ALL-ROUND FEEDBACK

A LOOK AT THE BIGGER PICTURE

PAGES 6–7

The future of work
Moving forward with internal business projects
 Pg 03

SEASONAL REVIEW
Come rain or shine; be ready to give feedback
 Pg 05

JUDGE NOT!
Withholding one’s tongue before clarifying
 Pg 10

A ‘MAZE’-ING TRIAL
Do you trust your leader in times of desperation?
 Pg 12
THE TIGHTROPE OF GIVING FEEDBACK

FEEDBACK. Hearing that word alone sends a chill down my spine. Add the word “constructive” in front of it, and I’d be an emotional wreck for the next week or so. I would do whatever it takes to evade it as long as possible, hoping that the person, usually my boss, superior or even a peer, would somehow suffer amnesia and completely forget about it.

My experience of feedback sessions are mostly pleasant ones. But, subconsciously and consciously, I have dreaded every single one of them. Thankfully, being blessed with amazing mentors throughout the years has completely transformed my perception of feedback, and allowed me to experience firsthand how it can be a transformative tool.

This week’s centrepiece by Sandy Clarke goes beyond our usual understanding of feedback, where it is more often than not a top-down approach. The introduction of 360° feedback is slowly but surely making progress, and an increasing number of organisations have implemented the approach.

It offers a more holistic approach of measuring an individual’s work-related competencies, and are given an evaluation from quite a few people, flitting from four to 12, including colleagues, managers, and sometimes customers. The philosophy is to provide the employee with an idea of where they stand, including colleagues, managers, and sometimes customers. The philosophy is to provide the employee with an idea of how they are thought of through the lenses of others, leading to the providence of a number of key insights which are not easily observable, or what Johari’s Window would term as the blind spot.

Try This reinforces the central theme, with Louisa Devadasan sharing a number of tips of how feedback can be given. One statement in particular stands out, reminding us to focus on the behaviour, and not the person. This factor alone could cause a feedback session to be an uplifting, transformative one, or swing it to the other end of the pendulum, resulting in a toxic cocktail of anger, doubt and negativity.

Andrew Lau in Hard Talk looks at how feedback is either growing or killing your organisation, and focusing on two particular areas: feedback in times of success, and feedback in times of failure.

In Thought of the Week, Peter Economy looks at the importance of withholding judgment, reminding us of the golden rule: if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all. It is a timely reminder, as it is human nature to arrive at premature conclusions before coming to a real understanding of where the individual we are judging comes from. The key to overcoming the desire to stem the tide of perpetual judgment would be simply this – empathy. It is the act of understanding the other person’s story.

Till then, have a wonderful weekend. May the pages ahead be as insightful and inspiring for you, as it has been for me.

Carpe diem,
IAN LEE
Editor
Leaderonomics.com

FEEDBACK AS AN ART

By LOUISA DEVADASON
louisa.aliyya@leaderonomics.com

The art of giving feedback is a pivotal but often tedious skill that everyone should cultivate. It isn’t just for leaders or managers; it is also for people who want to elevate and take charge of their work environment. Mastering this skill will lead to more positive, open relationships with your colleagues.

It is handy to be mindful that people generally respond more strongly to negative events than positive ones. Professor Andrew Miner and his team at the University of Minnesota conducted a study that showed employees reacting six times more strongly to a negative interaction with their boss than a positive one. This study highlights just how sensitive people are to criticism and how important it is to give tactful feedback.

Prior to giving feedback, it is necessary to have good rapport with your employees and colleagues as they open their minds to what you have to say. Starting a dialogue with someone who harbours negative feelings towards you may lead to a more passive-aggressive or defensive exchange. Another important thing to evaluate before approaching someone is the opportunity costs of giving said feedback. Is the error inconsequential? Is it worth straining your relationship in favour of correcting this particular mistake? Was the mistake just run-of-the-mill human error if feedback is needed, be mindful that the purpose of feedback is to improve their performance as a member of your organisation.

Consider these seven tips when giving someone feedback:

1. **Encourage the individual to self-evaluate**
   Ask the receiver how they feel they have progressed in the issue and get their insight.

2. **Reinforce positive attributes**
   Particularly before and after the feedback, reinforce the good work and qualities the receiver possesses.

3. **Place focus on the behaviour, not the person**
   Try swapping statements like, “Your writing skills are underwhelming” with statements like “I think this draft needs more thorough editing and elaborating, here and here.”

4. **Give evidence and provide a clear possible solution**
   Referring to the aforementioned example, you could enquire, “Have you referred to the following sources? They could reinforce some of the ideas you have shared.”

5. **Use ‘I’ messages**
   Starting feedback with “you” can sound accusatory. Try “I” statements like, “I find this description vague” or “I think this needs to be expanded on.”

6. **Give feedback ASAP**
   Try to address the matter immediately. Letting an issue go stale may make you seem like you are holding a grudge.

7. **Deal with how the receiver responds, especially if the response seems defensive**
   Be open to the receiver’s response. They may immediately seem defensive, so try to stay objective and constructive while addressing this.

Feedback is a powerful means of personal development and should be a two-way street. A communal attitude of giving and receiving constructive feedback will make your work environment more resilient and productive than ever before.

