INDEPENDENT ACTION

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CELEBRATING CHANGE

INDEPENDENCE represents a seminal moment for a nation, when it has the opportunity to create its own vision of a brighter future and set about making its mark on the global stage.

With around 200 independent countries throughout the world, there are few exceptions to the many that have prospered thanks to the success it has made following its new-found freedom. Sure, there can be turbulent times in the initial stages, but through perseverance and the commitment of its people, there is no end to the achievements a proud nation can accomplish.

Merdeka is a time of celebration for all Malaysians, who come together to revere in their country’s freedom to shape its own path and make its own way in the world. If we take a closer look at what this means, we see that it’s really a celebration of change. It’s a recognition that change is something to be embraced in order to allow us to take strides towards realising our vision of creating a brighter future.

In the corporate world – and, indeed, our own lives – we can learn a lot from the upcoming celebrations and what they symbolise. In order to grow, there must be change, there has to be perseverance, and there will be obstacles to overcome. Change takes time, and time requires determination to bring about the goals we want to achieve, be it for ourselves, our business, or our nation.

The key thing to remember is that it is impossible to fail if we never give up.

With that in mind, this week’s pullout focuses on the theme of breaking free from the shackles that prevent us from growing. Specifically, we look at the effects of micromanagement and how, contrary to belief, instead of promoting productivity, micromanagement stifles creativity and stunts progress.

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For other great leadership insights, including those by Marshall Goldsmith, visit www.leaderonomics.com/publications and download for FREE!

MERDEKA GHOSTS

By JASMINE CHUAH HUI LING
jasmine.chua@leaderonomics.com

MERDEKA is a special word. It’s more powerful than kebebasan (freedom), and comes wrapped in ribbons of red, white, blue and yellow.

Every year on Aug 31, the streets are filled with parades and people everywhere celebrate the day. Most pull out their miniature national flags or fly the big ones at home.

It is a day we all will look forward to because not only did our country gain independence on that day, but it is also a day to remember our forefathers and heroes who fought relentlessly for our future.

With every passing year though, I find myself having to dig deep for the Merdeka spirit. I ask myself: are we truly “Merdeka”?

If we are “Merdeka” why are we still striving to be the best? If we are truly “Merdeka” why do so many choose to leave the country?

Popular opinion ponders if we merely jumped from the frying pan into the fire when we yelled “Merdeka” with all our hearts on that significant day. It questions the current state of our country as we wonder, “Merdeka”?

MALAYSIA?

The palpable fading of the Merdeka spirit from my heart signalled a potential problem: Merdeka? No. Malaysia? Yes – a day to remember our forefathers and heroes who fought relentlessly for our future.

I sincerely love my country. I look around me and see mamak stalls where people from every race go for breakfast every morning. I see children who are ‘colour blind’, teens who have an open house to go to for every traditional festival, and adults who specialise in fare that is not of their culture.

I see Malaysia, alive, despite what has been thrown at us over the years, despite all those times we have been denied choices and, yet, we ultimately survive.

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And if you missed any of our past issues, go to www.leaderonomics.com.

JUDGE NOT A PERSON’S OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Lizzie Velazquez suffers from a rare congenital disease which impedes her from accumulating body fat. With zero per cent body fat, she has never weighed more than 29kg. She is also blind in her right eye.

At the age of 16, Lizzie Velazquez was labelled the world’s most ugliest woman in a morning talk show. She was said to have anorexia and wasuli. She was a victim of bullying.

Lizzie Velazquez is a researcher, author, motivational speaker, and a former “ugly duckling” who aspires to be an “ugly swan”.

In the year 2000, Lizzie began a website www.uglygirl.com. She also wrote a book titled ‘Ugly: Breaking Free from the Two-Thousand-Year-Old Lie that Says You’re Not Good Enough’.

Yet, despite the pain and bullying she has endured, Lizzie has never stopped pursuing her dream of leading a fulfilling and happy life and encouraging others to do the same.

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MICROMANAGEMENT AND ITS BENEFITS

WHY DO SOME LEADERS PREFER TO MICROMANAGE THEIR TEAM?

By JOSEPH TAN
editor@leaderonomics.com

According to Mary Parker Follet, management is “the art of getting things done through people.” Getting things done is indeed the sum total of what a manager aspires to accomplish. However, the process of making sure that the actual outcome matches the manager’s expectations is quite a challenge. This matching process is what keeps managers awake at night. Giving instructions is the easy part, making sure that it is acted upon (without the stress of nagging and reminders) is the cause of sleepless nights, and perhaps even a cause of stomach ulcers.

