THE CREDIBILITY ISSUE

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“I AM CREDIBLE” AND OTHER MISGUIDED ACTIONS OF WANNABE LEADERS

FOR all that leaders plan and strategise, the effectiveness of a leader depends on several traits and competencies – Eric Lau focuses on the essentials of integrity and credibility.

In the same vein, we feature the book Credibility – How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It.

How often have we seen leaders demand respect and loyalty, whilst knowing in our hearts that leaders must work hard to earn respect, loyalty and credibility?

My belief is that deep down, these leaders also know that demanding and enforcing respect is a hollow victory.

On a personal level, Mitch Ditkoff shares his own struggles and internal conflicts on being honest to himself and to everyone he engages with – and the moment it dawned on him that he can make a difference in this world, only if he can speak to all with love and respect. Rather than just plodding along on survival mode, he urges us all to “speak the truth to elevate the conversation”.

Not too far away from the corporate jungle, we take a look at Aesop’s Fables, stories that may have opened our minds and eyes as young readers – as we took our tentative first steps into the world of complex human relationships.

Going from a myriad of four-legged, two-legged (and at times no-legged!) protagonists, we take a moment to dwell on Iggy the Iguana – who made a great impact on the life and personal development journey of our Lim Lay Hsuan.

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Dinesh Dorai Raj asks the question “What makes a credible leader?” and walks us through five ways a leader might fall from grace. But do leaders only exist in the corporate sphere? While some may try to do more than one hat at a time, Joshua Yee does remind us that we are leaders at work, in families, in our communities – and offers some great insights on how to be effective leaders.

On the topic of leaders (as we most frequently are!), this week we bring you an instalment of The Leaderonomics Show – this time with Datuk Charon Wardini Mokhzani, managing director of – this community – and offers some great insights on how to be effective leaders.

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CREDIBILITY is a principle that should be harnessed from an early age, teaching a person that holding up specific values – honesty, integrity and timelines will ensure that one will go far in life.

No matter where you go or what you do, regardless if you are bound to an organisation or are a freelancer, having this quality in your life will get you far because you will be known to have strong principles that you abide by.

By being credible, not only will people respect you, you will be given more freedom in job execution and possibly an even better pay!

1 BE TIMELY
Remember when your par-
ents drilled into you to never be late to school? It applies to the working world as well.

Being late gives the impression to people that you are not serious about the job and if you miss it completely, that you do not care about the job at all unless you have a valid reason and physical proof.

You should always strive to give yourself a buffer period in case something unexpected happens. If you are late, apologise. Most people are accommodating of one or two instances but too many times and they may come under the assumption that you do not take your job seriously.

2 HAVE A TRANSPARENT WORK ETHIC
Having a transparent work ethic is important. It shows that you have nothing to hide and people can keep track of what you’re doing.

You should have a calendar or a Google document that can keep track of what you’re doing so that people know as to how far the assignments they have given you have progressed.

Not only that, make sure you stick to these, and if you think you are going to forget, set a reminder (or more) so that it gets done on time.

3 BE FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE
Having the above qualities ensure that you are able to tackle just about any situation. Do not compromise on your values and still be flexible enough to adapt to the situation.

Learn to try out new things; head out of your comfort zone – that is what flexibility can get you to do and oftentimes it does.

So try all sorts of things; experimentation is key because for some problems the solution may lie out of what is considered normal.

Do try. If you don’t, you’ll never learn.

CONCLUSION
Credibility is something that is of utmost importance to everyone.

It is one of the more important things in work that may help you go far. With these principles listed above, remember to use good judgment in tandem with the above skills.
HONESTY AND INTEGRITY
HOW TO EARN TRUST

By ERIC LAU
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A wise leader once said, “He who thinks he leads, but has no followers is simply taking a walk.”

Great leaders have genuine followers. Genuine followers willingly submit themselves to great leaders. They follow because they want to, not because they have to.

So, what makes a leader so compelling that people would just follow them wholeheartedly? The answer: leadership credibility.

CREDIBILITY

Credibility is the foundation of leadership. It is the quality of being trusted and believed. Credibility is the currency of influence. Without credibility, sustainable leadership influence that bears good fruit is impossible.

In their bestselling book, The Leadership Challenge, authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner researched extensively about personal traits, characteristics and attributes people look for and admire in a person whom they would be willing to follow.

After covering well over 100,000 respondents since 1987 across six continents, the results have been striking in their regularity.

According to their research, what people most look for in a leader has been constant over time across countries, cultures, ethnicities, organisational functions and hierarchies, genders, level of education and age groups.

The answer? For people to follow a leader willingly, the No. 1 trait that leaders must display is honesty.

YES TO VIRTUOUS CHARACTER

This is not complicated nor is itrocket science. If you want to lead credibly, you need to be honest. No one will believe in the message if they do not believe in the credibility of the messenger.

Honesty is a moral character that connotes positive and virtuous attributes such as integrity, truthfulness and straightforwardness, along with the absence of deceiving, lying and cheating.

You may be asking if it is really that big a deal that leaders must lead with such virtuous character?

The answer is a resounding yes. Great leaders and even successful organisations can collapse overnight because of a moral oversight.

CASE STUDY: ENRON

Consider the great tragedy of Enron Corp.

Enron was once ranked the sixth largest energy company in the world.

