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POWER OF DIVERSITY

FOR businesses to thrive, it is more important to hire people who best fit with the prevailing corporate culture, or those who are inclined to swim against the tide of consensus?

Conventional wisdom suggests that managers should hire people who align with company values, practices and processes. If we can all get along in the workplace, the happier everyone will be; the happier everyone is, the more likely company targets and objectives will be met.

Research seems to suggest otherwise. Ron Friedman Ph.D. — a renowned social psychologist — argues that, in an environment of similarity and charged positively, overconfidence sets in and the motivation to think differently and question decisions quickly diminishes.

Dr Gary Powell advises that, while hiring for fit can have its benefits, companies are unsure about the nature of their culture are bound to meet obstacles when adding to their team. Fitting in is, in many ways, important to the workplace. After all, we spend much of our time at work and so, according to Dr Lauren Rivera, managers prefer to have their teams consisting of similarity and charged positively, overconfidence sets in and the motivation to think differently and question decisions quickly diminishes.

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W \textbf{OULD you hire this man if you were the CEO or HR head of an advertising firm?} He is 38-years-old and unemployed. He dropped out of college, had been a cook, a salesman, and had done some PR work. Has no knowledge of marketing and has never done any advertising work, but processes to be interested in advertising as a career is ready to work as an executive for $50,000 a year.

The notion of hiring such a person goes against conventional wisdom.

And yet, this is a true story. This person was hired, despite conventional wisdom. His name is David Ogilvy, founder of the biggest advertising agency in the world, Ogilvy & Mather. He is known as the “Father of Advertising”, who created success for brands such as Rolls Royce, Schweppes, Dove, and American Express.

So what’s the moral of the story? Do you follow conventional wisdom by hiring based on a set of established practices, predetermined criteria, competency framework, culture and values, or do you use past experiences, models and frameworks, but we must balance between present capability and future potential.

In this sense, hiring is a paradox of opposites.

In the light of this paradox, we must reconcile:

- Present performance against future potential.
- Culture, consistency, and uniformity versus unity in diversity.
- People who play it safe and those who are willing to stretch the limits.
- Result drivers and relationship builders.
- Original thinkers versus copycat producers.
- Factual faces versus feely fellows.
- Book-smart versus street-smart.
- Creativity versus conformity.
- Employing people who are fired up versus firing them up.
- Learning, unlearning, and experimentation.
- Past experience versus future possibilities.

A HEALTHY BALANCE

There is a prevailing belief that if you hire a misfit, it will be a disaster. It need not be so. However, if an organisation is made up of mainly managers and not leaders, this may be the case. There has to be a balance between transactional hiring and transformational hiring.

The trained will become more sought after and the less trained will be sidelined, causing more of a critical industry-induced shortage.

There is actually no shortage of talent, but there is a shortage of trained and transformed talent. Companies need to look at the bigger picture by thinking abundantly. By doing so, they will enhance the overall talent pool. So, do you pinch or train? Pinching too much can disrupt your internal equilibrium. No pinching may cause complacency. Therefore, manage and balance these two paradoxes.

We hear of highly successful companies like Apple, Google, Zappos, and Microsoft advocating hiring the best. That may be true for a time, but we need to evolve from a Darwinian survival type of hiring to a more equitable and transformative type of win-win system.

From my own observation, I have seen many employees who were once “cold storage” or “sidelined” — the so-called “misfits” — transform into high achievers simply because of right input and guidance.

I have seen seemingly insignificant people, who would not normally be employed, rise to the occasion when given the opportunity. They would never have had a chance if we simply followed formulas and best practices.

Guidelines are useful, but only inasmuch as they help you — they don’t act as limitations. Is cultural fit a must? Yes, to some degree, but don’t be constrained by it.

We often adopt best practices, but best past practices suit what has gone before, and won’t necessarily suit your current circumstances.

Over time, the context, time, players and landscape will change. We need to be receptive, perceptive and proactive in order to maximise talent, potential and performance.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Having a map is useful but it does not fully reflect reality. Past experiences, precedents and judgments must be evaluated in the light of current reality and changing dynamics.

Evolve your own best practices and don’t be swayed by hiring myths, trends and fables. Be realistic and ready to adapt in the light of your culture, business, brand and vision. Hiring must be a lively and liberating experience — not a laborious one.

Let’s revisit the story of David Ogilvy. I am sure the firm had hiring guidelines but, reconciling the paradox between experience and potential, they caused the exponential growth of the biggest and most successful advertising agency in the world.