Yet, the act of micromanagement is usually the default management mode when it comes to getting things done through people. Before we become too quick to tear down the concept of micromanagement, there must be something inherently enticing about this approach, which caused it to be the prevailing method of interaction with employees. Let’s explore the attractiveness of micromanagement and deliberate through the consequences of such a mind-set.

THINGS GET DONE IN A SPECIFIC WAY

“When I meticulously monitor the performance of my employees, I get what I want, when I want.”

It is normal for a manager to be expecting a high performance from his or her employees. In fact, if there are no performance standards communicated, then there is really nothing to manage in the first place.

When there is micromanaging, the manager has the supposed benefit of being able to control exactly how their employees produce and deliver the goods. However, it means that the employee is less than buoyed with motivation to perform well.

The specifications of the task looks like this:

The boss dictates not only the end result, but also the way it is achieved.

The boss demands progress by applying pressure.

When it comes to safety protocol or critical work process steps, it is understandable that every step must be followed precisely.

However, when managers are managing for competitive advantage, the wise manager is the one who goes beyond the specifications and focuses instead on the spirit of the task.

The spirit of the task looks like this:

The boss describes the end result.

The boss discusses progress by providing support and resources.

According to Gallup, employees who are encouraged to focus on their strengths are six times as likely to be engaged in their jobs, and more than three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life in general. If an organisation aims to tap into the leadership potential of every employee, then the onus is on the manager to practice the art of outcome-based management.

In outcome-based management, the manager plays the role of a coach who identifies the talent of the employee. When the race starts, the manager guides from the sidelines instead of being on the racetrack itself.

Here are three steps to becoming an outcome-based manager:

1. Identify the individual talents of your employee (each one of them is unique).
2. Integrate their talents into their role description.
3. Intentionally allow your employee to meet the described goals through their own strengths.

TRIED AND TESTED METHODS WORK

“If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.”

While it’s often quoted that the only constant is change, one of the manager’s jobs is to provide stability and predictability. If the manager constantly changes how things are done, employees are then left without a stable structure to enable high performance.

One of the flavours of micromanagement could be the good intention of the manager to provide stability to the employee (i.e. “Let’s continue to do it this way because this is the proven path”).

However, the proven path may not always inspire motivation or passion. It all depends whether the manager is managing for continuity or managing for creativity. If continuity is the order of the day, then some degree of micromanaging may be necessary because employees need to toe the line so that we all can put our best foot forward.

Whether you need continuity or creativity depends on your answer to the following question:

“If your employees continue to think and act as the way they do today, will you be able to meet your desired results in the next three years?”

If your answer is a clear “No”, then the micromanagement style of the proven path is not the way to go. We can see that what has been proven to work in the past is not good enough to propel us into the future. In other words, what got us to this point will not necessarily carry us forward.

Here are three steps you can take to manage with passion and creativity:

1. Identify the compelling case behind the change. Employees need to understand the “why” of the change before you tell them exactly what will change.
2. Implement a clear reward system for those who comply.
3. Implement a clear reprimand system for those who fail. It is relatively easier to recognise our employees who do well but, if no action is taken against non-performers, you are actually sending out the wrong signal (i.e. there is no need to do your own job well—others will pick up the slack). Hence, when you have non-performers, remember this—the passion and creativity of your high performers will be affected if you do not take action.

CONCLUSION – IT IS ABOUT BEING A GREAT MANAGER

The great manager engages with his or her employees so that things get done in the right spirit with passion and creativity. According to Gallup, the single greatest factor that determines employee engagement is the quality of the relationship between the employee and his or her direct supervisor. The employee, who performs well, is the employee who is first treated as an individual. Nobody likes to be treated as just a dot on the organisation’s chart.

Although micromanaging is an attractive default option, it is not a sustainable option. However, when there is great management, there is the release of the freedom of individual talent and creative passion. Yes we get things done, but we get it done in an engaging manner.

—

Joseph Tan is CEO of Leaderonomics. His passion is to work with performance-focused leaders to capture the hearts and minds of their employees through a strengths-based and accountability-driven approach. Much of what is shared in this article above comes from his work as a Gallup-certified strengths coach. If you would like to enhance the engagement level of your organisation, email joseph.tan@leaderonomics.com for more details.
One in two employees leave their jobs to get away from their manager. It’s no big secret – managers can potentially help their employers gain significant competitive advantage (up to 48% higher profit). Yet many managers are sent for random training courses that have no key linkages. Learning (and HR investment) is not maximised for business value.