In 2002, the US Department of Justice opened criminal investigations into Enron for misrepresenting earnings and manipulating its financial statements to indicate favourable performance.

Enron shares were worth US$90.75 at its peak in August 2000 and dropped to US$0.67 in January 2002, subsequently leading to the largest bankruptcy in US (United States) history at that time that left thousands of workers with worthless stocks in their pensions.

Most of their top executives, including their chairman and chief executive officer Kenneth Lay were tried for fraud and found guilty and were sentenced to prison.

It was tragic. Lay died of a heart attack about one month after the courts found him guilty.

SPILLOVER EFFECT

This is not the only story of the downfall of Enron. Arthur Andersen which was at that time Enron’s auditor was also found guilty for obstructing justice and for illegally destroying documents relevant to the investigations.

As a result, Arthur Andersen which was one of the five largest auditing and accounting firms in the world collapsed too.

It is ironic that the very people who were supposed to uphold the highest standards of integrity to independently validate financial statements were found to be otherwise.

What happened to both Enron and Arthur Andersen? The root of the issue is not complex. The bottom line: a deficiency of moral uprightness in leadership.

LEADERS WITH INTEGRITY

Having leaders with good values is not just a “nice to have” for organisations. The absence of it can be devastating, as we have seen with Enron and Arthur Andersen.

In fact, cultivating leadership which has good values is a business strategy that is imperative for sustainable growth and development.

Indeed, good leaders lead effectively when they display good values.

CASE STUDY: ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln, arguably the greatest and most famous president of the US had a unique nickname.

He was called “Honest Abe.” The future president was first called “Honest Abe” when he was working as a young store clerk in New Salem.

According to one story, he had once realised that he had shortchanged a customer by a few pennies. He then closed the shop and walked quite a considerable distance to deliver the correct change to the customer.

Over time, people recognised his integrity and were soon asking him to act as judge or mediator in various contests, fights and even disputes.

The folks in New Salem knew they could always trust his judgment and they relied implicitly upon his honesty, integrity and impartiality.

By the time Lincoln was president, he gained an impeccable reputation as a man of integrity. Everyone, including his most formidable political opponents, knew exactly where they stood with Lincoln. They did not have to second-guess his intentions nor his promises.

CREDIBLE LEADERS DO WHAT THEY SAY AND SAY WHAT THEY DO

In comparison, what kind of leaders are we? Do people doubt our intentions or do they believe in our sincere motivations? Are they sceptical about what we say or do they trust our words?

Simply put, credible leaders do what they say and say what they do. There is an attractive authenticity in the way they lead that others get magnetised to their leadership.

Becoming a credible leader begins with character. Character is ingrained into us. It is taught to us by our parents, teachers and through life’s experiences.

As leaders, we have to intentionally choose to live out the positive values in our leadership on a daily basis. People do not merely look up to us for guidance.

They are looking for examples. When we are able to role model, we set into motion a powerful leadership momentum that not only shows the way but lives the way.

This then leads to right actions and profitable results that are sustainable.

PARTING THOUGHTS

No matter where you are in your leadership journey, leadership credibility needs to be at the forefront as you lead. People will not willingly follow a leader if they lack credibility. Trust must be earned through credibility.

So, what are you waiting for? Be a credible leader. Start today!

Eric Lau is a strategic leader with a relentless belief in people. His personal mission is to inspire and influence others to rise to their full potential and calling.

Eric is a faculty trainer with Leaderonomics and regularly leads training sessions in the areas of leadership, management and personal development. To engage him for your organisation, write to training@leaderonomics.com.

mystarjob.com, Saturday 11 July 2015
CREDIBILITY is the foundation of leadership because people have to believe in their leaders before they will willingly follow them.

Credibility is also what leaders have when they earn and sustain the trust and confidence of their constituents or followers.

Leadership is a relationship between those who are appointed or aspire to lead and those who are required or choose to follow. Credible leaders make a positive influence on people and organisations.

Earning and sustaining credibility requires six disciplines:

1. Disciplining yourself: knowing your credos, competence, confidence and character.
2. Appreciating your constituents: their hopes, aspirations and interests.
3. Affirming shared values: Leaders must understand and integrate diverse viewpoints into unifying themes.
4. Developing the capacity of people in their organisations so that they are able to put their values into practice.
5. Serving with a purpose.
6. Sustaining hope by inspiring their constituents and restoring faith in a better future for everyone.

Leaders have to ask their constituents to struggle with great challenges, to change, and to succeed. Success in responding to challenges and change is inextricably linked to the credibility of those leading the efforts.

Constituents will commit and submit to the extent that they believe in those guiding the change.

The key to unlocking greater leadership potential is by understanding the desires and expectations of constituents and acting on them in ways that correspond to their image of what an exemplary leader is and does.

The four characteristics that the majority of people look for and admire in their leaders are honest, forward-looking, inspiering, and competence.

Honesty is the most sought-after leadership characteristic, worldwide, and is absolutely essential to leadership. It is critical for leaders to have a vision, a sense of direction and a concern for the future of the organisation.

Leaders must know where they are going before they can ask others to join them. People admire leaders who are dynamic, inspiring, enthusiastic, positive and optimistic.

Leaders must not only have dreams of the future; they must be able to communicate those dreams in ways that encourage people to sign up and work hard for the goal.