If he wasn’t hired, David Ogilvy could have ended up as an unknown cook in an unknown town writing menus and making coffee instead of writing copy, and who knows how that would’ve affected the advertising industry.
ARE YOUR HIGH POTENTIALS ACCELERATING OR STUCK IN GEAR?

Your top employees have a burning desire to be high performers. Like a finely-tuned sports car engine, they crave an environment that allows them to really open up and show exactly what they can do.

A well-crafted development plan for your people ensures a clear road ahead for cultivating effective leadership in your organisation.

After all, with great leadership comes great success. When the time comes, are your top performers ready and able to take the wheel, and drive your organisation to the next level and beyond?

Our Talent Acceleration Programmes (TAP) help you create the right ecosystem that strengthens the growth of your people. We do this in four steps: Identify, Design, Engage and Assess.

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Organisations thrive by nurturing the best and brightest. But do you know who they are? We help you identify your key talents through a robust series of selection and qualifying criteria, aligned to your business strategy and organisational needs.

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We provide customised TAPs that make use of dynamic techniques to refine skills and accelerate leadership among your top performers. Our Learning Experiences build on your talents’ character and competencies, enhancing them in ways that contribute great value for the organisation.

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DOES ATTITUDE REALLY TRUMP APTITUDE?

IT TAKES MORE THAN WILL TO CLIMB TO THE TOP

By JOHN WALTER BAYBAY
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One of the questions I’m often asked is whether or not qualifications are the most important aspect of hiring or finding a job-fit. For the most part, senior managers will tell you that attitude is more important than qualifications; this, however, is a rather shortsighted answer.

As we all know, only qualified applicants make it to the top of the heap, especially when it comes to mission-critical posts.

The short answer is that you need both qualifications and the right attitude to get the job. Qualifications are almost always one of the bare requirements. Having said that, you cannot get hired on the strength of your curriculum vitae (CV) alone, nor will you be hired on the basis of having a positive attitude.

You need both, although it’s a little more complex than that. Nonetheless, you must have a strategy to climb your way to the top.

At the higher levels, where the so-called crème de la crème are vetted for positions, the supply side (applicants) will have already been strategically positioned for the post, and there are a few key considerations when trying to get there.

Here are some of the factors I’ve seen come into play when looking for the best people:

1. CONNECT

   Being connected with the right people and networks is the best way to get a leg-up in your career.

2. YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU

   More important than where you’ve worked and where you went to school, employers want to know what you have accomplished to date. Mentions of publications and awards on your CV help employers to paint a bigger picture of who you are.

3. CLOSING THE DEAL

   • FIND LEVERAGE
     Give your prospective employer the idea that they are one of your key options.
     Give them a clue as to who you have been speaking to, ideally an important account where you have connections or perhaps even the competition.
     Give them an impression that you want to be significant in your industry. Raise your value by knowing the talent market, but never divulge confidential information.

4. THE GLASS SHOE

   As mentioned, the question is often more complex than just a matter of qualification versus attitude. You need to have both when you’re trying to soar to great heights.

   What matters most is not just having the skill and the attitude for the job, but rather the right mindset and asumen to fit into an organisation.

   But even with the right skills, attitude and strategies to get into the organisation, if you are not a fit to their culture and strategy, then you shouldn’t try to force it. Doing so might make you less marketable. Do your research and ask questions. These answers come fresh in my mind as I have just finished doing an interview with someone who, according to his resume, could be the perfect fit. However, I discovered — after numerous exchanges over email — that his communication skills need work and his attitude needs realigning.

   Between him and a more personable and respectful candidate with similar qualifications, it’s easy to predict that I’d hire the latter.

   Come to think of it, there are others like him in the pile and employers shouldn’t make decisions in a rush to fill out a post. The commitment to new hires entails both a legal and social contract.

   It may seem simplistic at this point but finding the right fit, given all the prerequisites, boils down to the question of whether or not this person can work with me and my team. How well can this candidate relate to the rest of our stakeholders?

   Every employer has a mental image of that perfect someone who can fit into the glass shoe. Whether or not you can be that someone is up to you to make a winning impression.

   In the meantime, it pays to do some research, familiarise yourself with the company, and play your cards well. Perhaps you’ll find yourself in that moment of truth, in which case, if the shoe fits, wear it.

JOHN WALTER Baybay is a regional management consultant who has worked more than 17 years in corporate strategic planning and economic planning. He is a faculty representative of Leaderonomics in the Philippines. He is a competitive athlete who balances his time between business coaching, family and working with communities.