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1Gallup’s State of the American Manager, 2015  
2Terms and conditions apply
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE INDEPENDENT
YOUNG MALAYSIANS SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS, AND WHO THEIR ROLE MODELS ARE

By ARIELLE YEN
editor@leaderonomics.com

THE first inkling Malaysia had of independence was when the flag was raised on Aug 31, 1957. Our fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers stood in silence for two minutes in the dark, as the British handed Malaya over to the people and their prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. Tunku had a vision for Malaysia in the wake of our independence. Every country wants to be able to stand on its own two feet. For Malaysians, the first step was to create our own identity.

Our Menara KL and the Petronas Twin Towers are examples of how high we have soared since we took hold of our country. In conjunction with the upcoming Hari Kemerdekaan, we caught up with young Malaysians studying abroad, to find out their thoughts on independence, leadership, ambition, and role models. Here are some of the stories they shared.

HAWA RIDHWANI, 21
Psychology student, The University of Western Australia (Perth, Australia)

What does independence mean to you?
Independence is the ability to take action and make decisions on your own, knowing full well that you could rely on others, but having the courage to take a step forward on your own terms.

Who inspires you to take that extra step forward?
My mother. She is the strongest woman I have ever known. She has faced all kinds of struggles throughout her life, yet she meets every challenge thrown her way with grace, strength, and an undeniable sense of faith that everything will work out in the way it is meant to.

Through her admirable sense of independence and self-reliant nature, I have learnt that it is normal to be scared to do new things, but you should always try.

What have you achieved through your experiences of being independent?
Studying abroad has probably been the biggest act of independence I have ever taken. To be honest, moving an ocean away from everyone and everything you know can be daunting. But whilst studying abroad and breaking away from the familiar, I ended up discovering and learning new skills. I ended up being able to take care of myself without completely relying on the help of others.

Most important, I discovered myself in unexpected ways. With independence, comes the discovery that you are way more capable than you might initially think — so take that step forward!

TEOH JIA YING, 21
International & Global Studies student, Middlebury College (Vermont, US)

What does independence mean to you?
In my opinion, independence means reaching emotional maturity and being able to do things on your own, but also knowing when to reach out for help.

Independence means different things in different stages of one’s life. When we’re students studying abroad, we have to learn how to do things on our own. We should be confident in ourselves, but also be able to find the right people to collaborate with.

Who inspires you to take that extra step forward?
My parents. They give me the freedom to try new things, and they don’t restrict me by having rigid expectations of what I’m supposed to do or who I’m supposed to become. They allow me to do what I want (in a sensible way!) and encourage me to explore my options.

Despite my freedom, I know that I always have a home here to go back to, to find comfort or to get advice.

What have you achieved through your experiences of independence?
To me, it’s really important to get to know different people from different backgrounds. Through my leadership roles — such as co-leading an acapella group at university and working on a social entrepreneurship project — I’ve been able to meet many people from all over the world.

I’ve learnt to truly listen to them, which I really appreciate, because everyone has their own stories to tell and you can learn a lot from each of them. In my opinion, leadership is about helping yourself and others work towards common goals.

ALEXANDREA LOUISA FERNANDO, 23
English Literature & French student, The University of Auckland (Auckland, New Zealand)

What does independence mean to you?
Independence to me is about more than self-reliance. It’s about having the wisdom to know when to ask for help.

Who has been your biggest influence in guiding you towards independence?
My biggest influence has always been my sister. From young, she has always been a very independent person. She is incredibly self-reliant, but when she is faced with difficult obstacles in life, she is never too proud to ask for help from those around her.

How do you think Malaysia can benefit from a more independent generation?
A generation of self-reliant Malaysians who are not blinded by their pride will ensure that our country is always moving forward. Malaysia needs people who are confident in their own abilities but are not afraid to admit their shortcomings.

TO many of us, independence is all about being able to lead yourself. To me, it’s also about leading and taking care of others.

My grandmother is past her 80s now. I am her fourth grandchild. When I was much younger, I’d hide behind her when I was in trouble with my mum, and watch Cantonese dramas with her in the evenings. When I was growing up, she was one of my main protectors.

When my grandmother was still in primary school, World War II broke out. She left school, unable to continue due to the dangers held by the Japanese occupation. Without an education, she ended up working in a factory to make ends meet, where she eventually met my grandfather and, after marriage, raised six children.

Nowadays, in her older age, she still looks out for all her surviving children, their spouses and all her grandchildren. She doesn’t say much, but when she does, it’s to remind us to be safe, to encourage us to keep learning to do things for ourselves, to be careful with our money (I get reprimanded for this a lot!), to have ambition, and to have the independence to carve out our own path in life.

I hope that one day I’ll be able tell my children, and their children, the same thing.

If every Malaysian is able to lead another and synergise our best qualities, then our country will have the sense of direction we need to thrive and grow.