People follow leaders whom they see as capable and effective. Credibility is something that is earned over time through the daily actions of leaders. It does not come automatically with the job or title.

CREDIBILITY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Credible leaders make a positive difference in people’s lives and in the workplace. People are made to feel more worthy, more energised, and more committed to achieving extraordinary results after interactions with their most admired leaders.

Admirer leaders focus attention on others, and not focused on satisfying their own aims and desires.

The critical difference that credibility makes is an increase in the willingness of constituents to put forth effort on behalf of the shared vision and values.

It is the credibility of the leadership that determines whether people will volunteer a little more of their time, talent, energy and effort in order to achieve more for the organisation.

Credibility earns commitment from people to work beyond their job descriptions and to their fullest capacity. The behavioural evidence that shows whether a leader is credible or not is “doing what they say they will do”.

Credibility is consistency between words and deeds. Leaders represent their organisations and not just themselves.

The leaders’ actions must be consistent with the shared values of the organisation. To earn and sustain credibility, leaders have to get to know their constituents and let their constituents get to know them.

DISCOVER YOURSELF

Leaders must seek self-knowledge if they want to establish and enhance their credibility. Personal credibility depends on how well a person knows his values and beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, and the level of commitment he is willing to make.

The leader must discover his credo, competencies and confidence as he begins his leadership development journey. Credo is the set of values and beliefs that serves as a guide to decisions and actions.

Competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be used to transform words into actions.

Confidence is the will to make use of the competencies. It is the trust in one’s abilities to do what one believes, especially in uncertain and challenging times.

The first stage of the credibility journey is to clarify your personal credo. Constituents rightfully expect their leaders to have the courage of their convictions and to stand up for their beliefs.

You have to discover those fundamental beliefs and values that will guide your decisions and actions.

Values are the standards that guide your conduct in a variety of settings and situations. Through them, you can take positions on issues, choose your policies, and evaluate your own as well as others’ beliefs and actions.

Values also serve as guides for resolving conflicts. To create high morality in one’s organisation, it is important to have the right values.

Moral leadership is about attending and adhering to principles rather than following a person. It also requires providing people with choices and alternatives instead of imposing the leader’s will.

Competence is one of the key elements of credibility. Acquiring competence enables one to be genuine. Before leaders can do the right things, they have to know how to do things right.

Mis-leadership is the inevitable result of swashbuckling overconfidence accompanied by a lack of competence. To lead and not to mislead, the leader must have the knowledge and skills to perform their tasks and uphold the values they profess.

However, competence alone does not ensure the capacity to act on your values. You must also have the confidence to apply your skills and act on your beliefs. Psychologists refer to this self-confidence as ‘self-efficacy’.

According to psychologist Albert Bandura, “self-efficacy is concerned with people’s beliefs in their capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources, and the courses of action needed to exercise control over task demands.”

Belief in your own self-efficacy will influence the level of challenge and leadership that you will seek. There are at least four ways self-efficacy can be enhanced: mastery experiences or learning to do the task well, observing role models, getting social support and encouragement, and reinterpretting personal stress as a natural part of the learning process.

Koh Earn Soo and his team take the best books and summarise them into shorter, readable content in the hope of inspiring people to read more and learn more. To read similar articles, log on to www.leaderonomics.com
I’m From Woodstock, Yes I Am

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

By MITCH DITKOFF
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‘M from Woodstock. Yes, that Woodstock. The famous Woodstock – the most famous small town in the world, some people say. Former home to Bob Dylan. Jimi Hendrix lived there for a summer. Levon Helm lived near my place before his recent passing. John Sebastian still lives there, as do a ton of other awesome musicians, artists, writers, healers, therapists, car mechanics, plumbers, electricians, and just about anyone else you’d expect to be living in a small town. Other than winter lasting six weeks too long, I love where I live. I’ve been a resident of Woodstock for 19 years and I am proud to call it my home.

That being said, I’ve noticed a curious phenomenon about my little town (or at least my relationship to it) whenever a client or prospective client asks me where I’m from. You see, hailing from Woodstock does not quite have the same businesspanache as hailing from New York, London or Dubai. If I declare myself to be a resident of Woodstock, I run the risk of not only being stereotyped as a culture whack job, but being in cahoots with an entire generation of freaks for whom the word “corporation” is second only to “military industrial complex” on the list of buzzkills – a declaration fully capable of leaving my inquisitor-of-the-moment with the distinct impression that I am either highly unqualified to be of value to his organisation or a candidate to be paid in 100-pound bags of change.

Having weighed the pros and cons of my geographical pronouncement options, I decided, early in my career, to take the low road. With a big mortgage and two small children, I saw absolutely no reason to scare away possible clients.

Two hours north of Manhattan was my standard response. "Upstate New York" was my backup, closely followed by “The Hudson Valley”, “65 miles south of Albany”, and the always dependable “Foothills of the Catskill Mountains”.

Whatever euphemism I used worked like a charm. People nodded their heads, asked if I wanted another glass of wine or, if they were in an especially talkative mood, confessed they had a friend who had “been there”.

A thrilling conversation? Not exactly. But at least I didn’t run the risk of decreasing my perceived value in the eyes of those who controlled the big budgets.

So there I was in Munich at the international headquarters of Allianz, one of the world’s leading financial services institutions, with 142,000 employees and billions in sales. My task? To lead a workshop, the next day, for the company’s hard driving senior leadership team in an effort to support their newly launched company-wide effort to "gain a competitive edge by maximising innovation”.