To learn more about strategic planning for your organisation, write to training@leaderonomics.com
By SANDY CLARKE

1. They can bring employees on board who otherwise would not have been hired. This can foster a healthy sense of caution and a commitment to meeting the challenges that the company is facing.

2. They can help to create a more diverse culture within the company, which can help to foster innovation and creativity.

3. They can help to ensure that the company is not complacent. This can be especially important for companies that have been successful in the past but are now facing new challenges.

When thinking about the idea of fit, Powell reminds us that hiring managers need to look at it in two ways. First, they need to look at the fit of the candidate with the job. Second, they need to look at the fit of the candidate with the company. This means that they need to consider the candidate's skills, experience, and values in relation to the needs of the job and the culture of the company.

When Powell was working as a consultant, he found that many hiring managers were more interested in the candidate's skills and experience than in their values and beliefs. As a result, he developed a model called the “person-organization fit” model, which he used to help hiring managers make better decisions.

This model is based on the idea that there is a natural alignment between individuals and organizations. This alignment is often referred to as “fit.” When there is a good fit, the individual and the organization are able to work together effectively. When there is a poor fit, the individual and the organization are less likely to be effective.

Powell suggests that hiring managers should use this model to help them make better decisions. They should consider the candidate's skills, experience, and values in relation to the needs of the job and the culture of the company. This will help them to ensure that they are hiring the right people for the right jobs.
Dress up for the right occasion

LADIES, TAKE NOTE!

By CYNTHIA SOH
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YOU may have heard the saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover”, but the problem is that people do. Our outward appearance is the basis for everything we do. It is a simple but unfortunate fact.

You want to make an outstanding first impression, because you can never go back and do it again. Therefore, do it right the first time.

First, always consider where you are going. Do you have a job interview with a bank? Dress as a banker dressed appropriately (provided your workplace isn't overly casual), such as trousers and a blouse and evening-appropriate shoes.

If it’s a conservative business environment, dress conservatively for such events. But no matter how relaxed your office environment or the occasion, never wear anything provocative. A revealing outfit can prevent you from being taken seriously when it comes to job promotions.

A COCKTAIL PARTY

A cocktail party is an informal social gathering where mixed drinks and light refreshments served to the guests. At the party, you are encouraged to mingle while enjoying a variety of drinks. Therefore, you should wear a semi-formal dress that is comfortable to wear.

You can’t go wrong if you wear a top with special details and a skirt or tailored pants, plus heels or fancy flats. Avoid fabrics that are too casual, like T-shirts and denim.

Every woman should have the famous little black dress, which is usually mid-thigh or knee-length. Long gowns are usually not worn at cocktail parties. Alternatively, you can pair a nice skirt with a beautiful blouse. Whether you're on or off the clock, keep it elegant, but not too formal. Spare the formal dresses for occasions or events that are elaborate.

Accessories with low-key jewellery. Save the heavy diamond jewellery for a more formal affair like your colleague’s wedding. Instead, wear a delicate necklace with some diamond stud earrings. Always carry a cute clutch or small handbag. Large totes or shoulder bags will not match well with a short party dress.

Add details to complete the look. As for wearing a brooch, you can try some fine details you will have a complete cocktail party look.

A BUSINESS DINNER OR A COMPANY PARTY

Keep it professional, but appropriate to the event. Remember that when you’re dressing for a work function, the culture of your office should prevail.

If it’s a conservative business environment, dress conservatively for such events. But no matter how relaxed your office environment or the occasion, never wear anything provocative. A revealing outfit can prevent you from being taken seriously when it comes to job promotions.

For business dinners, office wear is appropriate (provided your workplace isn't overly casual), such as trousers with a refined sweater or a blouse and blazer.

If you’re going to the event straight from the office, try a wrap dress in a dark shade, or wear a suit and bring along an elegant blouse and evening-appropriate shoes.

Or you could simply swap your jewellery for something a little bolder; try a chunky necklace instead of pearls.

A WEDDING

In the old days, the etiquette was to avoid wearing all white, black or red. Nowadays, these colours are perfectly fine, although you may still want to be cautious about donning an all-white outfit.

If you are close to the bride, ask her what’s right; otherwise, consult the maid of honour or the bride’s mother.

For daytime weddings, a more casual dress would be ideal. You should steer clear of anything heavily beaded or sequined. Instead, opt for a knee-length strapless cotton dress, paired up with open-toed shoes.