Arielle is still figuring out how to be truly independent as a ‘young adult’. She has high hopes for Malaysia’s Gen Y and Z, and is excited for the future! Do you have any thoughts to share? Write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com.
By SANDY CLARKE

I nspiring leadership is not about having a style or being a great leader, but the many factors that combine to create effective leadership as well as the unique personalities of leaders themselves.

When we think of leadership, there are many questions that arise:

- Who is the right leader for the team? How do we know they are the right leader?
- Do they meet the standards of a great leader, or are they the micromanagers?
- How can we identify and develop effective leaders?
- What makes a leader great?

These are just a few of the questions we ask ourselves when we talk about leadership. But what does leadership actually mean? And how do we identify and develop it?

Leadership is not just about being a great manager or having a charismatic personality. It’s about understanding the needs of the people you lead and creating a work environment that fosters growth and development.

It’s about being able to communicate your ideas effectively and make sure they are understood. It’s about being able to motivate and inspire your team to achieve their goals.

And it’s about being able to create a positive and productive work culture.

In this article, we’ll explore the qualities and traits that make for great leadership, and how you can develop them in yourself.

Leadership Traits

Leadership is about being able to inspire others, to motivate them to achieve their goals, and to create a positive and productive work environment.

To be a great leader, you need to be able to:

- Communicate your ideas effectively
- Motivate and inspire your team
- Create a positive work culture
- Be able to work with others
- Be adaptable and flexible

These are just a few of the traits that make for great leadership. But what do these traits mean in practice?

Communicating Your Ideas

One of the most important traits of a great leader is the ability to communicate your ideas effectively.

Leaders who are able to articulate their ideas clearly and concisely are more likely to be successful than those who struggle to express themselves.

To be a great communicator, you need to:

- Be able to express your ideas clearly and concisely
- Be able to adapt your communication style to suit your audience
- Be able to listen actively and provide feedback

Motivating Your Team

Another important trait of a great leader is the ability to motivate and inspire your team.

To be a great motivator, you need to:

- Be able to set clear goals and expectations
- Be able to provide feedback and recognition
- Be able to create a positive work environment

Creating a Positive Work Environment

A third important trait of a great leader is the ability to create a positive work environment.

To be a great creator of a positive work environment, you need to:

- Be able to foster a sense of community
- Be able to provide support and assistance
- Be able to create a culture of respect and empathy

Being Able to Work with Others

A fourth important trait of a great leader is the ability to work well with others.

To be able to work well with others, you need to:

- Be able to manage conflicts and disagreements
- Be able to build relationships with others
- Be able to work collaboratively

Being Adaptive and Flexible

A final important trait of a great leader is the ability to be adaptive and flexible.

To be able to be adaptive and flexible, you need to:

- Be able to adapt to new situations and challenges
- Be able to learn from failure and setbacks
- Be able to be open to new ideas and perspectives

In conclusion, leadership is not just about being a great manager or having a charismatic personality. It’s about understanding the needs of the people you lead and creating a work environment that fosters growth and development.

It’s about being able to inspire others, to motivate them to achieve their goals, and to create a positive and productive work environment.

As leaders, we have the power to create a positive and productive work environment. Let’s use that power to inspire and motivate our team to achieve their goals.

Remember, leadership is not about having a style or being a great manager. It’s about being able to inspire others, to motivate them to achieve their goals, and to create a positive and productive work environment.

SANDY CLARKE

Leaderonomics.com, Saturday 29 August 2015

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A RIGID MIND BLOCKS SUCCESS

5 STRATEGIES FOR FEARLESS LEADERSHIP

By SHERRIE CAMPBELL
editor@leaderonomics.com

RIGID thinking is natural to the human psyche. This rigidity causes people to repeatedly apply the same behaviours over and over to diverse business situations.

The reality is that people are the most comfortable doing what they know or have done in the past. The challenge that arises is that diverse problems require varied responses, yet human beings are especially prone to doing what they’re familiar with because it doesn’t awaken any fear.

Fear leads to rigid thinking and subsequently blocks abundance. This is how people get stuck in self-doubt, confusion and stress, and their energy drains away as they dip into despondency and frustration.

These psychological states of mind are the reasons many aspiring leaders quit. They cannot move past the fact that the approaches they think should work don’t. And so, self-doubt and fear take over and the entrepreneurs feel blocked. Successful leaders wage war on these habituated patterns and this, in turn, leads to their success.

1 BREAKING MENTAL PATTERNS
Successful leaders fight against their habitual tendencies. They force themselves to react to what’s happening in the present moment without going back and trying to apply past philosophies. Great leaders know that, in order to be successful, they have to be hard-nosed and not let their reactive emotional responses get in the way of a current business opportunity. They are adept at yanking themselves away from using the same tired methods, even when it involves risk and invokes fear.

