STAR WARS: THE LEARNING SAGA CONTINUES

LESSONS FROM THE EMPIRE, THE FORCE, THE JEDI COUNCIL AND MORE...

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I grew up with Luke Skywalker as a role model—the budding, young Jedi who held so much promise and potential, who had Darth Vader as his dad, and struggled with the dark side of the “force”. For many among us, Star Wars brings back countless fond memories—inter-galactic battles graced by the X-Wing jet fighters, strange-looking animals deep in snow-filled land carrying members of the Rebellion. For those who are yet to be on the side of the “force”, I urge you to go on a movie marathon for all six episodes, beginning with the fourth episode to the sixth, followed by the first to the third. The seventh episode, The Force Awakens, premiers in five days’ time. How exciting!

This week’s pullout has Star Wars as the centrepiece—almost half of our content will be either Empire-related, or gleaning learnings from specific characters.

Our centrepiece focuses on the four constraints model consisting of business model deficiencies, processes/organisation structure, leadership and culture. Roshan Thiran draws parallels between the Star Wars ecosystem and the four constraints model, and how these are critical pillars that often cause stunted growth in organisations if not handled with care.

Next, Joseph Lalonde shares with us five great leadership lessons that we can learn from a galaxy far, far away. This week’s Consulting Corner by Avin Indran looks at unconventional leadership in the Jedi Order. He makes five key observations, and one of them that really struck me is how the lead characters, and the four constraints model, and how these are critical pillars that often cause stunted growth in organisations if not handled with care.

Finally, Jay Winder looks at how keeping your thoughts mind against these thoughts. Please email editorial@leaderonomics.com for us to provide content that would be insightful or interesting, we would love to know your thoughts. Please email us at editorial@leaderonomics.com

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The opinions expressed in this leadership guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.
E have, whether young or old, at some point in our lives marveled at the epic motion picture Star Wars which was one of the more successful attempts by George Lucas in producing and directing movies.

We have all been nothing short of amazed of the creativity and conceptualisation of the various characters, alien races, government and politics in a different realm. But for some reason we can draw so much similarity to the way we live today as homo sapiens.

There is much to observe from the Jedi masters and learn from them in being an excellent leader.

First of all, let us all admit that when we were young (some even now), we wanted to be like a Jedi Master swinging around our makeshift light saber blooms sticks chasing the feline around the house. But do we know the essence of being a good Jedi Master?

Here are some observations I picked up as I started my Star Wars marathon, in preparation for Episode VII: The Force Awakens.

**OBSERVATION 1: WITHOUT DISCIPLINE, TRAINING, ALL INBORN TALENTS ARE USELESS**

Contrary to popular belief, a jedi is not made born. Yes, the candidate has to have certain talents but it is made not born. Yes, the candidate must be ready, willing and able to progress. That leaders are made, not born and the University of Illinois supports the idea creates a Jedi Master. A study from the University of Illinois supports the idea creates a Jedi Master.

Contrain to popular belief, a Jedi learner but it was after the insistence of Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan saying that Anakin is the chosen one and will be the one that brings balance to the Force, that Yoda eventually gave in.

According to John C. Maxwell, leaders look at things differently than others. They evaluate everything according to their leadership bias. They possess leadership intuition that informs everything they do and it is an inseparable part of who they are.

**OBSERVATION 2: A CAUSE GREATER THAN YOURSELF IS ALWAYS WORTH FIGHTING FOR**

The well-known Grand Master Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi have served the Galactic Republic and the people for the greater good of the course. They seek neither wealth nor fame for themselves and always serve with utmost humility.

In the words of Jedi Master Mace Windu, “Jedi don’t fight for peace. That’s only a slogan, and is as misleading as slogans always are. Jedi fight for civilisation, because only civilisation creates peace. We fight for justice because justice is the fundamental bedrock of civilisation: an unjust civilisation is built upon sand, and it does not long survive a storm.”

Much like the heroes of our times, such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and Aung San Suu Kyi.

According to Robert K. Greenleaf, the founder of the Servant Leadership movement, “The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?”