If the ceremony is in the afternoon and the reception is in the evening – and the invitation does not specify the dress code – you can take this event as semi-formal, which calls for a cocktail dress or an evening suit in a colour that won’t upstage the bride. Pale pink is still okay, but not hot pink.

A black tie dress code once meant floor-length gowns. These days, at the grandest affairs, dresses as short as knee-length are acceptable, provided they have a semi-formal or formal cut and fabric-wise, are of silk or a silk blend. As for wearing a strapless or sleeveless dress in a house of worship, some may have strict rules about covering up, so check the protocol beforehand or bring a shawl.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ask yourself this question: What do you want to achieve by looking your best? For a start, understanding colours that suit you will be a great help when dressing up.

When attending your colleague’s or different business functions, and even your boss’s wedding! Instead, wear a semi-formal or formal dress, paired up with open-toed shoes.

When you mix them with each other, you get orange, violet and green. These are secondary colours.

Each secondary colour sits directly opposite a primary colour on the colour wheel. That opposite relationship is called complementary colours.

When you mix the three secondary colours with the three primary colours, you get six tertiary or intermediate colours, which are lighter variations of the secondary colours.

How do you translate these colours to clothes?

Well, you can wear black or white with any hue on the colour wheel, because they are so versatile.

Let’s start with the basics

THE three primary colours are red, blue and yellow.

When you mix them, you get orange, violet and green. These are secondary colours.

Each secondary colour sits directly opposite a primary colour on the colour wheel. That opposite relationship is called complementary colours.

When you mix the three secondary colours with the three primary colours, you get six tertiary or intermediate colours, which are lighter variations of the secondary colours.

Colour Wheel Combos

So which colours go together?

The primary colours all go together.

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Retain Your Top Performers

By MARSHALL GOLDSMITH
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Leaders are debating the changing nature of work and the perceived decline in job security (the lifelong career at a benificent company is a fading memory), and the erosion of corporate loyalty.

Employees are wondering, “If the company is willing to dump me at its convenience, why shouldn’t I dump the company at my convenience?”

We tend to focus on the profound impact that these workplace changes have on our lives. But too often we overlook the profound changes that have on our organisations.

The new work contract – where employees take responsibility for their own careers and corporations provide them with career-enhancing but impermanent opportunities – can be as difficult for organisations to manage as it is for individuals.

We, as leaders, still understand little of how to retain essential high performers in turbulent times.

FIVE TRENDS: Our task is complicated by five additional trends:

1. **The Reduced Status of Working for a Major Corporation**
   - In his book New Rules, John Kotter notes that, from 1974 through 1994, Harvard Business School graduates who worked for smaller corporations tended to make more money and have higher job satisfaction than their counterparts in large corporations.
   - Top young leaders and technical specialists around the world now avoid working for major corporations. They are attracted to the risks and rewards of small start-up companies.

2. **The Frequent Lack of Connection between Pay and Contribution**
   - When I asked more than 2,000 managers from a variety of corporations, “What is the difference in contribution between a top performer and a below-average performer at the same pay-grade level?” the average answer was, “Over 100%.”
   - When they were asked, “What is the typical pay difference?” the average answer was, “Between 5% and 10%.”
   - In fact, many managers cited cases of younger employees who were contributing more to the company but made less money than older employees.

3. **The Decline in Opportunities for Promotion**
   - Restructuring has led to fewer layers of management, also to fewer opportunities for promotion. In most companies, pay scales are still tied directly to rank, not performance.
   - In the past, many organisations have rationalised the lack of differentiation within pay grades by pointing out that top performers tend to be promoted rapidly.

4. **The Increase in Workload and the Decline in Support Staff**
   - Most employees in major corporations believe that they work harder today than they did 10 years ago. Support staff and many “amenities” of working for a large organisation have disappeared.
   - Whereas employees at small, entrepreneurial organisations have always worked hard, the difference in workload and support between major corporations and smaller corporations is declining.

5. **The Rise in the Influence of the Knowledge Worker**
   - Innovative high-technology corporations are currently paying employees large bonuses to recruit top talent. The “intellectual capital” brought in by high-knowledge employees will be a major, if not the primary, competitive advantage.
   - As the perceived value of key knowledge workers increases, the competition to hire these workers will intensify.

RETIETING HIGH-ImpACT PERFORMERS

Leaders can no longer afford to let the vagaries of the job market determine who leaves and who stays. We must manage our human assets with the same imagination and care we devote to our financial assets.