They are clear that everything they want exists on the other side of fear, and so they jump.

2 CREATING SHOCK
In moving away from rigid and safe decision-making responses, great leaders are aware that while they might sacrifice emotional comfort and security, they will gain the element of surprise. Because they can be flexible in the present, they are unpredictable. This is powerful for leadership and success, as their decision in creating shock doesn’t allow customers, competitors and strategic partners to know what they will do next.

This creates further interest and fascination with the entrepreneur and also generates awe and respect. Shock inspires people to pay close attention and want to follow.

3 USING MINDFULNESS
Successful leaders are clear that being elite in a field is not just about having knowledge. When a deal is lost, the problem is often not because a person thought of a solution too late. Some individuals will ruminate, “If only I had had more knowledge.”

Successful leaders know this is an incorrect approach. What creates failure is not being mindful of the present moment.

Great leaders refrain from getting lost listening to their own thoughts, reacting to things that happened in the past and habitually applying prior concepts and ideas to the present, which might have little relevance to what the situation is calling for.

They are able to intuit and stay attuned to the demands of a current deal, letting them spontaneously figure out what needs to be accomplished (which may be entirely different from similar prior negotiations).

4 EMBRACING THE UNEXPECTED
Accomplished leaders dispel the myth of preparation as being the greatest strategy for success.

Top leaders know that no amount of thinking in advance can prepare them for the chaos of business or the infinite opportunities of today’s deal.

The current negotiation is completely new and full of possibility – which a fixed mind won’t be able to see. The present moment is fresh and always brings uncertainty. Great leaders know their minds have to keep up with change and adapt to elements that are unexpected.

In this way, knowledge, experience and theory have limitations and can be deterrents to seizing and keeping up with unexpected changes arising from the present arrangement.

5 DEVELOPING A FLOWING MIND
Successful leaders view the mind through the metaphor of a river.

The faster the mind can flow, the better it keeps up with the present and responds to change. The faster it flows, the more it refreshes itself and the greater the momentum.

Fast thoughts, past experiences (whether successes or failures) and rigid ideas act as boulders in this river, darning it up. When blocked, the river stops moving and stagnation sets in.

For this reason, great leaders wage war in their mind so it’s open to the flow and keeps up with the creativity of the present opportunity on the line.

“Nothing in the world is more flexible and yielding than water. Yet when it attacks the firm and the strong, none can withstand it, because they have no way to change it. So the flexible overcome the adamant, the yielding overcome the forceful.” — Lao Tzu

PARTING THOUGHTS
To improve leadership skills and become an esteemed leader, a person must shed old traditions and misconceptions.

Strategy does not involve learning a series of steps to follow like a recipe because success has no magic formula. To lead effectively, people must learn to become their own strategists, based on intuition and relying on new and unused tactics. They have to take chances that may not at first seem to make sense.

The greatest leaders and the most creative tacticians stand out not because they have more knowledge but because they are able, when necessary, to drop their pre-conceived notions and focus intensely on the present moment and all it has to offer.

That is how creativity is sparked and new possibilities in business are seized.
A 58-year progression as an independent nation 58 years on, the post-Merdeka generation often does not reflect how our forefathers went through many struggles to gain freedom. If we would ask those who survived the communist insurgency era, for example, they would have many stories of hardship, bravery and resilience to share in living through life pre-Independence.

I watched Bukit Kepong, a 1981 film directed by Jimmy Shamuddin, as a young child and I remembered it as one of the most memorable local movies I’ve ever watched. For the uninitiated, it is based on a true historical account of the communist guerilla attack on Bukit Kepong police station on Feb 23, 1950.

The communists underestimated the fighting spirit of the police force, thinking they could seize control of the station in a short time. Despite the odds, our men fought gallantly about five hours before the communists burnt down the wooden station.

In conjunction with the Merdeka week, I revisited this movie to extract some timeless lessons from it. Thus, the lessons that follow are written based solely on the film, and not from the real historical account of the Bukit Kepong tragedy.

**ATTENTIVENESS: TRUST YOUR GUTS**

In the film, we see scenes of APs checking on people entering the area to ensure that they are not communist proxies. One particular scene shows how two spies entered the police station late in the evening on the pretext of reporting a child falling into a well and therefore needing urgent rescue. We have to commend the policeman who took the report for his watchfulness in reading the body language of the other spy, who acted suspiciously, as his eyes wandered around to check the layout of the police station.

The policeman trusted his guts that they were up to no good, and even advised Sergeant Jamil not to heed to their request for help.

When it comes to national security and borders, citizens and authorities alike are called to be alert at all times to ward off foreign influences and ideologies that are detrimental to the country. As an example, we have a public duty to alert the authorities when we suspect dodgy activities going on in a premise whose tall gates are always shut, but with dark-tinted vehicles going in and out from the place.