**OBSERVATION 3: NOT EVERY GOOD DECISION IS EXPLAINABLE WITH REASONS**

Intuition is another key leadership trait in a Jedi Master. You would notice how Master Yoda would always sense when there is something wrong or when something is about to go wrong.

In fact, Master Yoda first rejected the acceptance of young Anakin Skywalker as a Padawan learner but it was after the insistence of Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan saying that Anakin is the chosen one and will be the one that brings balance to the Force, that Yoda eventually gave in.

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**OBSERVATION 4: SOMETIMES, YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE WHAT’S EXPECTED OF YOU**

Many times, there is a “perfect picture” of how a leader should be. Qui-Gon, master of Obi-Wan, and the one who first spotted Anakin, was seen as an outcast in the Jedi Master circle for his unorthodox and unconventional views. While all Jedis are constantly thinking of the future, Qui-Gon tells this to his young padawan Obi-Wan in The Phantom Menace: “Be mindful of the future, but not at the expense of the current moment.”

Even though his approach was different from what’s expected, Qui-Gon must be commended for the good values he held on strongly. It teaches us not to judge one who practices different styles of leadership, but more importantly, the principles and values that they stand for.

After all, Yoda gave a thumbs-up to Qui-Gon as a Jedi Master and Yoda sums it right when he said: “Once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny.”

So choosing which value we stand for as we reach our vision is so much more important than choosing the quick wins – like the Sith.

**OBSERVATION 5: LEADERSHIP IS ALWAYS A CHOICE - PAINFUL BUT REWARDING**

“Training to become a Jedi is not an easy challenge, and even if you succeed, it’s hard life,” states the wise Qui-Gon. To be a great leader in the Jedi Order, one must possess great discipline, as becoming a great Jedi leader is a process and is not something that can be done in a day.

The process helps develop and hone your skills that will help make you an effective leader. All young Padawan learners in the Jedi Temple have immense discipline to go through their training to become a Jedi Knight and eventually a Master. The Jedi Grand Master Yoda himself only became a master at the age of 961!

**IN CONCLUSION**

There is no shortcut in becoming a great leader. It is a process that requires much discipline.

So leaders, as we work towards becoming better leaders, in the famous words of Yoda, “Do, or do not. There is no try.”
'Tis
the season
for joy and
celebration

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THE BACKSTREET BOY, ALRIGHT!

By Lim Lay Hsuan
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HEN I was little, there were times when mum and I would walk through back alleys from where she parked her car to go to our neighbourhood pasar malam because of limited parking spaces nearer to the market. Along that back alley, I would frown looking at the images and ‘colourful’ languages sprayed across the poor walls. Talk about the nuisance of graffiti. On the contrary, in my school, we had colourful drawings and edifying words executed directly on the walls too; and we call it a mural.

While street art has been around in other parts of the world for decades, I’d say that the movement in Malaysia caught on after Ernest Zacharevic’s masterpieces were showcased in Penang. Today, street art not only functions as tourist attraction, but as a mean to bring out the character (and soul) of a building or city.

I got hold of Mohd Zakir bin Nordin, or Eki, a muralist or graffiti artist who goes by his street name Escapeva, to share his creative and unique journey.

LET THE WALLS TALK

“I discovered my love for spray-painting by chance when I was painting with a friend,” says Eki, who has a diploma from Malaysian Institute of Art and a degree in graphic design from Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan University College. Prior to becoming a full-time muralist, Eki worked for a company as an event coordinator and a graphic designer, while he took on commissioned painting works in his available time.

“It came to a point where it was a real struggle juggling between the two responsibilities. I eventually took the plunge to quit my nine-to-five job and focus on fulfilling my heart’s calling,” says Eki.

Eki has since done many commissioned murals of restaurants, cafés, bars and private companies for more than seven years now. In Klang Valley itself, you can spot Eki’s artworks at Day & Night, Sri Petaling; Drift Dining & Bar, Kuala Lumpur and Oh Scooter Café, Subang Jaya.