Lois believes that healthy communication is key to fostering better work relationships. She is open to receiving feedback as she believes that will enable her to better herself. To engage with her, write to louisa.aliyya@leaderonomics.com.

If you found a particular article insightful or interesting, we would love to know your thoughts. Please email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

Try this: 

**Guideline**

**Dominoes**

- If you are a leader, give a positive feedback.
- When you receive feedback, take it seriously.

**Feedback**

- If you find a particular article insightful or interesting, please email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.
- If you have any feedback on our work, please email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

**Feedback as an Art**

By LOUISA DEVADASON

**The Art of Giving Feedback**

The art of giving feedback is a pivotal but often tedious skill that everyone should cultivate. It isn’t just for leaders or managers; it is also for people who want to elevate and take charge of their work environment. Mastering this skill will lead to more positive, open relationships with your colleagues.

It is handy to be mindful that people generally respond more strongly to negative events than positive ones. Professor Andrew Miner and his team at the University of Minnesota conducted a study that showed employees reacting six times more strongly to a negative interaction with their boss than a positive one. This study highlights just how sensitive people are to criticism and how important it is to give tactful feedback.

Prior to giving feedback, it is necessary to have good rapport with your employees and colleagues as they open their minds to what you have to say. Starting a dialogue with someone who harbours negative feelings towards you may lead to a more passive-aggressive or defensive exchange. Another important thing to evaluate before approaching someone is the opportunity costs of giving said feedback. Is the error inconsequential? Is it worth straining your relationship in favour of correcting this particular mistake? Was the mistake just run-of-the-mill human error if feedback is needed, be mindful that the purpose of feedback is to improve their performance as a member of your organisation.

**Consider these seven tips when giving someone feedback:**

1. **Encourage the individual to self-evaluate**
   Ask the receiver how they feel they have progressed in the issue and get their insight.

2. **Reinforce positive attributes**
   Particularly before and after the feedback, reinforce the good work and qualities the receiver possesses.

3. **Place focus on the behaviour, not the person**
   Try swapping statements like, “Your writing skills are underwhelming” with statements like “I think this draft needs more thorough editing and elaborating, here and here.”

4. **Give evidence and provide a clear possible solution**
   Referring to the aforementioned example, you could enquire, “Have you referred to the following sources? They could reinforce some of the ideas you have shared.”

5. **Use ‘I’ messages**
   Starting feedback with “you” can sound accusatory. Try “I” statements like, “I find this description vague” or “I think this needs to be expanded on.”

6. **Give feedback ASAP**
   Try to address the matter immediately. Letting an issue go stale may make you seem like you are holding a grudge.

7. **Deal with how the receiver responds, especially if the response seems defensive**
   Be open to the receiver’s response. They may immediately seem defensive, so try to stay objective and constructive while addressing this.

Feedback is a powerful means of personal development and should be a two-way street. A communal attitude of giving and receiving constructive feedback will make your work environment more resilient and productive than ever before.

The opinions expressed in this leadership guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.
WHAT’S IN STORE FOR THE FUTURE?

AD HOC INTERNAL BUSINESS – THE NEW NORM

By RUPA SIVANOLI
rupa.sivanoli@leaderonomics.com

ANY young people enter the workplace in the hope to find structure, role clarity and a career path that will map the next five years of their professional lives. Increasingly, this is proving to be difficult for organisations to deliver. Why? It’s because of the changes that are happening in the way we work. Consider this: 20 years ago in Malaysia there were no social networks and no web facilities at work. Today, if you work in the web-programming, online marketing or mobile phone industries, chances are your job did not exist back then. So who knows what will be in store at the workplace in 20 years?

FUTURE OF WORK
Emerging practices that is sure to shape the future of work can already be seen, and these include:

TRANSPARENCY – No one will take your word for it. However, tracking and business analytics tools are able to create and verify a whole host of data. Your productivity can easily be tied to the bottom line in a very visible way.

FLAT ORGANISATIONS – Work from anywhere. Location will not matter in teams set up to deliver on a specific purpose or outcome.

Composition of team will be based on a combination of tested capability and fresh perspectives. Just as critical is the structure and processes to lead the team to persevere towards new and break-through solutions. Often times, the more diverse the team has, the better the chances of success.

EXPERTISE IS EVERYWHERE – With 60,000 graduates entering the Malaysian workplace annually, degrees are the new diploma. Graduates are expected to be resourceful as knowledge is everywhere and ever-changing. Competition for Malaysian top jobs will come from Asian and other countries; it will be more difficult to protect jobs for Malaysians.

Crowdsourcing will be an attractive alternative channel to get work projects done across boundaries.

ON DEMAND DELIVERY – There will be no such thing as a lifetime career, as organisations will be looking for competencies on demand. The word ‘career’ will be as outdated as a typewriter. Talents will come together to work on a project, much like a movie production set. At the end, all will go their separate ways.

Recruiters will be forming ad hoc “tribes” to get projects done. Today, at least 100 million Americans work in virtual teams at least one day per month. Malaysia will not be too far behind.

INTERNAL BUSINESS PROJECTS, PLUGGING THE GAP

Given this future landscape, how will organisations innovate or respond to opportunities in their marketplace? This is where internal business projects play a critical role.