Corporate speak? For sure. But so what? It didn’t matter in the least to me, what euphemisms my clients used to express themselves, if they demonstrated even the slightest willingness to go beyond the status quo and think outside of the box, I was there. There, in this case, was the well-appointed, pre-dinner reception for Allianz’s senior team and a handful of outside consultants, like me, who had been flown in from God-knows-where, to help the organisation reach its highly ambitious goals for the year.

The dress code? Business casual. The bar? Open. The client? Dutifully introducing me to anyone in his field of vision. And so it went for an hour or so – the small talk, the head nods, the handshakes – me patiently waiting for the waiter with the pizza puffs and the inevitable moment when the question being asked somewhere in the rear its ugly head.

And rear its ugly head it did – the question being asked somewhere in between my first and second glass of chilled 1987 Riesling – me standing in a small circle of large men – Guenther, Heinrich, and Hans, to be more precise – three upstanding gentlemen to whom I’d been introduced just minutes before.

But then an odd thing happened. I opened my mouth to say “Two hours north of Manhattan” and “Woodstock” came out. Woodstock? Maybe it was the wine or the jet lag or maybe it was the cumulative effect of 17 years of mouthing lame, geographical euphemisms. I don’t really know. But whatever it was, I knew this moment was going to be a very interesting moment, indeed. For three very long German seconds, no one said a thing. The word just hovered in the air like a Superbowl blimp.

Guenther was the first to speak. “Wow!” he announced. “Did you actually go to the festival?” Hans inched closer. “My older cousin went. Lucky guy. I was too young.” Heinrich just stood there, expressionless, silent as the clam dip. Then he raised his right hand with a laugh and gave me a rousing high five. “I love Joe Cocker!” he exclaimed.

Somewhere, I got the feeling that the innovation workshop the next day was going to be just fine.

SO WHAT?
The older I get, the more I realise there is only one thing I can do to make a difference in the world and that is to speak my truth with love and respect for all the people I am speaking it to.

Compared to that, everything else I could say is a distant second – poorly written dialogue in a direct-to-video “B” movie tinged with fear, gamesmanship, jive, hustle, and projection.

The problem? Most of us think we have something to lose if we speak our truth on the job – assuming that no one really wants to hear what we have to say and, if they did, we’d become hopeless outcasts, homeless former employees in a cardboard box with no access to cappuccino or crème brulee.

Far too many of us are stuck in survival mode on the job. Afraid of getting laid off, kicking someone off, or, if we are self-employed, losing the gig – we play it safe.

Instead of playing to win, we play not to lose. Instead of pulling the sword from the stone, we beat around the bush. We don’t just hide our light under a bushel, we hide the bushel under a mountain of excuses.

It’s time for all of us to come out of the closet and speak our truths – to ourselves, to each other, to our clients, managers, customers, vendors and anyone else who will listen. Not to prove a point. Not to vent. Not to blame. But to elevate the conversation.

Life is too short for anything else. The world needs you to be you and me to be – not our concept of what the people “in power” think we should be.

NOW WHAT?
What is your version of my Woodstock story? What truth about you and your life have you been hiding under a bushel? And when is the next time you can tell it like it is?

Mitch Ditkoff is the president of Idea Champions, an innovation consulting and training company and the author of the forthcoming Storytelling at Work. The above story is excerpted from the book. He is also the author of the very popular Heart of Innovation blog, the award-winning business fable, Awake at the Wheel and is a regular contributor to the Huffington Post. He is a much sought after keynote speaker on a variety of innovation-themed topics. To connect with him, write to editor@leaderonomics.com. For more interesting articles of his, log on to www.leaderonomics.com
CORPORATE JUNGLE

ARE WE AN ABERRATION OF NATURE MOTHER?

By KAREN NEOH
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While my mother and father pre-
pared us for life in countless ways, so far I
have not seen a near death book about
working life. That’s why this article
may not have just been published,
but it is one that I urge you to read.

The 21st century workplace environ-
ment is a jungle, not a nature reserve.

The wind and the sun were disput-
ing of the “geese” who ultimately are
the vision setters, and the “wolves”
who are the workers. Their actions
reinforce each other’s direction.

The golden eggs

"Greed often overreaches itself."

Whether you are a CEO (chief execu-
tive officer), a community leader or
the president of your student body, we
do know that it is not easy to
make decisions without due considera-
tion. One must be responsible for the success or failure of the team. It is not easy to
make decisions that benefit the
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The golden eggs

"Greed often overreaches itself."

"Appearances can be deceptive."

When applying to working life, I believe there is a strong need to
take time to understand the people you work with. You may end up
being friends with colleagues when you first meet them. As the
time goes by, be aware of the changes that people may
undergo. Don’t assume you always know who you are dealing
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make decisions without due consideration. One must be responsible for the success or failure of the team. It is not easy to
make decisions that benefit the organisation.
CREDIBILITY is the foundation of leadership in the 21st century and would be the most important aspect of leading a team or running a business effectively. This topic got me thinking hard whether credibility may be a fixed theory. As I sipped my coffee, I pondered if people with varying experiences across different generations would have different perceptions on credibility. Almost instantaneously, I whipped out my phone and dropped texts to people on their thoughts about credibility.