These seven steps can help you.

1. Clearly Identify the People You Want to Keep
   - In recent years, many executives have focused on whom they should get rid of rather than on whom they should keep. Many downsizing packages give all employees with similar experience the same incentive to leave.
   - Unfortunately, those who decide to leave are often high-impact performers who can find other work quickly.

2. Let Them Know That You Want to Keep Them
   - When high-impact performers are asked why they left an organisation, many report, “No one ever asked me to stay!”
   - Many executives do not tell high-impact performers that they are special, for fear of alienating “average” performers. But this practice makes it difficult to retain top performers.

3. Provide Recognition
   - Although compensation is important in retaining, high-impact performers are leaving organisations for three major reasons: lack of recognition, lack of involvement, and poor management.
   - A chief executive officer (CEO) of a leading telecommunications company recently embarked on an innovative approach. Division-level executives provide a quarterly report on high-impact performers who should be recognised.
   - The CEO personally calls, thanks them for their contributions, and asks for their input on what the corporation can do to increase effectiveness. This process not only helps to retain key talent but also yields great feedback for continuous improvement.

4. Provide Opportunities for Development and Involvement
   - One large consulting and accounting firm recently embarked on an innovative programme to identify and cultivate high-potential leaders. Young leaders engage in an “action learning” project in which they work on real-life problems facing the firm.
   - This gives young leaders fantastic development and gives the firm valuable input on solving real problems. It also enhances the young leaders’ commitment to stay with the firm.

5. Challenge the Compensation Plan
   - Organisations that are unwilling to make performance, rather than mere seniority, the key driver of pay won’t keep top talent, especially young talent.
   - Low-performing employees typically oppose a variable, performance-based compensation plan, but high-impact performers of the future will demand and receive substantially more pay than their lower-performing peers.
   - A “socialistic” compensation plan combined with a lowered potential for promotion will lead to an “average” workforce.

6. Relax the Culture
   - In addition to reducing bureaucratic, high-performing, high-tech companies provide freedom in dress codes, scheduled hours, and lifestyle choices.
   - Although employees may work hard, they appreciate the lack of rules, regulations, and restrictions that inhibit their freedom without increasing their productivity.

7. Provide Intrapreneurial Opportunities
   - Gifford Pinchot, inventor of the term “intrapreneur”, has shown how major corporations can provide positive opportunities for reasonably autonomous enterprises to operate within the larger corporate structure.
   - By allowing high-potential leaders to “run a business” inside a larger business, a corporation can gain commitment and ownership of results while simultaneously developing people.
   - People who see opportunities for ownership and personal development are much more likely to stay.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To retain top talent in the future, executives will need to clearly identify, develop, involve, and recognise key people. Traditional compensation plans must be challenged, needless bureaucracy eliminated, and intrapreneurial opportunities provided.

Executives who create a dynamic, new human resource model will retain the high-knowledge talent needed to succeed in tomorrow’s globally competitive environment.
THE VALUE OF CREATING EXPERIENCE

JOSEPH PINE II’S TAKE ON LEAVING A MEMORABLE PATH

By CINDY YAP
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THERE are many fresh approaches to making a company’s presence meaningful to its potential audience. According to internationally-acclaimed speaker Joseph Pine II, this can be best achieved by creating experience.

Author of several award-winning business books including *Mass Customization: The New Frontier in Business Competition* and *The Experience Economy*, Pine reveals how staging experience leaves a memorable and rewarding impression that engages people. Pine recollects how he brought customers and business partners into the development process during a special assignment to create the AS/400 computer system in IBM, where he started his career.

Says Pine: “I learnt that every customer is unique and everyone wanted it in a different way. We had no way of resolving that, as it was designed for a general purpose computer system that simply didn’t exist.”

His innovative ways resulted in customers’ needs being met more exactly and quality of the systems being significantly enhanced. He also contributed towards IBM clinching the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 1990.

He then set off to strategic planning, where he read Stan Davis’ book *Future Perfect*, which he describes as being akin to “Heaven coming out and the angel’s singing.”

He goes on: “This chapter, called ‘Mass customising’, talks about how technology was bringing down the cost of customisation, so we should be able to give everybody what they want, but do it at the price they are willing to pay.”

Pine was subsequently sent to Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Sloan School of Management as a reward to gain his Masters of Science degree in the Management of Technology, where he wrote a thesis on Mass Customisation, and fixed his mind to turn it into a book after graduation.