Historically, it makes sense to hire a third party expert to tackle business challenges, as these experts possess experience and knowledge not accessible to everyone.

Today, this not the case. Unless there is a particular sensitivity around a project type, there is no reason why it cannot be set up and delivered by an internal team.

EXPERTISE IS OVERRATED
The last 10 years have seen great success of in-house project teams looking into strategy, operational, processes and people efficiency projects. I see a shift in this trend where teams are now being made up of members who come from very diverse backgrounds.

In more recent times, I have also worked with project teams who do not have the necessary expertise or experience at the start of the project, but are required to work with coaches, experts and sponsors who look in on them periodically to advise and guide them towards successful implementation.

Some of the best breakthrough and innovations have come from perseverance, curiosity and a can-do attitude. So, expertise is a contributory factor and certainly not the be-all and end-all for project successes.

CHOICE MATTERS
Choosing the right project matters.

The type, complexity and scope has to be well thought out so that everyone is clear from the start. Some examples are:

- performance improvement, best practice implementation
- new initiatives rollout
- cycle time reduction
- cost reduction
- revenue enhancement
- process elimination
- error reduction

Once selected, it is important to clearly describe the finish line, either in terms of timeframe or outcome. With this, the management will be able to estimate how many team members are required to get the job done.

CLARITY OF THE JOURNEY
Project management methodology and tools serve as a guide and there are many available out there such as Lean Six Sigma, Design Thinking, etc.

These tools help the project team go through a step-by-step approach. The team defines the scope, looks at data and evidence, brainstorms a solution which will be useful to the intended audience and implements the solution until the desired outcomes are achieved.

However, when projects start, team members will generally feel overwhelmed and anxious but with proper communication, role clarity and guidance on a structured approach, they eventually find their way.

In some cases, they find that their perseverance pays off big time and it serves as a boost to their confidence, they are able to achieve the seemingly impossible. Key to having successful in-house projects is the buy-in of top management and the sponsors of the project.

Competitiveness can be introduced by launching four to five projects at a time. Proper coaching to ensure momentum is maintained and monitoring of milestones will help ensure that all projects are making their way at the right speed.

In addition to running internal projects with employees, internships can also be offered to undergraduates to work within such projects. This will enable interns to have first-hand exposure to project management capabilities, and broaden their content and contextual knowledge about the organisation and industry that it serves.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER
There is little time to be wasted to start gearing up towards setting up, managing and realising the full value of internal business projects. Most roles that are repetitive are already being automated.

It’s the ad hoc tasks that need attention and creativity on how it’s designed and delivered. Internal business projects – staffed with a diverse team will be the answer in effectively preparing for tomorrow’s challenges.
LOST IN THE MAZE?

Gain clarity in the midst of chaos. We can help your business grow in 2016.

Business Strategy • Employee Development • Talent Acceleration • Culture & Transformation
Talent Assessment • Process Excellence • Employer Branding • Community Engagement

Contact Dinesh at 012 985 6835 or dinesh.draj@leaderonomics.com to schedule a free consultation.

www.leaderonomics.org

Leaderonomics
The Science of Building Leaders
ARE YOU GROWING OR KILLING YOUR ORGANISATION?

By ANDREW LAU
training@leaderonomics.com

E VERY organisation goes through the cycles of startup, growth, success, decline and, if recovery doesn’t set in, failure. While we can’t control market forces that lead our organisations to decline, we can control how successfully the organisation navigates back into recovery instead of diving into failure.

One of the secrets is how an organisation engages and communicates with the employees through feedback.

FEEDBACK THROUGH THE SEASONS

According to a research by Larry Greiner and Ichak Adizes, in every season, the organisation experiences different challenges and unique situations.

A great manager is able to identify the characteristics of that season, and ensure that your feedback is serving the most crucial objective of that season – constructively rather than destructively. Below are some great opportunities for you to give feedback to your employees, depending on your company’s life cycle:

Startup: Time of openness and flat organisational structure – feedback to instil vision and drive positive energy.

Growth: Time of endless possibility and extreme busyness – feedback to focus and deliver on the main objectives.

Success: Time of maximising profits and keeping things constant – feedback to continue to think different while reaping current benefits beyond revenue.

Decline: Time of stagnation and lack of confidence – feedback to identify root causes and also to turn things around.

Failure: Time of uncertainty and defeat – feedback to ally fears and instil belief.

I would like to talk specifically about feedback in two of these cycles – feedback in times of success and failure.

FEEDBACK IN TIMES OF SUCCESS

In this season, things are going great and there’s no reason to make any changes. The belief is that you are only here because you have done things right.

A common mistake that managers make at this time is to think that feedback is only necessary for the sake of improvement or perfection. Nitpicking could cause high-performing teams to feel undervalued.

Why not take the opportunity to harness the optimism and good spirits of the times to offer feedback of challenge. If you’ve got a team of high performers, the best feedback is not only to praise them but to offer a challenge. Tell them that they can do better and you believe in them. High performers then pick these up as ways to stretch their own comfort zones and will surprise you again the next time. Try it – it works.

FEEDBACK IN TIMES OF FAILURE

In this season, there are feelings of fear and uncertainty. The organisation will experience drastic changes that may affect the employees’ security. The fatal mistake is to further damage their security by questioning their performance and demanding loyalty. At this point, even your high performers would doubt their own capabilities and may be looking for an exit.