As a result, I got three people that I interact with on a daily basis and from different generations — Gen-Y, Gen-X and a Baby Boomer.

GEN-Y Saarvin Vignesvaran, 26, is an engineer with a large multinational oil and gas organisation who is based offshore most of the time. Working alongside personnel from diverse age groups, background and cultures, he said credibility is firstly built from SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reasonable and Time-bound) communications that enable effective delegation and execution of tasks.

Saarvin continues that the credibility of leaders is elevated when they acknowledge achievements of their subordinates and subsequently take the effort to create a desirable working environment for all.

He adds that a leader’s credibility is largely gauged based on the importance to the subordinates’ welfare.

GEN-X Jeffry Sathitarn, 35, is currently running a start-up in the medical line. He pondered on the word “credibility” in relation to his business and said that a start-up is like a hot air balloon that has not taken off. For a hot air balloon to be flying high, some amount of hot air has to be blown into the balloon. He says that the hot air for a start-up would be credibility.

Jeffry believes that business growth is exponentially proportioned to credibility that is gained through reputation, past successes and trustworthiness from the ground up. He stresses that the core to building credibility for the business and business leaders starts from the provision of great service to clients in all situations, and to deal with them with total honesty, high morality and integrity.

BABY BOOMER Doral Raj, 56, is a director of finance with one of the fastest growing chains of five-star international hotels in Malaysia. Having been attached to the same company for 27 years, at different locations and positions across the region, he believes that credibility is intertwined with trust that is built over the years of loyalty.

Doral Raj says: “To be a credible leader, we must firstly associate ourselves with the organisation we are in as one.” This is followed by a lot of hard work and commitment which must contribute to organisational growth.

He adds that as a credible leader, one must be open to communication and constructive discussions.

A credible person should also have the right balance of having a tough front and being able to lend a shoulder to cry on.

WHAT I CAN DEDUCE Despite the different perspectives on credibility from the three different generations above, I can clearly draw a parallel that all of them strongly relate credibility to trust and integrity. They gave the impression of how vital credibility is in different situations, business and positions.

I quote from this book, Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It by Kouzes and Posner. “We want to believe in our leader, we want to have confidence in them as people, we want to believe their word can be trusted, and that they have the knowledge and skill to lead, and that they are personally excited and enthusiastic about the direction in which we (the organisation) are headed.”

Although credibility is imperative, we seem to hear more and more about leaders losing their credibility lately.

What leads to this phenomenon? Let’s now focus on the five common factors.

1. Practising dictatorship in leading

As a leader, one must be prepared to listen to other people’s constructive feedback. After all, leaders are the epicentre of a vast web of relationships.

Failing to build an emotional connection with others disrupts their credibility to lead well. Allowing others to share opinions towards taking a right decision increases the respect gained towards a leader’s credibility.

So, talk less and listen more to develop the ability to influence and develop great credibility.

2. Unwillingness to share information and knowledge

A credible leader is always willing to nurture his followers to become greater than who he is.

Frequent failures in credibility happen when a leader withholds acquired knowledge and refrains from sharing information with others.

3. Not taking ownership

Referring to a quote by John G. Miller, “Ownership is a commitment of the head, heart, and hands to fix the problem and never again allow the blame.” I believe that taking ownership of an issue, good or bad, is the foundation upon which a leader’s credibility is built.

Many leaders tend to push the blame onto somebody or something else when things go wrong. This response actually breaks the trust that people had placed on them.

Instead, when one takes ownership despite failures, he builds a great reputation as a credible leader and would be trusted by more people.

4. Not bothering about others

A self-centred leader would crush his credibility faster than ever.

A leader who couldn’t care less about others, will aggravate the need in the others to give their best in what they do.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS Credibility definitely makes a huge difference in current times. It is under- able that credibility will be the key that differentiates a common leader from a great leader.

No matter where we are in the leadership journey, credibility is needed at the core. We also need to understand that credibility cannot be built without the trust and support of others around us.
By JOSHUA YEE

B

ack in college, my Economics lecturer once asked a classroom a very simple question, “Who are you?”

My classroom stood there baffled by the simplicity of it. After gathering his thoughts, he finally replied, “I’m in university now, pursuing my degree in business.”

Our society holds quite strongly to a working belief that what you do defines who you are. If someone is a chief executive officer (CEO) of a renowned company, he or she is expected to have the profile of a CEO.

This gives the implication that the person always dons a power suit, carries the latest smartphone, is chauffeur-driven and has a personal assistant constantly.

The projected image of a leader is one of immaculate attire and articulate speech in the presence of others.

However, the reality is that there are many different aspects to leadership. Every one of us has different roles and responsibilities in life. We wear different “hats” for the many “roles” we play.

When we step into our workplace, we immediately put on our “boss” or “employee” hat. When we reach home, we discard it for our “mum” or “dad” hat for the children in the family.

Once we have tucked the children into bed, we put on our “wife” or “husband” hat. We swap, rotate, and sometimes put on more than one hat in serving others. Despite all that, there is one hat that we never take off: the “leadership” hat.

The Oxford dictionary defines leadership as the action of leading a group of people or an organisation. It is not in the act of instructing people, but through showing them.

So how do you make the best of this hat you inherently own?

1. CHOOSE INFLUENCE OVER AUTHORITY

Influence is the ability to affect someone or a group of people with your words, actions or position. Authority is the power and position in which one holds to assert dominion over others through orders.