In late 1992, the book *Mass Customisation* was published by Harvard Business School Press. Pine left IBM to strike out on his own six months later, after being offered a half year’s salary to leave IBM. He then formed a small company and started speaking, teaching and consulting around the world.

PARADIGM SHIFT

In *Mass Customisation*, Pine speaks of how we don’t have to live with mass production anymore.

“Although mass production lowers the cost of producing things to benefit the masses, the problem is it entails sacrificing our individual desires to buy something standard,” he argues.

“Mass customisation allows for the products, goods, services and experiences to be obtained at low cost, high volume, and with efficient operations but in a way that allows you to get exactly what you want.”

This eventually led to his subsequent book, *The Experience Economy*.

“If you customise a service for a person to be exactly what they need at that moment in time, you will turn it into a memorable event that engages people in a personal manner and make people go ‘Wow, that’s an experience!’” he quips.

Pine uses Kidzania as his favourite illustration of how kids get to play adult roles in experiences, which present so many possibilities, while recognising that moving to experience leaves the market, Pine advises, “Business is hard and it gets tougher year after year.

If you keep doing the same thing without change and stay in the safety of past practices, then you will be commoditised.”

FUSION BETWEEN REAL AND VIRTUAL

Pine’s advice to graduates fresh out of school is to “decide what business you really want to get into, while recognising that the greatest of value is going to be in experiences, which present so many opportunities.”

In his 2011 book called *Infinite Possibility: Creating Customer Value on the Digital Frontier*, Pine wrote about discovering the right opportunity to pursue amid the infinite possibilities that are available to us, and using digital technology to fuse the real and the virtual to create experiences on a digital platform.

“If I were looking for a place to go and the world was totally open, I would look at the intersection of the digital and the physical,” he says.

At the core of the book is a humble new framework that builds on the three fundamental dimensions that create the universe (i.e. time, space and matter). What digital technology does is allow us to flip each of these on their heads to create new worlds, first in our imagination and then in our experiences, says Pine.

“Space is about real places, and now we can have virtual experiences in virtual places that simply don’t exist in reality and create something that is not possible and never been done before.”

Time is about the actual events unfolding in front of us, moment by moment, but with digital technology we can get rid of the tyranny of time by focusing on all dimensions at one time.

PINE’S NUGGETS OF WISDOM TO CEOs

Here are Pine’s responses at the Thinknomics segment:

1. For whatever experience you’re creating, you need to have a theme and the organising principle of the experience, and decide what’s in or out. If you don’t, you are throwing everything but the kitchen sink.

2. When you are working on staging experiences, you are working as theatre.

3. You need to direct your workers to act, help them develop characters that play and help them characterise a role. Build a climax and come down again.

To watch the interview with Joseph Pine II on The Leaderonomics Show, scan the following QR Code.

Which is more genuine – giving your time or money? If my talent can make money, which can be given to some organisation that has the capability to do things which are not my cup of tea, to me that’s more authentic.

Would you rather have less work to do or more work you actually enjoy doing? I love doing my kind of work. I excel at figuring out what’s going on in the world and developing frameworks that first describe what’s going on, and prescribe to companies what they need to do about it.

If you could bring one character to life from your favourite books, what would it be? My favourite book is *Lord of the Rings*, and favourite character – Gandalf. He really feels for Middle Earth and his desire in life is to save hobbits from the greater disasters that are going around them. Similarly, I try helping companies avoid all the disasters in the world of business and find the way to safe harbours that allows them to excel.
I remember the first time I stepped onto a yoga mat—it was like a portal to a place where people, mostly women with slender nymph-like figures, were able to twist themselves into shapes of pretzels, and where they spoke a language I could not understand. “Namaste, what?”

Being one of the few males in class was definitely awkward and foreign to me. It made me feel like a fish out of water. Being a beginner and starting from scratch was a huge challenge. Nonetheless, with a year of consistent practice, I’m surprised at how far I’ve come and how much more I can stretch myself.

My practice mat has grown beyond the classroom into everyday life, and I’m beginning to see how the essence of yoga can guide one’s personal and leadership journey.

Here are five lessons on leadership that I’ve learned from the mat and beyond.

**LEADERSHIP IS ONE MINDFUL DECISION AFTER ANOTHER**

In these days of digital technology where everything moves at breakneck speed, leaders are faced with the challenge of keeping up with changes, whether it’s within the organisation or on a macro level in the market.