When it comes to checkpoints and immigration, authorities just cannot afford to close one eye anymore with the exposé of power abuse, lackadaisical attitude and incidents of commodities and people smuggling.

**1. COLLABORATION: COMMUNICATE OPENLY**

In the movie, we see how the police led by Sergeant Jamil Mohd Shah, the marine police, the villagers and the British representative sat down together to discuss the vulnerability of their area (by the Muar river banks), which was only accessible by boat, and surrounded by jungles – an easy hideout for communists.

As a result of the discussion, the villagers from the neighbouring kampongs underwent artillery training to be auxiliary police (AP) to help combat communist threat. They were always on high alert and became extra eyes and ears for the Bukit Kepong policemen.

They even created a warning system where an assigned villager would incessantly beat a makeshift drum should there be a threat to warn others and mobilise the villagers to fight the communists.

We can better equip ourselves for a challenging task if we recognise what we are lacking. We ought to articulate those issues and discuss with all stakeholders on how we can work together for the betterment of our nation.

With that, leaders from all sides need to avail themselves to listen to the grouses of the rakyat and find actionable solutions in a matured manner.

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**3. COURAGE: SURRENDERING IS NOT AN OPTION**

There were numerous trumpet calls by communist Muhammad Indera for the Bukit Kepong police officers to lay down their arms. But we know that when it comes to defending our beloved land from the enemies, we’d rather die honourably by fighting.

In the film, we also see Mariam, the wife of a fallen marine police, taking up arms to continue fighting the communists.

In situations like these, the act of surgndering has its connotation of giving up your rightful authority to the enemies. It is like giving them easy access to what is yours in the first place.

In national issues, it takes courage not to kowtow easily to the threats brought about by corrupted officials in high places. Even though it is often tough fighting for the truth, we must stand united and not be shaken to what is true and just.

**4. SELFLESSNESS: CHECK ON YOUR PEOPLE**

In Bukit Kepong, we see Sergeant Jamil risking his life to check on surviving people in the police barracks. While most of the marine police had fallen, he gathered the widows together to comfort and look out for each other.

As great emphatic leaders move forward, they will always look back to check on their people to see how they are coping. They will ensure that their people are also doing okay and not left behind on their own.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Lessons from this movie are aplenty. There are more lessons about the story, characters and the people behind this film that I’m not able to cover due to space.

My recommendation is that you watch Bukit Kepong as a Malaysian not as someone from a different ethnic background.

Today, we face different kinds of internal and external threats. Besides extremism and terrorism, corruption is perhaps the biggest battle of our time.

Despite the concerns shrouding the future of this nation, it’s my utmost hope that your love for this country will never die. Malaysia is still worth saving and fixing.

Happy Merdeka!
By SARA YEE
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I think giving it forward to someone who is in need is the greatest gift to both the giver and the receiver. To me, regardless of the gift, the old adage “it’s the thought that counts” continues to ring true. So when the day comes for me to present my gift, I will present wholeheartedly—no strings attached. I am fortunate to have received assistance from both within my internal community (friends and family) and from the external community—the people at large—to spur me on as well as to strengthen my faith in humanity. Recently, I volunteered at the local refugee centre, which I had discovered through the DoGood Volunteer portal. It was a two-hour drive from where I was, but distance did not pose a problem. What I did was something that any teacher would have done—I went to great lengths for my students. The experience of teaching English to the children was extremely fulfilling. When I came into class and the gratitude I felt was really amazing. However young and inexperienced you are, you can still learn something. They taught me the meaning of kindness and humility. They also showed me that it is all right to back down and think of a new strategy if something just doesn’t work. Most importantly, they have taught me that learning is a process that never ends. Regardless of who you are or where you are, you can learn something, even just a little bit.

LESSONS FROM THE CLASSROOM

Teaching disadvantaged students a language that was foreign to their own in the centre was a challenge I gladly took on. They were students who were mischievous but good at heart. While the barrier of language was present, I knew enough to overcome these barriers and get my point across as I explained the intricacies of the language I was trying to teach them. Teaching is a learning experience—not only do you strengthen who you are teaching, but you also reinforce the lessons in yourself. Learning is teaching and teaching is learning—the paradox is in fact true and beneficial to everyone involved. When you teach, remember that you are there to dispense knowledge and better the lives of the students learning from you. Not only that, what you learn from them will be beneficial to you too.

All those stories of teachers learning things from their students is not a stroke of luck from having a child genius in the class, but in fact lessons that can be learnt from any student. However young and inexperienced your students are, you can still learn something from them. Every human has a story to tell, even the young ones. So throughout my lessons, not only did my students learn what I was trying to impart but, subtly, I learnt a lot from them.