TAGGED FOR CHARACTER

Staying true to his street name Escapeva, which stands for “escape visual art”, Eki describes his choice of career as “black book”, a graffiti term used to denote an artist’s precious sketchbook where outlines and ideas to be executed are kept. To feed his spray-paint “addiction”, Eki paints walls on the same spot or at new designated locations once a week. Instead, it’s always a ‘to be continued’ mode. However, it greatly encourages Eki to keep himself occupied with non-commissioned work. “Perhaps it is not a bad thing because you study, graduate, work, fall in love, set a relationship really. You do feel a sense of awkwardness when you witness others falling down and live happily ever after. "My life cycle is that of continuous learning, painting, studying and exploring. And there seems no end to it. ‘Survival-ability’ seem to be the common theme among artists like us." says Eki.

For his journey as a muralist thus far, Eki describes his choice of career as his form of improving and mastering his artistic skills. It is Eki’s playground for experimentation on some of his quirky ideas.

When asked about the frequency of his commissioned work, Eki matter-of-factly.

"Perhaps it is not a bad thing because it pushes me to always look out for opportunities and slots of upcoming events through much reading and research, besides making new connections and promoting my works to the market out there," continues Eki.

NICE CLEVER PLAYGROUND

When Eki is not working on walls, he keeps himself occupied with non-commissioned works, live spray-painting demonstrations at events and personal projects. On a daily basis, he sketches in his "black book", a graffiti term used to denote an artist’s precious sketchbook where outlines and ideas to be executed are kept.

When asked what you do when you study, graduate, work, fall in love, set up a relationship really. You do feel a sense of awkwardness when you witness others falling down and live happily ever after. “My life cycle is that of continuous learning, painting, studying and exploring. And there seems no end to it. ‘Survival-ability’ seem to be the common theme among artists like us.” says Eki.

THAT’S A BURNER

"I like to add life to the surroundings. I don’t use walls as a source of fun, wonderment, humour, quirkiness and happiness." says Eki.

His concluding advice for aspiring artists or muralists out there?

"Just do it. You only live once."
The 4 Galactic Constraints of the Empire

1. Business Model

2. Processes or Organisational Structures

3. Leadership

4. Culture

The 4 Galactic Constraints are crucial factors that limit the success of any company, whether it be in the space galaxy or your own. Understanding these constraints can help you develop a winning strategy and overcome challenges that may hinder your growth.

**Business Model**

A business model is the foundation of any company. It describes how a company creates, delivers, and captures value. The 4 Galactic Constraints can affect your business model in a number of ways, such as the technology you use, the markets you operate in, and the risks you face.

**Processes or Organisational Structures**

These constraints refer to the way a company operates. They include the processes that a company uses to deliver its products or services, as well as its organisational structure. These constraints can limit a company's ability to scale, innovate, and respond to change.

**Leadership**

Leadership is crucial for the success of any company. However, the 4 Galactic Constraints can affect leadership in a number of ways. For example, a company may struggle to find the right leader for a particular role, or it may not be able to retain top talent.

**Culture**

A company's culture is closely tied to its success. However, the 4 Galactic Constraints can affect a company's culture in a number of ways. For example, a company may struggle to maintain a strong culture when facing a crisis, or it may find it difficult to change its culture when needed.

In Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back, we see how Admiral Ackbar (who worked for Darth Vader) made a big mistake by taking the Imperial Fleet too close to the Hoth system, thereby allowing the Rebel Alliance to defeat him and the Empire.

Darth Vader, upset by the “mistakes” used by “Fives” in their strike against Ackbar, immediately after killing him, Darth Vader promulgated Captain Part. Oboi’s success in command to Admiral of the Imperial Fleet.

Shortly thereafter, Darth Vader declared Captain Needles when he failed to capture the Alliance’s leader. These actions immediately became the “norm” for the Empire – mistakes will not be tolerated.

This culture of “fear” and those in command being punished by these mistakes soon mutated into employees in the Empire pushing their bosses to failure. After all, the fastest way to be promoted was to undermine and ensure your boss failed.