The first thing to do is check if you as the manager have the team’s trust. If you have lost it, re-build that first. If there is no trust, the team can never turn around.

Next is to instil belief in the team – by shifting focus from finding fault to finding learning. Ask them what can they learn from this failure and what is everyone going to do with the learning?

There are two major mindset changes that are in play – it makes the team believe in new possibilities and helps them to dream again. That’s when great ideas will flow. Great ideas cannot flow in a toxic environment where there is no trust and no belief.

OPINION, CRITICISM AND CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Most managers cannot differentiate between the three terms and make the mistake of having the right intentions but ultimately making a disaster.

OPINION – It’s the lowest form of feedback. It requires no accountability, no understanding and it risks nothing from the side of the one who gives it.

CRITICISM – It involves tearing down; often both the problem and also the person. There’s no faster way to devalue a person’s contribution and self-worth by criticising.

CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE – This is a focused approach. It isolates the problem from the person and tears down the problem. More importantly what resource(s) does the conveyor of feedback provide so that the receiver can construct upon? The resource can be in the form of more time together, empowerment, budget, access, etc.

FEEDBACK THAT GROWS OR KILLS

While there may be a lot of great tips out there on how to give feedback, what separates good feedback from great feedback? What are the pitfalls to avoid? There are four ways to respond when providing feedback:

- passive destructive
- active destructive
- passive constructive
- active constructive

Let’s say a team member comes to a manager with the news that she has secured a small deal with a customer that she has been chasing for a long time.

If a manager feedbacks in a passive destructive manner, he would ignore the event. He would probably say something like: “Great you’re back in office, here’s the things we need to discuss.”

If a manager feedbacks in an active constructive manner, he would half-heartedly acknowledge the event. He would probably say: “Ok, sounds good.”

If a manager feedbacks in an active destructive manner, he would diminish the good news. He might say “Well it’s about time. Six months for such a small deal. When’s the next deal coming in?”

If a manager feedbacks in an active constructive manner, he would share in the joy and success of the team member. He would say “Congratulations, that’s great news! I know that you’ve been working hard on this. Even the smallest deal adds to the company. Well done.”

Of all the four feedback styles, the active constructive makes the best feedback. It shows the manager having interest and also adding to the self-worth of the team member. This is critical for healthy relationships within an organisation.

Whether your organisation is basking in success, slow pacing through stagnancy or languishing in failure, feedback provides an inexpensive, immediate and effective tool to create positive change.

Every manager should understand how to manage the different life cycles of an organisation and also give great feedback.

This will ensure the organisation is prepared to respond rather than react when the next cycle comes.
CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM SHOULD NO LONGER BE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF MANAGEMENT

WHAT EXACTLY IS 360 DEGREE FEEDBACK?

- A system that provides employees with confidential, anonymous feedback from the people they work closely with, as well as with people who are more, or less, distant.

- Provides feedback from a large variety of sources, including colleagues, supervisors, managers, and customers.

- A more comprehensive and objective view of performance than traditional 360 feedback.

GETTING THE BEST OUT OF 360 DEGREE FEEDBACK

1. KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

- A starting point for the feedback process. It should include feedback from all stakeholders.

- The feedback should be used to help individuals improve their performance, and to make the organization more effective.

2. UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

- What they need from the feedback.

- Providing clear and concise feedback.

3. PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY

- Not all feedback should be provided in the same manner.

- Feedback should be tailored to the needs of the individual.

4. GET A HANDLE ON OFFICE RELATIONSHIPS

- To be effective, feedback should be delivered in a constructive manner.

- Feedback should be delivered in a confidential manner.

5. 360 DEGREE FEEDBACK, POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 360 Degree feedback reviews are not used in processes.

- They are not a substitute for normal performance reviews, but are an additional component.

- They provide a broader view of performance.

- They can be used to improve personal development.

- They can be used to improve the organization's performance.

- They can be used to improve the individual's performance.

- They can be used to improve the organization's performance.
ALIGN YOUR DRESSES WITH YOUR PERSONALITY

THE PERFECT ATTIRE FOR EXTRAVAGANT BUSINESS FUNCTIONS

By WENDY LEE and SHAWN WONG
training@leaderonomics.com

Have you ever had the experience of wearing something that fits you physically, yet your friends say you look lovely, but when you look into the mirror, you find yourself saying, “This is not me?”

In a nutshell, not everything that suits your physical proportions is a great choice of garment. Think of the way you like to dress now, and think back to the way you dressed up 10 or 20 years ago. You will realise that your dress sense has changed – you are not the same person as you were then. Our tastes are constantly evolving and, over time, the type of clothes we choose to wear and the way we choose to wear them also changes.

As image consultants, we noticed that the majority of women tend to focus on work attire. The minute it comes to attending company cocktail parties, clients’ weddings or one-off industry events where one has to pick a suitable dress, suddenly everything becomes impossible.

Even if an outfit suits your body shapes, the common remark would still be: “It’s a special night, so I need to pick something that is ‘me’, suits my personality and is appropriate.”

Together with my colleague, Shawn Wong, who has experience making customised dresses for women, we will be imparting some great tips on how to pick your dresses according to your personality, and make things simple for you.