A manager of a retail store has authority over his or her employee, but it is based on the position that he or she holds, not influence.

Although it is true that both leadership and management go hand in hand, at the root of it, these are two very distinct perspectives. This is vital in knowing your own leadership style.

In his book, On Becoming a Leader, Warren Bennis compiled a list of differences between a manager and leader.

Bennis wrote:

i. A manager administers; a leader serves.

ii. A manager gives instructions; a leader shows instructions.

iii. A manager focuses on systems; a leader focuses on people.

iv. A manager relies on his/her authority; a leader relies on his/her influence.

v. A manager depends on control; a leader inspires trust.

“Management is doing things right, leadership is doing the right things.”

– Peter Drucker

2. PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and many other social media have turned the world into a self-absorbed culture of “Likes”, “Comments”, and “Re-tweets”.

Social media is not necessarily negative, but there is a compulsive need for social acceptance that it brings out in us, is. We want the latest gadgets, to own a house and a car that we cannot even afford to maintain.

These individualistic pursuits for material gain shape the way we think about ourselves, and others. Oftentimes, it’s the former. However, as leaders, people should matter the most. Your employees need to be your priority. The thing is, people need people. Investment in the lives of those who work with you is significant.

A leader sees employees as human beings. Therefore, he or she treats them as human beings, not as people who “work for them”. Showing appreciation to your employees after they have accomplished a goal empowers them as well (Marshall Goldsmith, 2008).

Praise pays off when it comes to increasing the overall success of your company (Posin, 2013).

Recognising your employees’ accomplishments increases their interest in their work. This goes without saying that honesty is the best virtue when it comes to praise and affirmation.

Responsible leaders always look for decisions which benefit the company and the people, never for themselves. Possibly the most important, yet often forgotten fact about an organisation is that your assets are your employees.

3. LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Leadership is serving. Being a leader does not free you from getting your hands dirty. In fact, more often than not, the opposite is true.

Successful leaders work the hardest to show and set the bar for all employees to follow. Many leaders of the world today strive to be successful, rich and powerful. They want to be the next Steve Jobs, or Henry Ford. But many more are not willing to do what it takes to get there.

Sam Walton, owner and founder of Wal-Mart, the world’s largest retail store which began in the United States, showed us an excellent example of a leader. Walton despised corporate fat cats. He would handle the cash register as well as stock the shelves in any of his Wal-Mart stores all by himself if there was a need to.

Although his company’s operating income in a year averaged between US$12billion to US$18billion, he still chose to drive his old, rusty, dented pickup truck because it had plenty of good mileage left in it.

Walton captures the perfect picture of what every leader should aspire to be like. Humble and open in character, ready to serve the needs of others when the opportunity arises.

He told his employees that “If American management is going to say to their workers that we’re all in this together, they’re going to have to stop this foolishness of paying themselves US$3 million to US$4 million bonuses every year and riding around everywhere in limousines and corporate jets like they’re so much better than everybody else.”

To run a company, a leader’s main role is to delegate to his or her workforce. But when you pick your spot, roll up your sleeves and are prepared to work, you will see the entire organisation following your lead.

I think Walton summed it up best by saying, “If you get your hands dirty, you become involved in something where the realities might compromise your principles.”

“It can also mean that a person is not just stuck in an ivory tower dictating strategy, but is prepared to put in the effort and hard work to make the details actually happen.”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Till today, nobody has fully grasped or understood the meaning of leadership. This is because it is an area so subjective and broad that each individual carries his or her own unique leadership style.

It is easy to wear the “leadership” hat when we step into our office in power suit and tie, easier still to tick off checklists simplifying leading qualities.

But the true test comes in the form of our integrity in our actions when no one is around. Everyone is entitled to his or her own form of leadership, be it in the role of management or parenthood. These are tools to be used to add to your arsenal as you strive to be a better leader or simply, a better person.

Joshua Yee is a caffeine-dependent life-form. He wants to live in a world where cars can fly, teas are banned, and iPhones are cheaper. He is currently involved in the Campus Division in Leaderonomics and is passionate to see young people stand up to fulfill their fullest potential in their own unique way. To engage with him, email editor@leaderonomics.com. For more leadership content, visit www.leaderonomics.com
DIVERSE OPPORTUNITIES

VALUABLE LESSONS GAINED FROM VARIOUS EXPERIENCES

By CINDY YAP
editor@leaderonomics.com

B
EDATH the down-to-earth façade of Datuk Charon Wardini Mohd Razali is a highly acclaimed leader who has led diverse teams in various industries.

Charon, managing director (MD) of Khazanah Research Institute (KRI), joined Khazanah in November 2013 as executive director and was subsequently appointed MD of KRI, an organisation tasked to undertake research and analysis on pressing issues for the nation.

Prior to Khazanah, Charon was an investment banker at CIMB Group, where he headed investment banking globally as the deputy chief executive officer (CEO).

He was subsequently appointed executive director of CIMB Investment Bank in May 2006 and CEO of CIMB Investment Bank in November 2011.

With an illustrious career and impressive education credentials from Oxford and the University of London, the former lawyer speaks to The Leaderonomics Show about his early years and his path to success.