In conclusion, the 4 Galactic Constraints of the Empire are crucial factors that can limit the success of any company. By understanding these constraints, you can develop a winning strategy and overcome challenges that may hinder your growth.
leadership playbook.

**Leadership Lessons From Han Solo**

Remember when Luke Skywalker was making his run on the Death Star and he was about to get toasted by some Tie fighters going pewpewpew on him with some lasers? And remember that one right behind him blew up and it was none other than Han Solo and the Millennium Falcon that blasted it? We thought Solo had bailed. He was in it for himself. But something inside him clicked and he knew he had to risk his butt for a greater cause.

What does this mean for you? Sure. It’s easy to be on a project team, keep your head down, avoid attention (especially the bad kind), and walk away from the project unscathed. But I’m encouraging you to simply take action. Sure it was uncomfortable but it saved us a lot of agonising and dancing around the issue.

**Thought of the Week**

Solo is about as subtle as a cinder block to the head (maybe that’s why I like him so much). You always know where you stand with the guy. Greedo knew Solo didn’t like him. Chewie knew when Solo was upset. Leia knew he didn’t care for her ‘tude. And when it came to the time for giving orders and letting people/aliens know what to do, Solo was the king of giving orders directly.

The implications for you are that people respect directness. It can be uncomfortable but very productive.

I just had a very uncomfortable conversation with a colleague. Neither of us wanted to have the chat. Both of us knew we had to. We both clearly laid out our perspectives, highlighted our major issues, and mutually worked to come to a conclusion that satisfied both of us. It was a very open and direct conversation. Sure it was uncomfortable but it saved us a lot of agonising and dancing around the issue.

As a member of the team, you have an obligation to your peers to be direct. They’ll respect you for it. People will know where you’re coming from and where you’re trying to go.

When they have clarity on your direction, you might be surprised how many of them want to follow you there. Talk about informal leadership.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The bottom line: be direct, act, and take risks.

For crying out loud, people – these problems you’re facing aren’t going to solve themselves. And your leader probably has so much on their plate that they’re challenged to make it all happen. They need you. Now. More than ever. Step up!
DARTH VADER OF LEADERSHIP

OR WHY YOU SHOULD TAKE LESSON IN LEADING FROM THE DARK LORD OF THE SITH

By SONIA MCDONALD
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I f you are wondering what is going on here, you have probably never seen any of the Star Wars films. And since that is not illegal (yet), you need to know that the aim of this article is to give you some insight into the skills and qualities of one of the best leaders in the world of fiction – Darth Vader.

While it’s difficult to see him as anything other than a fiend, he did have a good side. Read on to see why Vader was a leadership rock star and what we can learn from him.

MENTORS
Vader had great training and qualifications relevant for his leadership role. To put it simply, he learnt from the best. In the process of becoming Darth Vader, he had sought out a variety of influential and powerful mentors who themselves were respected leaders. He backed up his natural leadership qualities with an extensive base of knowledge and experience.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

“You may dispense with the pleasantries, commander. I am here to put you back on schedule.” – Darth Vader in Star Wars: Return of the Jedi

Although being usually perceived as the ultimate villain, it needs to be said that Vader was stern but fair. The main virtue he sought in the members of his team was the ability to contribute to the ongoing projects and to always keep a level of high-quality work. Indeed, he dined those who were not performing well, but he also praised and rewarded those who excelled.

In this sense, Lord Vader had a perfect grasp on team management and constantly monitored and evaluated the performance of those around him, taking the necessary measures to improve team-work when necessary.

VISION

“Join me, and together, we can rule the galaxy as father and son!” – Vader in Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back

One of the reasons why Vader was performing well (after all, within 20 years he built an enormous space station with the power to destroy a whole planet), was that he was extremely focused and knew his priorities. He also knew how to communicate his vision to others, and motivate them to join him.

TEAM FOCUS

“You can find new ways to motivate them.” – Vader in Return of the Jedi

Vader understood that he could not work solo, but needed the support of a team. He constantly assessed the skills and abilities of his team members, intending to build the strongest and most powerful team possible.