When assessing your dress preferences, you will likely find yourself between at least two dressing styles – a dominant style and a secondary style. It is the blending of our personality traits that makes us so unique.

There are seven recognisable categories: classic, feminine, dramatic, elegant, natural, creative and sensual. For the purpose on how to pick your dresses, we will focus on the first four styles.

CLASSIC

According to Wong, the classic personality is timeless and evergreen. It is a style which suits the personality impeccably, rather than the style which is in trend for the season. Classic women love their apparel to be understated and believe in the concept of simplicity. Less fabric, less texture and less fuss are keywords for these ladies.

These women tend to be steadfast, conservative and business-like. They like to be well groomed and tastefully attired, neither too casual nor too dressy, and always appropriate. Think Kate Middleton during her royal outings.

If you are someone who is of classic personality, then pick something which looks tailored and timeless.

FEMININE

Feminine women are the epitome of womanhood. They are warm, sensitive and caring, whose presence has the ability to calm and inspire others. Asked how Wong picks clothes for the feminine woman, she said: “The dresses they enjoy the most are those that are soft to the touch, light weight, have pretty colours, are of soft tailoring, and have matching accessories. Everything must have elements of romance and dreams. “Dark dusty shades are not their cup of tea. Instead, they adore pinkish hues and soft spring and summer palettes.”

If you are someone who loves frills, ruffles, lace and petals then, for your overall look, refer to the table below.

ELEGANT

Refined and sophisticated (think Audrey Hepburn) are words that best describe this personality style. The elegant woman is confident, calm and unyielding. She enjoys high quality clothes and is prepared to ensure good fit and superior workmanship. While minimal in quantity, her favoured accessories tend to be investment pieces.

If you are looking into creating an elegant look with your dresses, see the table below.

Align your dresses with your personality...
IS MY FEEDBACK MOTIVATING?

AND HOW YOU CAN DO IT MORE EFFECTIVELY

By SUSAN FOWLER
editor@leaderonomics.com

OEs giving feedback cause you to toss and turn at night, procrastinating on delivering it, disappoint you when it doesn’t make a difference, or frustrate you because it instigates an argument?

No matter what your role, you are probably in a position multiple times a day to give people feedback about their past or current behaviour – with the hope of motivating their future behaviour.

If providing feedback is part of your job or something you do in your personal life almost daily, why is it so challenging?

Here are some tips that can help you overcome your insomnia, procrastination, disappointment, or frustration – at least when it comes to feedback!

REALISE THAT FEEDBACK IS ALWAYS MOTIVATING, BUT NOT NECESSARILY AS YOU INTENDED

Consider two examples of typical feedback.

Example 1: “Sara, I am proud of you for getting this report done ahead of time. It makes my life so much easier. I need you to get these reports in on time in the future.”

Example 2: “Sara, I am disappointed in you for being late with this report. It made life difficult not just for me – but for others, too. I need you to get these reports in on time in the future.”

Both statements are examples of personalised feedback – information steeped with your judgment. Both are risky.

In Example 1, praising Sara for her work risks having Sara embrace the feedback for the wrong reason – to please you.

In Example 2, expressing disappointment in Sara may prompt her to change her behaviour in the future, but also for the wrong reason – to avoid guilt, shame, or fear of not meeting your expectations.

In both cases, you risk Sara developing an external need for your praise. Without your ongoing validation, research shows Sara may stop submitting reports on time since her reason for doing it, her reward for acting, has been removed.

Personalised feedback includes evaluative phrases such as:

- I am so proud of you.
- You make me happy when…
- You are amazing (wonderful, terrific, the bomb).
- I don’t know what I’d do without you.
- You sure didn’t disappoint me when you…
- You sucked (failed, screwed up).
- You disappointed me when…
- I am so disappointed in you.

Personalised feedback provides alternate reasons to perform the same outcome: to please you or avoid disappointing you.

Realise that feedback is risky, but you should never shy away from giving it candidly and sincerely, nor are you looking for a guarantee they will keep up their efforts in the future. Your statement of thanks is not an attempt to develop their competence or sense of responsibility, nor are you looking for a guarantee they will keep up their efforts in the future. When you express gratitude, it is based on your need, not theirs.

Your gratitude, delivered candidly and authentically, without ulterior motives or expectations of future behaviour, gives people the choice to continue acting wisely, deepens their sense of contribution and connection, and validates their competence.

YOUR FEEDBACK MOTIVATES

Remember, your feedback is always motivating. The question is whether your feedback is more likely to generate optimal or sub-optimal motivation.

If people are optimally motivated, through their values, sense of purpose, or an inherent motivation to perform above expected standards, they can operate in these moments of sub-optimal feedback.

If they need corrective feedback, your disapproval will usually result in sub-optimal motivation. The science of motivation provides alternatives.

Intangible rewards (such as praising) tie to people’s need for status, power, and image, and have the same ending effect.

In Example 2, pointing out a person’s unacceptable behaviour by cloaking it in your disappointment can lead to an imposed motivation.

Motivation science has shown that people working from this sub-optimal outlook to avoid feelings of guilt, shame, or fear are more prone to emotional and physical stress. As a result, they are less creative in the short-term and less productive in the long-term.