Our day-to-day lives are dictated by packed schedules with meetings to catch and people to meet, leaving a tendency for us to become used to the mindlessness of the daily grind. This then leads to increased stress that affects the quality of our work and relationships.

In yoga, we are encouraged to be mindful and intentional about our words and actions—acknowledging each moment that we’re in. Whether it’s a business meeting with a client or giving feedback to an employee, our conscious effort to be present and really listen may just be the greatest gift we can offer as leaders.

**EVERYTHING IS ABOUT PRACTISE, EVEN LEADERSHIP**

When I first started yoga, bending over and touching my toes seemed like an impossible goal. Leadership is both a science and an art, hence, like any learnable skill, it can be sharpened through consistent practise and perseverance.

Malcolm Gladwell famously said that elite performers and those who rise to the top of their game have spent roughly 10,000 hours at their craft. Of course, the blood, sweat and tears come packaged as part of the process towards excellence.

When J.K. Rowling wrote her first Harry Potter book, it was rejected by 12 different publishers. The small publishing house Bloomsbury, who purchased her manuscript, even told Rowling to “get a day job.” Had she taken their advice and thrown in the towel, we may have missed “Harry Potter”.

**AUTHENTICITY WINS**

The practice of yoga encourages us to show up and reveal our true selves in order to form a genuine connection with everything around us. Yoga is a work-in rather than a workout, and it leads us to explore our strengths and vulnerabilities. After spending decades researching human emotions such as courage, shame, worthiness and vulnerability, Professor Brené Brown at the University of Houston sums it up by arguing that leadership has nothing to do with position, salary or number of direct reports.

By now, we’ve seen it all. We are sick and tired of empty promises and fancy talk. Professor Brown believes that “across the private and public sector, in schools and in our communities, we are hungry for authentic leadership—we want to show up, we want to learn and we want to inspire and be inspired.”

Having power does not automatically make one a leader, but our highest power and most influential selves can only be achieved when we align who we are with what we do.

Maya Angelou said, “Success is liking yourself, liking what you do and liking how you do it.”

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**LEADERSHIP’S A STRETCH**

5 LESSONS ON AND OFF THE MAT

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**THE SKY IS NOT MY LIMIT... I AM.”**

— T.F. HODGE

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**PRACTISE MAKES PURPOSE, NOT PERFECT**

Leaders are not built in a day and excellence is not achieved with an hour’s work. The road to success is often paved with challenges and difficulties that will test us to give up, raise the white flag and retreat to our comfort zone where it’s nice and safe.

As evolved as we are as human beings, our behaviors are still strongly governed by our lizard brain—the primitive part of the brain influenced by emotions and our call to arms in a fight-or-flight response. Fear, shame and uncertainty shake us off our trajectory sometimes, thus for any leader to show grit and keep to his or her goals is no easy feat.

In yoga practice, the goal is not to realise perfection but to find a purpose. When our tight muscles are reeling from the pain of stretches and screaming for us to let go, a clarity of the ultimate goal is what keeps us from giving up the practice. How about leadership? What is the higher purpose that drives our motivation to keep going come rain or shine?

When it comes down to it, a leader with a clear raison d’être will likely be the one who sees things through to the end.

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**DISCOVER AND CURATE YOUR OWN LEADERSHIP STYLE**

Hatha yoga. Ashtanga yoga. Vinyasa yoga. Just as there are many styles of yoga, there are just as many styles of leadership. There is no model of leadership that can fit perfectly and be applied across all organisations, communities and cultures.

The best leaders are aware of their own style of leadership and are able to adapt this style situationally to put it into effective practice. In a world saturated with media spotlights on high profile leaders, it is common for us to fall into the trap of thinking that great leaders are razor-sharp, extroverted and outspoken figures like Steve Jobs.

What worked for Jobs may not necessarily work for us. When leaders are well-acquainted and comfortable with their own style, they unintentionally extend the same feeling of ease to their followers, and this enables everyone to perform at their natural best.

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**WHETHER IT’S A BUSINESS MEETING OR GIVING FEEDBACK TO AN EMPLOYEE, OUR CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO BE PRESENT MAY BE THE GREATEST GIFT WE CAN OFFER AS LEADERS**

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Nigel Teh is a curious explorer of the landscape of life, his days are defined by the sheer joy of having questions to ponder. He believes that his background in psychology is a useful addition to his exploration toolkit. If you believe in the power of mind over matter too, do write in and let us know how your organisation has adapted to the idea of authentic leadership.