They taught me the meaning of kindness and humility. They also showed me that it is all right to back down and think of a new strategy if something just doesn’t work. Most importantly, they taught me that learning is a process that never ends. Regardless of who you are or where you are, you can learn something, even just a little bit.

HOMEWORK

Passing on what had been graciously given to me—support—I knew it was my way of paying it forward towards the persons who had helped me, by continuing the cycle of help towards those who really need it. The smiles of the children when I came into class and the gratitude I felt was really amazing. To me, giving something that could bring much happiness brought about a sense of fulfillment. If giving back was what I did, I intend to do it wholeheartedly and I urge you to do the same in your own time. Maybe you’ll see it as something of a chore but, when you do it willingly towards a group that needs it, and you see the joy on their faces as a result, I can guarantee that it will put a smile on your face. Even if you can’t go the distance (no pun intended), you can still do small things for people—holding up doors, helping to carry their bags, or even something as simple as picking up a dropped item and returning it to the original owner.

When I taught those students, their eyes lit up with joy. At that point, it was not so much of the lesson coming across but helping them—that was the very thing that they appreciated. I still remember their smiles as I left for the last time after my class. I could see that it affected them (in a good way). As I left the place, I could feel the tears streaming my cheeks.

CLASS DISMISSED

The most important thing when giving back is knowing that you are passing on the kindness that someone else has given you. Giving back is passing the intangible kindness to someone else in a different form. Like energy, kindness cannot be created or destroyed but moved from one form to the other. It is this cycle that transfers the energy from one person to another. When that energy reaches a new person, it brings a certain joy. Sometimes, that little act of kindness can spur them forward into doing something that they have always wanted to do or even to pass on that energy to another person, thereby continuing the cycle. Every little bit counts towards a better world, as Sydney Smith says, “It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little. Do what you can.”

PROVOKING THOUGHTS

Think of it this way, even a tiny pebble, when thrown into a still pool, still makes ripples. Have you thrown yours?
By PARIMALA THANABALASINGAM
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Are Teachers Micromanaging Students Too Much?

I’ve ever watched the series Monk on TV, teacher? asked Razif*, soon after I had instructed the class to tidy up their desks and chairs and, for the ninth time, align them in neat rows. I always wondered this before I started my mathematics class. Monk is a comedy-drama series and it features a special investigator with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Adrian Monk is brilliant at solving difficult crimes but struggles to manage daily chores that we take for granted.

He has 322 phobias! The National Institute of Mental Health includes being preoccupied with order and symmetry as a facet of this disorder.

**Are we duplicating or cultivating?**

Higher order thinking skills (HOTS) are essential if we are to overcome the current poor ranking in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). During a visit to Malaysia in early 2013, Dr. David Byrue, of Kestrel & Thinking Schools International fame, highlighted that it is a falsity to regard the eight visual maps rolled out to schools as the only way to achieve HOTS. There needed to be a unified approach to bring this programme quickly into everyday practice in the schools and this was a tried and tested model. Schools still had the choice of using any other tools or methods. Now, teachers had to ask reflective questions and students answered by choosing any of these visual maps (or other tools) to exhibit their knowledge.

Children learnt metacognition as they had to figure out how as well as what they were thinking. They realised that it is okay to have different views; to agree to disagree.

Not My Highway or the Highway—Autonomy and decentralisation

A world-class education system is the basis of the strategy to become a global player and propel Malaysia into a higher income economy. Yet, the quality of the education system cannot exceed the quality of its principals and teachers (The Education Blueprint, 2013–2025). Michael Fullan uses the term “micro-madness” in his book, *The Principal*. Three Keys to Maximising Impact. He says that we must resist the micromanaging of one teacher at a time. The professional capital of teachers as a group must be developed as micromanaging educators stifles reform.

Perhaps from a systemic viewpoint, the ultimate contrast to micromanaging is giving autonomy to schools. Currently, principals of selected high-performing schools do have some autonomy on selection of subjects, teachers and students.

The idea of school decentralisation was mooted at the May conference as the way forward in other nations, albeit with the disclaimer that it should be done in stages. Dare we dream?

A New Approach: The Student Voice

As stated in the syllabus, I asked my students to prepare a ‘Book of Ideas’ to jot down their ideas and sketches. Their first question was: “What type of book do I require?”

Even when repeatedly told that they were free to choose, that just a loose-leaf folder was okay, the students were decidedly uncomfortable and argued that all their books must be the same. It would be a long and interesting journey to creativity for both the students and me.