Ironically, your well-intentioned praise or expression of disappointment is likely to erode people’s sense of autonomy. They may become more dependent on your opinion of their effort, outcomes, and self-worth than on their own judgment.

If Sara finds value or joy in preparing reports and delivering them on time, what is the purpose of praising her? She might even question why you feel the need to praise her, finding it irritating, insincere, or manipulative.

But, the biggest risk is that your praise could cause her to shift her attention from her real and optimal reasons to perform to sub-optimal reasons: to please you or avoid disappointing you.

DON’T CONFUSE PERSONALISED FEEDBACK WITH EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE

Personalised feedback is risky, but you should never shy away from genuinely expressing your thanks.

Communicating your gratitude is powerful. “Sara, I’d like to express my gratitude for the effort you made on these reports. Getting them in earlier than the deadline gave me the ability to focus on something else that was creating a lot of stress. Thank you.”

What is the difference between expressing gratitude and giving personalised feedback? Intention.

Your expression of gratitude is not intended to change or reinforce people’s future behaviour. Your statement of thanks is not an attempt to develop their competence or sense of responsibility, nor are you looking for a guarantee they will keep up their efforts in the future.

When you express gratitude, it is based on your need, not theirs.

YOUR FEEDBACK MOTIVATES

Remember, your feedback is always motivating. The question is whether your feedback is more likely to generate optimal or sub-optimal motivation.

If people are optimally motivated, through their values, sense of purpose, or an inherent motivation to perform above expected standards, they can operate in these moments of sub-optimal feedback.

If they need corrective feedback, your disapproval will usually result in sub-optimal motivation. The science of motivation provides alternatives.

Susan Fowler has 35 years of experience as a researcher, consultant, and coach in over 30 countries around the globe in the field of self-leadership. She is the bestselling co-author of three books with Ken Blanchard: Self Leadership & The One-Minute Manager, Leading At A Higher Level, and Empowerment. To engage us on ways to provide effective feedback at the organisational level, email us at training@leaderonomics.com.
IF YOU DO THIS, THEN YOU MAY LIVE TO 100

By TERRY SMALL
editor@leaderonomics.com

H ave you planned your 100th birthday party? Why not? Remember, the pictures you put in your brain are important.

Everyone wants to live a long, good life, and science is helping us make that happen. This is an opportunity, and a challenge:

Is there a secret to living a long, good life? Maybe.

Hans Seyle says, “If you want to live a long life, focus on making contributions.”

True. And are there other lifelong secrets? It turns out there are. Let’s hear from some experts people who have actually lived to be a hundred. If asked, what advice would they give you?

“Don’t eat junk food.” – Besse C, 111

Good advice, Besse. Food can be a medicine, or toxin for your brain.

“My family has always given me meaning. Having friends helps too.” – Justina S, 100

Justina is right. Science says that staying connected and engaged with others is one of the best things you can do to keep your brain healthy.

“Kindness. Treat people right and be nice to other people.” – Gertrude W, 116

A good reminder, Gertrude. Charles Schulz, the creator of the Peanuts comic strip would agree, as I mentioned in one of my previous articles The Charles Schulz Philosophy which tells you that our brains remember what touches us emotionally, such as an act of kindness.

“I live on green vegetables.” – Bernando L, 111

Well done, Bernando. I eat a lot of them too. And other things, I take my brain health seriously, and that includes eating anti-oxidants.

To find out the top 20 best brain saving fruits and vegetables, read one of my previous articles Is Your Brain Rancid?

“I made sure that I got plenty of exercise, and ate a nice warm bowl of porridge every morning.” – Jessic C, 107

Jessie, exercise and porridge are great for your brain, as breakfast is your brain meal.

“Friends, a good cigar, drinking lots of good water, staying positive, and lots of singing will keep you alive for a long time.” – Christian M, 115

Christian, you got most of this right. Music has a powerful effect on your brain. By really understanding and experiencing the powerful effects that certain music has on your brain, you can get your brain to do so much more for yourself.

“I do lots of good deeds, so maybe that’s helped.” – Rose S, 100

Without a doubt. Science confirms altruism is good for your brain.

“I travelled the world. People interested me then, and still do. I remain very curious about life, and if something new happens, I want to be involved.” – Lili R, 100

Big like, Lili. And you get the final word.

“I participate in lots of activities. I play bings, do crafts, and attend fitness classes, like zumba, chair yoga, sittercise.” – Mae L, 100

Indeed.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS
Living a long life with a good brain is a remarkable achievement. Now you know how.

“Being miserable is a habit; being happy is a habit, and the choice is yours.”

– Terry Small

Terry Small is a brain expert who resides in Canada and believes that anyone can learn how to learn easier, better, faster, and that learning to learn is the most important skill a person can acquire. To connect with Terry, write to him at editor@leaderonomics.com.

By PETER ECONOMY
editor@leaderonomics.com

In almost all our daily activities, it is impossible to refrain from prematurely judging others – but refrain we must.

We are all too familiar with the golden rule: if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.

What we are slightly more unfamiliar with, however, is why exactly we had something mean to say in the first place. Although we have encountered a great number of parables and fables that teach us not to judge before knowing, we often do not abide by these principles in our everyday lives.