REST AND RECOVERY

No leader works 24/7 without a minute for themselves, not even Darth Vader. When he was sure that everything was under control, Vader usually retreated to his chambers where he relaxed, meditated, re-charged and took some time to clear his mind and give rest to his body.

Being a former Jedi Knight and a current Sith Lord (both of which were based on martial arts and the philosophy of Asian spirituality), Vader knew only too well that to be productive and efficient, he needed to restore his organism after a hard day at work. He took care of himself so he could produce the best results possible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As you can see, Darth Vader is a perfect example of the successful leader with some distinctly “winning” qualities.

A great team manager, Vader knew how to establish mutual respect between those involved in the organisation. He was a great team manager and a hard worker. His tactics might have been a little “dodgy” but there is no doubt that his purpose was sound.

For all these reasons we count the Dark Lord of the Sith high in our list of leaders we can pair from – as long as these do not include building Death Stars or blowing up planets.

Building a High-Performing Team Despite Stack-Ranked Performance Management Systems

By KARIN HURT
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BE L curves bring out the worst in your best. Rewarding individual performance drives individual behaviour. Yet, most performance management systems do just that.

Bell curves, stack ranks, nine-box succession planning grids – they all encourage selfish choices. Unless you’re running human resources (HR), you can’t change the system. But, you can build great teams within it, leading past the curve to greatness.

I’m going to share with you six secrets to building great teams. These are secrets that I have discovered from 20 years of watching, listening, lead-

ING, and being a member of great and mediocre teams.

1. INSPIRE VISION THAT MOTIVATES SACRIFICE

Build excitement around an important vision.

2. DEFINE ‘LEADING’ IN TERMS OF EXTRAORDINARY BEHAVIOURS

Expose mediocrity tenaciously and compassionately. Teams rise when mediocrity is courageously rejected and excellence is pursued.

3. REWARD TEAMWORK

Collaborative behaviour should be rewarded early and often. Focus on creating infrastructure and peer recognition to celebrate “how” or for “what”.

4. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CROSS-TRAIN

People remember the years they grew professionally. The memory of a 5% higher bonus will fade, but vital skills will last forever.

5. INVOLVE THE TEAM IN EVALUATION

This can be done by having employees rate themselves and one another on behaviours.

6. ELIMINATE COASTERS

Require teamwork as a foundational job requirement. Remember to inspire and teach teamwork.

If a team member refuses, help him find a more fitting job.

By SONIA MCDONALD
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Karin Hurt is a keynote speaker, leadership consultant, and MBA professor. She has decades of experience in sales, customer service, and HR, which she uses to help clients turn around results through deeper engagement. She knows the silliness of a yagi, the reflection of a marathoner, and the joy of being a mom raising emerging leaders. To engage with Karin, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com

Karin Hurt is CEO of LeadershipHQ and has vast experience in organisational development, learning and development, facilitating, and leadership development. She is passionate about building long-term partnerships with her clients and making sure she achieves the best results for them. To share your views on Darth Vader’s leadership style with us, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com. We’ll love to hear from you!
20 SUCCESSFUL HABITS I LEARNT WORKING FOR 2 BILLIONAIRES (Part 2)

By PAUL C BRUNSON
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Last week’s article, we looked at how successful leaders work for billionaires Oprah Winfrey and Enver Yucel. Now, I provide deeper insights of successful habits – specifically for business-minded readers seeking to understand how extraordinarily successful people reach the top of their fields.

1. RECOGNISE THE VALUE OF SIMPLE IDEAS
Winfrey, Yucel, and most of the world’s billionaires became rich not from a complex idea, but from a very simple one. Sure, there are several billionaires who do something technical – like create complex hedge funds.
But, most of them figure out how to take something we all like to do, simplify it, and bring more value to the bottom line. So, the next time someone asks you to invest in a lemonade stand, don’t dismiss it so easily.