Email us at editor@leaderonomics.com
WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU POWER
LESSONS FROM FANTASTIC 4

By SARA YEE
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WHAT do you do when faced with circumstan-
es that appear, at first glance, to be far beyond
your control?

Fantastic 4, a superhero group consist-
ing of Mr Fantastic, Susan Storm, The
Human Torch and The Thing, teaches us how to cope with tough challenges.

In this version of the highly anticipated
 cinematic remake of Marvel’s popular
characters, we see the origins of this
superhero group.

Together, they have to stop a friend-
turned-enemy with their newfound
powers.

Here are some lessons
from the team’s formation.

HEED NOT THE NAYSAYERS
At the beginning of the film, a young
Reed tells his class that he wants to be
the first person to be teleported across
space and time. He receives an unequivo-
cal “no” from his teacher, who tells him
to choose something more sensible to
focus on.

He then builds a beta version of his
teleporter, with the help of his classmate
Ben, and succeeds in teleporting a toy car
to another place.

Fast-forward to his high school days,
Reed’s teleporter has become a resound-
ing success and he is proud to show it off
at the science fair, much to the chagrin of
the sceptical assessors who dismiss it as
“magic”.

Reed is then approached by Franklin
Storm and his daughter Sue, who marvel
at his work. Franklin promptly offers him
a scholarship to his school.

There, Reed creates the very machine
that does the thing that he was told
could not be done – teleport live matter.

LESSON: No matter what people tell
you, if you work for it and believe that
you can, you will be able to achieve what
is needed to reach that goal, no matter
how impossible that sounds.

JEALOUSY IS DANGEROUS
Whilst at the school, Reed meets Victor
Doom, a promising young scientist
brought on by Franklin Storm to assist on
the project.

Victor’s jealousy is evident when he
sees Reed’s teleporter completed – an
idea that he developed much earlier,
independently of Reed.

Victor goes on to say that he, not Reed,
will be famous, echoing the same senti-
ment when the party (Jim, Reed, Ben
and Johnny) are on the planet they were
teleported to.

When they return to the planet after
losing Victor there (spoiler alert), they
find he has turned into the villain Doom,
after having absorbed the energy of the
planet – the very same one that gave the
Fantastic 4 their powers.

Jealousy is an extremely dangerous
trait. It can hinder you from doing your
best, because you are clouded by the neg-
avity that you cannot see what you are
able to contribute to – much like Victor
on the Quantum Gateway Project.

LESSON: As Carrie Fisher notes,
“Jealousy is like drinking poison
and waiting for the other person to die.” So
do not drink that poison. Instead, work on
a cure for everyone.

A SINGLE ROD CAN
BE SNAPED, BUT IT’S
IMPOSSIBLE TO BREAK A
WHOLE BUNDLE
The Fantastic 4 are brought together
after (spoiler alert) they are sent to the
planet where Victor was. Putting their
differences aside, the superheroes are
able to work together as team.

Reed declares, after they had tried and
failed to defeat Doom individually: “He
may be stronger than each of us, but he
is not stronger than all of us”.

They combine their abilities in battle
and subsequently defeat Doom, thereby
putting an end to his schemes and saving
Earth.

Strength lies in numbers but it is also
how you play to each person’s strengths,
in a way that complements the project or
the organisation.

Mixing and matching abilities helps
because they can fit together like puzzle
pieces and reveal the bigger picture in
greater clarity – that is, the solution to
the problem.

This cohesion within a team can also
help to cover weaknesses. We think of
top talents as people who do not need
to work in teams but that is not true, as
teamwork can help deliver results much
more effectively.

LESSON: Individuals have their own
strengths, but they also have their weak-
nesses. By uniting a team of strong play-
ers, issues insurmountable by one or two
can be overcome through the collective
effort of the team.

I HAVE MY LEMONS
NOW, WHAT?
Ultimately, even though one’s life may
stray from what is planned, as with
the four superheroes whose powers came
from an accident, you can use your new-
found powers for good, be it to change
someone’s life or make a difference to the
community.

Create the change you want to see.
Change is the only constant and, within
that paradox, you can do a lot with what
you have and perhaps create something
new altogether.

LESSON: When life offers up surprises,
take them in your stride. These are oppor-
tunities to learn and grow, and they may
change at any moment – so grab them
while you can.

Also next week
Celebrating the power of integration and cohesion
Can meek leaders be impactful, effective leaders in the workplace?
We chat with diving queen Pandelela about her incredible success story
Are you fit to climb up the corporate ladder?