We make comments – either in our minds or aloud – about the people passing us on the escalator, about the man serving our food, or about the large crowd of tourists milling about. It is human nature to arrive at premature conclusions about people before we know their stories or backgrounds; it’s a vice we all have.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WITHHOLDING JUDGMENT

Yet, what we need to address is how this ruthless, incessant judgment in our stream of consciousness can actually be stopped. How do we do so through empathy. Until we’ve walked in another’s shoes, we can’t know or explain anything about them.

UNDERSTANDING ONE’S STORY

How can we judge a person for their relationship choices or disliking tomatoes or not going to college when we have no knowledge of who they actually are?

The most powerful relationships are built on respect, and we can only give adequate amounts of respect after fully hearing and understanding another’s story. The vast majority of respectful and rational opinions about other human beings are formed after learning where these people have come from, what they have been through, and the struggles they have faced in order to get to where they are today.

Withholding judgment, however difficult it may be, is one of the most important steps in building long-lasting relationships with our peers.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS
So the next time we find ourselves carelessly thinking negatively about someone we have just met, we should stop and question whether our opinions have been formed with enough background.

If we find that we really do have enough valid reason to justify our opinions, then we should simply follow the golden rule and keep them to ourselves.

Peter Economy has written more than 80 books on a variety of business and leadership topics. You can read more of his leadership articles here: www.inc.com/author/peter-economy
DOES GETTING A HEAD START GUARANTEE SUCCESS?

By ARIELLE YEN
editor@leaderonomics.com

WHEN I was less than a year old, my mum entered me in a cutest baby contest. I didn’t win – but I was one of the runners-up.

Ever since then, or maybe even before, my parents have harboured high hopes for me, as many parents do for their children, especially in the increasingly competitive atmosphere. (Being cute was one of the ‘talents’ they thought I might have had as an infant!)

That contest was the beginning of my mum’s quest to guide me into the all-round person she hoped I would be. From thereon came a slew of piano lessons, baby ballet, mental arithmetic, art classes, English lessons, Mandarin tuition, speech and drama sessions.

What happens when we start learning or being challenged at a young age? Does the outcome matter?

BABY EINSTEINS

Starting to learn at a young age has advantages. Studies by Harvard show that in order to speak a second or third language fluently or at least proficiently, it’s best to start at age three. Younger learners are more able to learn proper pronunciation and adapt to processing words and grammar.

Additionally, learning new languages or being multilingual in turn increases critical thinking, creativity and flexibility of the mind.

Starting young also gives you a longer time to master your crafts and figure out what talents you might have, what activities you enjoy, or what skills you might want to cultivate to an occupational level. From my childhood to present, I’ve tried my hand at multiple endeavours. Some at my parents’ insistence, others at my own.

At one point in my life I thought I’d be a pro equestrian – I lasted three months at horse-riding lessons. At other times I tried to be an expert skier (I was the worst out of everyone in our beginners ski group), a pianist, a potter and a ballerina. It’s safe to say that I didn’t become particularly skilled in any of those pursuits.

On the other hand, being taught to read and encouraged to love books at an early age has made me an avid reader – I can devour heavy novels in a matter of days.

I also enjoy writing and drawing, which means that all those trips to the children’s library and art classes didn’t go to waste!

Sometimes, you can pick things up when you’re younger, go back to it at a later age and find that you remember quite a bit from what you had learnt previously – the human mind and the information it retains is an amazing phenomenon.

The art of learning is a skill everyone should pick up.

“IT IS better to know how to learn than to know” – Dr Seuss

JACK OF ALL TRADES, MASTER OF ONE

Unless you are some kind of prodigy, you’re not going to be talented at everything you learn, at least not without tiring yourself out through non-stop practice.

It is definitely advisable to explore your options, and not be afraid of stepping out of your comfort zone. However, it’s equally beneficial to pick out one or two interests to direct your focus towards, and become really skilled in that area.

The now-retired professional skateboarder Tony Hawk describes himself as a “hyperactive child”. His mother described him as “so hard on himself and expected himself to do so many things”.

Instead of trying to juggle many different activities, Hawk was advised in his younger years to channel his energy and time into skateboarding. By age 14, he was a professional skateboarder, and today he’s one of the best-known skateboarders in the world.

As an inquisitive person, I was often overwhelmed by the many choices of classes I was given.

I do not consider doing all those activities a waste of time, but I do wish I had focused more on certain classes, rather than trying to be good at every pursuit without making enough effort into mastering any one thing.

CHILDLIKE WONDER

Starting young may give you the opportunity to develop abilities and adapt to new learning experiences more fluidly than starting at an older age.

The lack of fear and the openness to new experiences are qualities you’re more likely to have as a child, but also are qualities that encourage improvement, development and innovation – the type of growth we see so often in the tech and business world.

Recently, I went rock-climbing. I found myself breathless, trembling at the height I had hauled myself up to. I was on the “easiest level” wall aimed at young children; the climbing wall held were shaped like smiley faces and tetris blocks. There was a little boy, about five years old, rambunctiously scrambling up the wall next to mine.

“It’s really high up there. Don’t you think it’s scary?” I asked him apprehensively as he leapt off the top of a very tall structure.

“It’s not scary!” he yelled back at me, already starting to climb again. His family watched him proudly, laughed at our exchange and my apparent cowardice. The gallant attitude of young children is something I wish I had retained in adulthood.