2. BE PATIENTLY IMPATIENT
Billionaires are aware that nothing happens overnight. While patience is used for their long-term goals, I’ve witnessed deadlines for day-to-day, short-term goals articulated by my former bosses as “due yesterday.”
Being nimble and having the ability to deliver faster than your competitors is often what makes the difference between success and failure.
Think about Winfrey often beating a competing TV network to secure a coveted interview, or Yucel launching a competing TV network to secure a covetous interview. OratoRy skills.

3. BE GRITTY
Ask any 10 people to describe Winfrey and Yucel, and I bet words like “tenacious” and “relentless” would top the list. Billionaires don’t let obstacles or pitfalls keep them from achieving their goals. Just because you fail 200 times, it doesn’t mean you can’t succeed on the 201st try. The key is not just about having the stomach for failure, but having the strength to face what feels like an endless amount of resistance and still move forward.

4. DEVELOP GREAT ORATORY SKILLS
I’ve never seen better live speakers than my previous bosses. Coincidence? I think not. If you can’t articulate your ideas and your vision (in a compelling way), you can’t galvanise the support required to make things happen.
This concept was underscored in a recent interview I did with one of the world’s leading public speaking experts, Marshall Evans. She said, “The more effectively you speak, the higher your chances of career success.”

5. GROW THICK, ARMOUR-PLATED SKIN
The higher your heights, the greater number of detractors you will have and the sharper their attacks will be. This is a basic truth for everyone, but literally watching thousands of people hurl insults at my bosses (without impact) made me realise that they possessed an extraordinary layer of emotional resilience.
I recall when we filmed the opening scene of Downtown U.S.A., a reality show series about finding true love. (Winfrey arrives on a naval vessel), while thousands cheered on, hundreds complained (and ridiculed) her for wasting tax dollars by using a military vehicle. Developing a “shield” is critical. First Lady Michelle Obama said it best: “Never let what somebody else says distract you from your goals. And so, when I hear about negative and false attacks, I really don’t invest any energy in them, because I know who I am.”

6. CONNECT WITH PEOPLE OUTSIDE YOUR COMMUNITY
Your ability to be of influence within your community is directly related to your ability to make connections outside of your community. The technical phrase for this is called “bridging structural holes” and is eloquently written about by Ronald Burt in his research paper ‘The Social Capital of Structural Holes.’
Both Winfrey and Yucel possess tremendous bridging capital. They spend a disproportional amount of their time gathering information from communities of people outside of their core circle of people (different age groups, social class, ethnicity, education level, careers, etc.) and then share that information to their own community. This is where their power and ability to influence come from.

7. OVER-COMMUNICATE YOUR MESSAGE
It’s not just about speaking loudly, it’s about speaking often. I learnt this from my favourite professor at the illustrious McDonough School of Business. He floated this concept in class one day and it stuck with me. Don’t make people guess or assume, make sure your community understands your message precisely.
Given the abundance of content produced in today’s world, this concept has taken on even more relevance. Watch Winfrey or Yucel closely when they speak for a short or extended period of time. Their format is always the same. They begin by first telling you what you want your community understands your message precisely.

8. LEARN TO LAUGH AT YOURSELF
Most of us know from experience that having a sense of humour about things can make life a little easier. In fact, there’s science to back this up: being able to laugh at yourself may be a sign of an optimistic personality and it might even improve your mood.
Humour has also been identified as a possible factor in the development of personal resilience.
Reverend Susan Sparks says, “If you can laugh at yourself, you can forgive yourself. If you can forgive yourself, you can forgive others.”
You can’t go more than two minutes in a conversation with either Winfrey or Yucel without them smiling and belting out a laugh (typically at their expense).

9. BE GREAT AT ONE THING FIRST
By focusing on one passion or strength, you can actually be more innovative. The deeper understanding you gain by doing one thing opens up creative new ideas. Ironically, limitations can lead to liberation. As I mentioned in Part 1 (last week), billionaires like Winfrey and Yucel aren’t necessarily great at many things, but they’re exceptionally good at (at least) one thing.