“Calling himself “fortunate” to have had many careers, he was influenced to read law by his lawyer father, as well as by a TV series called Petrocelli, which is about how a lawyer gives up big money to fight for the underdogs.”

I also like to talk,” he jokes.

He continues: “Back then, merchant banking was taking off. After being in Shearn Delamore for a while, I went into corporate finance at Rashid Hussein Securities when the stock market was booming.”

Considering himself lucky for having many big banks as his clients, he practised law for a decade before Datuk Nazri Razak invited him to join CIMB.

CHANGE IN CAREER PATH

“I was very grateful for this chance of major career change – how often do you get such opportunities anyway?” says Charon, adding that when he joined, there were only 800 people. It surged to 1,000 employees within a couple of months.

Zaid Ibrahim & Co (ZICO) was a medium-sized firm with less than 30 lawyers when Charon joined the company. “We managed to grow it into the largest law firm in Malaysia, with more than 100 lawyers.”

Zaid then decided to do less of day-to-day management and made me a managing partner,” he beams, pointing out that ZICO was one of the first firms to break into a market controlled by three big firms, whose history dated back to the colonial times.

Charon downplays his personal contributions when asked what enabled his swift move up the ranks. Instead, he attributes the success of ZICO to the change in circumstances which offered them the opportunity to break into a market controlled by well-established players.

“The industry was changing at that time with privatization happening, so it was a whole new branch of law which could be explored,” he explains.

Due to the changing nature of Malaysia’s capital markets, which really took off in the 1990s and early 2000, new rules and regulations were created – this gave them a major break to penetrate the market.”

During this stint at CIMB, Charon feels that he was lucky to have chosen an industry going through market dislocation at that time.

“CIMB was the first to witness the change from the mature and stable old-style merchant banking, to investment banking which involves more client-related stuff,” he comments.

LOOKING INTO THE STATE OF HOUSEHOLDS

In regards to his current role in KRI, Charon is glad to have had the opportunity to influence and offer ideas to the government and policymakers as to what can be done to improve.

He is also able to apply what he has learnt in the course of his career to fundamental issues concerning the nation.

“We look at the big picture and national policies for the country, gravitating towards economic issues,” he elaborates.

Their first published report, The State of Households, was launched in November 2014.

The report states that while GDP has shown growth with the GDP per capita over USD10K per person, these numbers do not mean anything to an ordinary citizen.

As expected, the thesis reveals an uneven distribution of wealth within Malaysia, with the households in certain areas such as Klang Valley being better off than other households in Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis, Sabah or Sarawak.

“At the end of the day, what we want is an increase in the general well-being of the population, and the better number to look at would be the household income,” he expounds, adding that an example is last year’s budget which talks about the people economy and the capital economy.

“That’s great, as it shows a fundamental realisation and resonance within the government and policymakers that we are growing the economy, with emphasis placed on making the citizens better off, instead of only profiting the share-holders,” he stresses.

CHARON’S THOUGHTS ON THE STRUCTURE OF MALAYSIA’S ECONOMY:

• If we want households to be better off, higher salaries are required. A way to get higher salaries would be to equip ourselves with better skills and qualifications.

• Additionally, there is a need for companies, industries or factories that require qualified people.

• On the other hand, we need jobs for people who are trained in technical colleges and possess vocational training.

IMPORANCE OF LEADERSHIP AND AUTONOMY IN NATION BUILDING

Charon agrees that having strong leadership will transform villages, communities, and the nation.

However, he emphasises that an organisation cannot solely rely on one leader.

“As much as we hope that some great leader will come and save us, one person cannot save the whole world,” he says.

“Process is as important as vision. In Malaysia, we have the centralisation versus decentralisation issue in the management of problems, whereby central government dictates and the rest will follow,” he adds.

Charon suggests that perhaps, we should look at something more decentralised, whereby the people on the ground, who are in the know in regards to the process, are given the chance to do something which fits their particular circumstances.

“Leadership is also about building up management systems and giving people the right autonomy to decide,” he muses.

“Sometimes, I wish we could go back to the P Ramlee school of leadership, where you call someone in, beat them up and tell them to do their job. Of course, we can’t do that these days! Now, we have to persuade and influence,” he quips.

TO A GRADUATE

1. It’s hard to predict the future. You’re better off doing something you want to do and really like, rather than something you think might turn out to be a good decision in 20 years’ time. If you don’t like it, you are unlikely to do well at it.

2. Never fail to keep asking: be curious and see where that curiosity leads you.

TO A CEO

1. Things change incredibly fast. The market you have now may no longer be around in a few years’ time. In the past, it takes a long time for you to lose a market, but in this digital age, things can be disrupted very quickly. An example would be traditional prints versus digital versions.

2. Threats to your business existence is much higher today than it was in the past. Be aware and think ahead for potential threats or disruptions.

Here are snippets of Charon’s response in The Thinkonomics segment:

Q: If you had all the funding in the world, what would you invent? A: Peace, love and happiness for all mankind.

Q: Do you ask enough questions, or do you settle for what you know? A: I’d like to think I’m inquisitive, curious and ask questions, but that’s only my own perception.

Q: Is it better to give to the people you know, or people you don’t know? A: It’s easier to give to people you know, but often we give to people whom we don’t know such as charity. I guess it depends on the circumstances. Maybe 50-50. There is no rule of thumb.