“Play is the highest form of research.” – Albert Einstein

WHERE ARE WE NOW? WHERE WILL WE BE?

Thinking back to the baby who beat me in the cutest baby competition (no hard feelings!), I wonder where he or she is, and what the future holds for the person. He or she could be a student about to complete a degree, completely uninterested in appearance-based competitions. One of the babies who never made it in the Top 10 could be in the running for the next Miss Malaysia.

The cutest baby competition wasn’t taken seriously by anyone. It wasn’t meant to set any expectations for anyone’s parents or children. My mum thought I was a cute baby, but I don’t think she wanted me to grow up making a career out of my cuteness. I doubt that’s what any of the other contestants’ parents wanted either.

I would never expect my own child to be a Miss Universe, a savant, or an Olympic medalist. I would, however, expect my child to have interests, to want to cultivate those interests, and to enjoy learning. I think that my mum’s insistence in placing me in so many classes as a child, whilst not turning me into a multiple-talented intellectual, has made me more open-minded and, to an extent, “adventurous”.

I would like to believe that the bruises on my knees from rock-climbing alludes to these!
STICKING TOGETHER

DO YOU TRUST YOUR LEADER IN TIMES OF DESPERATION?

By CAROLINE REGINA PARAMESWARAN
editor@leaderonomics.com

WHAT would you do if you found yourself in a desolate landscape surrounded by obstacles and disease beyond your wildest imagination? Will you give up and get swallowed up by the desperation around you or will you resist and fight for a better future?

This is the reality for Thomas and the rest of the Gladers in the Maze Runner sequel – The Scorch Trials. They find out that they have been hoodwinked by their rescuers and are actually once again under the rule of the very people who put them into the maze. They escape only to find themselves exposed to disease and desperation in the Scorch.

A few characters stand out and teach us about different aspects of leadership. The Scorch, which is the playing board out of which only a few may survive, represents a harsh working environment full of hidden pitfalls and dangers. A number of leadership lessons stand out in this movie, which easily raise the question: What kind of leader would you become under severe conditions?

SEEKING A KINDRED SPIRIT

Aris, the loner, teaches us about leadership in a different sense. As one of the longer survivors of the bunker, he notices odd things going on. However, he is aware that he is not influential enough to get the other residents to listen to him.

Aris represents the majority of us who may recognise that things may be wrong but are not comfortable being the one to initiate change.

When Thomas and his group arrive, Aris notices that Thomas is not afraid to stand up to authority. Therefore, he seeks out Thomas, lets him in on what he knows and subsequently helps himself and the other Gladers escape.

Truly, leadership comes in all shapes and sizes. It doesn’t necessarily mean having to be the one in the forefront rallying people and making a change. Sometimes it could be as simple as recognising and assisting someone who is influential enough to make that change.

Therefore, recognise your own leadership style and act on it.

TO TRUST OR NOT TO TRUST

The Scorch represents the trials and tribulations that leaders face in their leadership journeys. Often, in the face of countless obstacles, leaders have to instil trust in those that they lead. And since trust is a two-way street, we also have to trust others in return.

Thomas teaches us about the importance of trust in leadership. At times it seems that he is leading the Gladers out from the frying pan into the fire. As a natural consequence, his leadership is often questioned. However, because of the group’s loyalty and trust towards him, they continue to stand by his decisions albeit their inner insecurities.

Likewise, as leaders, we have to create an atmosphere of trust and honesty amongst those we lead. This can be done by encouraging open communication without fear of judgment or repercussions.

Therefore, trust and be trusted.

WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

Thomas also teaches us that leadership is not a bed of roses. As leaders, we may not have all the right answers. At times we may even doubt ourselves or the decisions we are about to make, just as Thomas does when times in the Scorch pushes him to take extreme measures.

Thomas does not allow the stress of the moment to get the better of him. Instead, he focuses on the goal – to find the resistance group known as the “Right Arm”, and to keep moving forward.

As the saying goes, when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. As leaders, we may not necessarily know all the answers. But if we remain focused and keep moving towards our goal, we will eventually get there.

Therefore, see the bigger picture, keep your goal in sight and move forward regardless of current situations.

A CALL TO BE TOUGH

Winston, a pivotal character in the movie who starts off as a follower, teaches us that sometimes as leaders we will have to make tough decisions for the betterment of the group as a whole. These decisions may involve hurting oneself or the whole group.

Winston’s decision to sacrifice himself when he is infected with disease saddens the rest of the Gladers. But it is a decision that has to be made to prevent himself from turning into a full Crank and eventually becoming a threat to the Gladers.

Likewise, as leaders, we may be put into positions that require us to step down as leaders or to let go of certain members of the group for the betterment of the whole group. Such decisions are bitter-sweet but if you ever find yourself in such a situation, take charge and make the best decision regardless of how hard it may be.

Therefore, recognise when a tough call has to be made and be courageous in carrying it out.

TAKEAWAY

In short, leadership may seem daunting as it involves trust, adversity and tough decisions. However, have faith that it can be done. Many have led, many are leading and many more will soon lead.

Even if you may not be comfortable leading people per se, take after resilient leaders whom you see around you and use your strengths to bring change to your community.