10. KNOW A HIGHER POWER
Developing a relationship with a higher power will provide you with guidance for making decisions and solving problems. When you connect with a higher power, you can draw upon greater wisdom to help you resolve your problems.
I find it fascinating in my analysis of Winfrey and Yucel, that while they practise different religions, they possess an unswerving faith. I believe that faith is why they strive to have a positive impact on people and society, value integrity, and hold high ethical standards for themselves and their organisations.
How are you putting these successful habits to work?

By Paul C. Brunson’s insights and unique understanding of relationships and personal development, have made him a sought-after expert on self-actualisation and entrepreneurship, having appeared in over 180 major media outlets around the world. To keep updated, follow him on Twitter @PaulCBrunson. This article was originally published at www.leaderonomics.com.
HRDF HOSTED A CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION TO INSPIRE PEOPLE TO DEVELOP THEIR TALENTS

By PRETHIBA ESARY
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W ith Malaysia chairing the Asian Economic Community (AEC) this year, efforts made towards achieving the goals of the AEC have become critical to the development of the country’s economy.

It should be noted that the Malaysian economy was faced with a dip this year, from 5.6% gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the first quarter, to 4.9% in its second quarter and finally to 4.7% in the third quarter, according to Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz.

One approach of uplifting the economy is through the enhancement of the country’s labour market efficiency. In line with this, one of the initiatives taken by the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) or Perbadanan Sumber Manusia Bhd (PSMB) was to organise a HRDF Conference and Exhibition 2015 for human resources (HR) thought leaders and practitioners.

HRDF is a dynamic organisation, with an aim to catalyse the development of a competent workforce, in order to support the country’s vision of becoming a high-income economy.

The widely-attended event which took place on Dec 8-9 at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, saw a turnout of over 2,000 participants, and 15 industry experts – locals and experts from abroad, who took on key roles as speakers, panellists and moderators.

This year’s theme of ‘People, Prowess and Progress’ reflected PSMB’s commitment in supporting the Government’s aspirations of accelerating the growth of our human capital, with the aim of achieving a national agenda of a 35% skilled workforce by 2020.

The conference this year was a unique one as it managed to deliver a range of perspectives on the nation’s human capital development, which is critical as the new year looms just around the corner and companies are already formulating plans for 2016.

The conference observed a meeting of minds between leading players, decision makers and key personalities of the industry, not just to better understand Malaysia’s human capital development, but to also exchange talent and resource ideas. It witnessed 15 highly interactive and content-rich sessions, with discussion topics as follows:

- Recognition of the advantage of a multi-generational workforce
- Leveraging on synergies of a workforce that cuts across various ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds
- Cross-border movements for optimisation of resources and the nurturing of new skills

One of the popular topics discussed during the conference was the brain drain epidemic in Malaysia. This is a significant issue as depicted in a 2011 World Bank report entitled Malaysia Economic Monitor: Brain Drain, where it was stated that the number of skilled Malaysians living abroad has tripled in the last two decades.

The conference thus served as a platform to critically deliberate on the matter from a HR perspective, with several key experts from this industry.

Speakers that were present at the conference are as follows:

- Maybank Group chief human capital officer Nora Abd Manaf
- Mydin managing director Datuk Ameen Ali Mydin
- PETRONAS Group human resources management senior vice-president Datuk Raiza Azni Abd Rahman
- Malaysian Directors Academy chief executive officer Datuk Abdul Aziz Abu Bakar
- Sheridan College Continuing and Professional Studies associate dean Michael Cassidy
- Prosci’s Global Business and Strategic Partnerships vice-president Mark Dorsett
- SMR HR Group English Language Training project manager Michael Hughes
- Asian Institute of Finance chief executive officer Dr Raymond Madden
- Korn Ferry International office managing director Reza Ghazali
- University of Technology Sydney senior associate Prof Babette Bensoussan
- IMD SE Asia Pte Ltd regional director for South-East Asia and Oceania, and Professor of Strategy Margaret Conding
- Validity Group HSE Specialist Brian Dalby
- Universiti Utara Malaysia, College of Business, School of Business Management, lecturer Dr N norizan Ali
- AsiaAus Leaders Pty Ltd director Catherine Duncan
- Athens University of Economics and Business, Department of Business Administration, assistant Prof Olivia Kyriakidou
- HRDF chief executive Datuk CM Vignaesvaran A/L Leyendaran said, “We hope that participants of the conference had received valuable insights that would help drive a collective mutually beneficial collaboration, in order to build a globally competitive workforce, that will drive the AEC.