For more interesting interviews with diverse leaders on The Leaderonomics Show, visit https://www.youtube.com/user/leaderonomicsmedia. For corresponding articles, visit www.leaderonomics.com
LEADERONOMICS IS READY TO SERVE ISKANDAR

This Southern hub offers our world-class Corporate Services to help companies with their talent development efforts, as well as our Community and Media initiatives.

Even as we expand, our mission remains the same: to build people of every age and background into leaders so they can be positive and powerful contributors in the transformation of our nation.

For more information on our services in Iskandar, contact our Iskandar Regional Strategic Manager, Shahrani Masood at 012 778 1269 or email shahrani.masood@leaderonomics.com

We are looking for passionate people to join our Iskandar Team. Find out more at www.leaderonomics.org & email your resume to people@leaderonomics.com
STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

ORGANISATIONS EXPECT GRADUATES TO POSSESS SOFT SKILLS DESPITE THE FACT THAT THESE SKILLS ARE UNDervalued AT A DEGREE LEVEL. COULD THIS BE WHERE THE PROBLEM LIeS?

A key point would be in terms of actually doing what you’ve assigned to do without the need for supervision.

Never shirk your responsibilities, instead always strive to deliver your best work. It is also essential to do that within the deadline for it to be laudable.

ENTHUSIASM AND POSITIVITY

Having a positive attitude may seem trivial to some when in fact, it carries significant weightage in light of performing in the workplace.

With the right attitude, one would be willing to go above and beyond in completing the task at hand.

They would also be able to translate that positivity within their team members to be able to improve overall functionality.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Having said that, these are skills that should be developed from a young age for it to become a habit.

With Leaderonomics Youth, we help develop soft skills such as communication and performance characters such as creativity, initiative and dependability through our DIODE camps and Leaderonomics Clubs in schools.

So while it may be important for a surgeon to know how to make proper incisions, an importance must still be placed on fine-tuning one’s soft skills in dealing with patients empathetically.

Now wouldn’t you say that it’s a good time to grant equal importance to soft skills as you would to a degree?

By STEPHANIE LING

stephanie.ling@leaderonomics.com

HAVING just attended my convocation last month, it was clear to me that I was merely one of the many hundreds of thousands who were graduating with a bachelor’s degree for the year 2015.

Data released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States showed that 1.5 million students graduated in 2014. This got me thinking about what I had to offer to employers in order to stand out from the rest?

What would differentiate me from that RM50,000 piece of paper? Coming from the human resources line, my father had always told me that when push comes to shove, your degree merely serves as your passport for an interview. It will be your soft skills that gets you hired and promoted?

WHAT ARE THESE SOFT SKILLS EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT?

Soft skills refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that describe an individual’s ability to interact with one another and is usually linked to a person’s emotional quotient, or EQ.

Say you visit an optometrist for your yearly eye checkup, but beyond his or her technical skills, what else do you look for?

Would you prefer someone who is warm and takes time to answer your questions or would you go to someone who talks to you as though you owe them for taking up their time?

In this circumstance, soft skills matter.

With more Gen-Y entering the workforce, the diversity in age, experience and work ethics now becomes more apparent. Here are the most important soft skills:

THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE

Everyone always talks about the importance of having communication skills but no one actually feels the need to improve themselves. Why?

Because people feel that communicating appears to be so common that it should be innate.

The question is: What do employers want to see? Would it be in terms of learning how to listen instead of just hearing?

Hearing would be the act of perceiving sound by ear whereas listening is something one consciously decides on doing.

It is something that requires attentiveness in order to process the meaning from words and sentences. Knowing when and how to speak in the workplace is essential as it will dictate your success of sharing ideas between one another.

DEVELOPING INITIATIVE

It is always difficult to be the one who makes the first move. That first move becomes even harder when it involves making decisions with regards to organisational matters.

However, this is where initiative comes in.

The ability to act without being told is what makes someone a proactive worker, who is able to think and foresee problems rather than have to solve them later.

These individuals are motivated to perform above and beyond their line of work and that is important as they are usually the inciters of change! Criticism can be crippling but when taken in stride it allows for personal growth. Only when we welcome failure are we able to learn from it and to focus on our strengths.

Personally, I used to be someone who took criticism too much to heart but I have learnt to embrace it.

The ability to accept criticism from others has made me more open to the possibilities for coaching thus in a roundabout way, making me more teachable.

FOSTERING CREATIVITY

Conventionally, art, music and dance are considered to be creative outputs. In the workforce however, creativity refers to one’s ability to transcend what is ordinary and to think out of the box.

Creativity also refers to problem-solving skills. When conflicts arise, it should serve as a means towards improving relationship and work performance rather than for it to be of negative connotation.

The ability to understand the issues at hand and to critically and creatively come up with solutions with consideration of everyone’s interest is an important aspect in problem solving.

DEPENDABILITY

In order for things to run smoothly and as planned, a sense of reliability is required to be displayed by employees as it ensures completion of every task assigned to them.

A laudable.

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Stephanie Ling is part of Leaderonomics Youth and is currently under the Clubs initiative. Her personal passion lies in developing all-rounded youths who are able to impact their communities. Occasionally, she can be seen engaging in downward dogs and headstands for her own leisurely pursuits. To engage with Stephanie, email her at stephanie.ling@leaderonomics.com

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10 ways to not procrastinate

Mourning over job loss

Time to chat with Chatime founder

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