Did years of being micromanaged lead to conformity?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12.2) states, “Children and young people have a right to express opinions on matters which affect them and to have those opinions taken seriously.”

Anyone Listening? Truth is Liberating

I had to go through the process of “learn, unlearn and reinvent” (Alvin Toffler) to stay relevant as research findings and new initiatives came pouring in during these last few years—micromanaging actually discourages independence and interferes with learning.

Marzano & Pickett (2003) asserts that most teachers talk too much, help too much, and are seen too much. They claim that micromanagement breeds needy, demanding and dependent students.

| Landeka Diamond, principal of Westlake Primary School, South Africa, shared: |

> “I realised that I led by attempting to create duplicates of myself instead of allowing people to find answers from within; I would direct people, rather than allowing them to discover and unleash their own potential. I realised to change this and adapt a more coaching role as a manager.”

**REFERENCES**

[1] Razif* name changed

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12.2) states...
By STEPHANIE LING
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Y ou know you’re procrastinating when you find the houseplant in front of you more interesting than your 20-page essay that is due the following week.

Let me start by saying that I have yet to win the war against procrastination, and that is probably why this article was handed in just days before its deadline. On a serious note however, procrastination is something to be trivialised. It is ultimately a problem with self-regulation with the emphasis being on self-control.

A good point to note is that procrastination is something learnt rather than something you are born with — therefore it is possible to overcome this habit, albeit with some effort and willpower.

PROcrastinators Unite

Everyone procrastinates to a different degree, be it in terms of severity or cause. The first possible reason for why people engage in procrastination would be due to the fact that these individuals are thrill seekers. In other words, they thrive on that euphoric rush obtained when rushing to the last minute to beat a deadline.

They are the kind of individuals who feel that this final dash is what being productive is all about.

On another note, there are those who practise self-handicapping. Called “avoiders”, they are the kind who fear demonstrating one’s ability to prioritise with relation to the urgency required for each task. With that said, any task that is put off, due to its low priority on the list, will demonstrate one’s ability to prioritise rather than an inability to avoid procrastination.

Reward Yourself

Always reward yourself for completing that to-do list within the given deadline.

Positive reinforcement serves as a good motivator be it that five-minute dance party or even that chocolate bar in the fridge that you’ve been eyeing. Celebrate the little successes and remember how good it made you feel to have accomplished it so that you will always have something to remember in future when you are facing roadblocks again.

Time-Bound Timeline

We always assume that we have plenty of time to get things done and because of that we tend to postpone completing anything.

Creating a to-do list with deadlines in tow ensures that we are constantly reminded of the call to action with relation to the urgency required for each task.

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Eliminate Pit Stops

Put on some noise-cancelling headphones, turn off social media notifications and put that good book aside. Use apps that help you focus by restricting the number of hours you are allowed to spend on social media. Learn to exercise self-control to ensure that you do not stray from the task at hand.

Find a Buddy

If personal accountability is a problem, find a friend who is able to keep you on track.

Friends do make or break you, so get one who is able to inspire and encourage you rather than one who puts you down.

This person should also have personal goals so you will be able to hold each other accountable for your respective projects.

If you wanted to take it to the next level, you could also make your intentions public. This serves as additional motivation as you would want to avoid being chastised by others.

Just Do It

The best way to get something done is really to begin. When self-regulation fails, it is usually because short-sightedness takes precedence over our long-term goals.

When an unappealing task is presented to us, we typically seek immediate emotional relief by putting it off in order to feel better instantly. Rather than to give in to that momentary relief, we should stand our ground and push on. Always remember that the negative emotions will eventually pass so embrace it and use it as inspiration instead.

Re-Clarify Expectations

In addition to making your task concrete, it is also essential to reduce uncertainties and distractions.

When a task is too vague, we tend to avoid tackling it. That is why it is important to clear these doubts early on so we are able to get some structure and direction towards solving it.

Create That Environment

It is also important to create a conducive environment. Being mindful about distractions and making an effort to tune them out allows you for self-regulate and focus better.

Motivation

Should I watch that latest episode of Game of Thrones now or should I finish up my pending proposal?

Seems like a no brainer, but that is when the irrational side of human nature steps in to throw us off. As humans, we tend to engage in temporal discounting which is the act of pursuing a reward that may be small but is more immediate rather than larger rewards that are only available in the distant future.

With self-awareness, we know to focus on the bigger picture instead and that will result in increased productivity.

Concluding Thoughts

With reference to Shia LaBeouf’s video that is making rounds on the Internet, he urges us over and over again to ‘Just Do It!’ Recall the times you had wished that you had started earlier. Today, you have that chance to do just that, so why don’t you?

With greater awareness of the problem as well as means for self-control, your procrastination woes can be managed.