“We also hope that the conference has managed to inspire others to develop their talents in order to improve the quality of life of the nation.”

For more details on HRDF and their initiatives, visit www.hrdf.com.my

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HRDF Conference 2015 which took place on Dec 8-9 at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre.

Prethiba is a writer and content curator with Leaderonomics. She believes that Malaysia already has a large pool of talented individuals and entities, and if the skills and capabilities of these talents are not honed according to the relevant needs, the progress of the country may be affected.

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KEEPING YOUR THOUGHTS TO YOURSELF DOES MORE HARM THAN GOOD

By JAY WINDER

editor@leaderonomics.com

don't listen to people who are telling you: "Don't worry, being quiet is good! You're great how you are right now!" That doesn't help you. You've identified something you don't like about yourself, and you're actively trying to change it, and that's great. Kudos to you.

In work and in general life, the ability to choose to be more outspoken, extraverted, and personable is 100% upside. There are no downsides. You know how to be quiet. It's time to learn how to be more outgoing.

I've been through this change myself. I used to be far more unsure of my opinion, and I used to be a lot more reserved. The good news is this: it's a positive feedback loop. The more confident you become, the more outgoing you get. The more outgoing you become, the more positive social feedback you get, and the more confident you become. This means it's hard at the beginning. Don't worry, keep at it.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Here's some homework for you this weekend: Go out and do something you've never done before. Some kind of sport or activity. Meet a bunch of new people there. It'll be awkward, but push through it.

Use sentences like: "Sorry if I'm a bit quiet – it's a bad habit. I'm really happy to be here meeting everyone! How do you all know each other? What do you guys do?"

Then on Monday, when people ask "What did you do on the weekend?"; you'll have a great and unique story to share, and it'll be interesting, because people at your office might not expect you to share that kind of story. Then basically rinse and repeat!

Try to get into new and unique situations, generate adventures, and you'll have lots of stories to share. The art of telling a story is an entirely different issue, but the best way to get better at it, like anything, is regular practice.

Once you get really good at it, you can make even the mundane into quite an interesting anecdote.

However, it's slow going in the start (I know, I've been there), but keep at it – even if it takes weeks or months (and it will).

CHATTING CAN BE FUN

Another tip: Learn to love small talk. Technology people and developers often misunderstand the purpose of small talk, and become very frustrated because it's a very low bandwidth way to exchange information.

Instead, look at small talk as a fun and low stakes way to practise and improve your social skills. Try sharing exactly what you're thinking at the time. Bonus points if it's positive, and if you can include emotion.

SMALL TALK EXAMPLES

“Wow… the new coffee machine is so much better than the old one! Are you a coffee fan?”

“The best thing about this kind of weather, is that I get to do "Activity A" more. Have you ever tried that?”

“You seem like you're in a good mood today. Has something good happened to you recently?”

Certain people are reading these and thinking: “That's kind of a stupid thing to say.” They're wrong. This kind of small talk isn't about what you're saying, and all about finding ways to connect with your fellow human beings.

Remember, you have just as much right to share stories, comment on things, and start conversations with people as anyone else in the office or your social circle. But it takes time for you to learn and internalise this, so take small, regular steps.

As part of this process, you're going to say things and tell stories that might be awkward, or might not hit. Doesn't matter. Rinse and repeat.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The less you care about your social missteps, the less other people care. Over time, you'll have no choice but to get better, and tell more interesting stories, and become more chatty.

Before you even notice, your reputation as the quiet guy will be a thing of the past.

Best of luck!

Also next week

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