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DOING nothing. That expression alone is enough to spark a strong reaction, especially in our productivity-obsessed modern day society. Twenty-four hours is no longer enough, when multitasking is encouraged by managers everywhere, and a 60-hour week is more the norm than the exception. Employees are compelled to take on different projects for exposure and experience, and organisations are constantly pushing the boundaries of what is known. The Star Trek line goes: “Where no man has gone before” – it seems to be the mantra of entrepreneurs, business owners and leaders everywhere, in their quest to be the very best in their field.

Hence, to do nothing seems like a very strange notion. It goes against what most of us have been conditioned to do. Last year, in particular, felt like a really long one, as there were so many projects that needed execution, a brand new team to build, and systems and processes to be implemented. Going through the weeks and months, little did I realise that leave days were rarely taken, and most of my time was consumed with working on the next project, pursuing my coaching masters, and everything else that needed careful and diligent attention.

Doing nothing was not an option, or so I thought. We make choices every single day. The choice to go to work, or not. The choice to be excellent at tasks given to us, or to choose the choice to be consumed by work, and we struggle to find time to simply do nothing and reflect, our bodies are very reliable “reminder” instruments that occasionally shout out to us to take a much needed break to reflect and recharge. When it “whispers” at us, it is best for us to take heed, before it snowballs into something far more damaging.

Crucial lesson that I have learnt: listen to your physical body heed, before it snowballs into something far more damaging. Shout out to us to take a much needed break to reflect and recharge. This year, I have made it a priority to periodically make time for doing nothing. That expression alone is enough to spark a strange reaction, especially in our productivity-obsessed modern day society.

FROM ZERO TO HERO

MOST of the great influential leaders have one commonality – they have gone through much suffering and pain in their lives. But this pain has not in any way detracted them, rather it has made them better leaders. If Spider-Man and The Avengers managed to become better superheroes by going through the fires of pain, surely you will become a better leader if you too embrace the “joys” of suffering.

Perhaps, there is blessing in disguise after all when we go through suffering. As the lyrics in the song sung by Najwa Mahiaddin says, “after the fires of pain, surely you will become a better leader. Become better superheroes by going through the fires of pain, surely you will become a better leader.”

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A LEADER’S DROUGHT

By ELISA DASS AVIN
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must admit, this has happened before, and it’s frustrating. It’s midnight. I have been staring at the screen for two hours and still have no idea what to write for this column, not counting the last three days I spent trying to consolidate some thoughts. Given the theme, it’s ironic but painfully true. If I could hazard a guess, this is a real and familiar experience for many of you. Eventually the gears start turning and ideas pop into your mind but, have you stopped to ponder why our idea pipe stops flowing in the first place? What deliberate steps can we take to turn the creativity tap back on?

Let’s start by developing an understanding of why we get trapped in a box:

1. WE CHOSE IT
Have you ever read article headlines that say 20 foods you had no idea contained unhealthy sugars? If you click on such links and read, you’ll probably quietly tell yourself “I kind of guessed it.” Yet, you just had an oat cookie yesterday. Even if you click on related articles, blogs or videos are good ways to get your brain “in the mood.”

2. WE ARE NOT CONVINCED
I have read that near-death experiences unleash many new ideas! It’s telling and true for all of us; when we feel truly desperate do we begin to think about solutions to our predicament. Your previous ideas may have worked to get you to where you are today but innovation is necessary to move forward. We are often not convinced about new ideas until desperation calls for them.

3. WE ARE LOOKING IN THE SAME PLACES
Familiarity breeds contempt. Can I say that of ideas? If you keep looking at the same places (ahem, Google), you probably will not get many ideas that you have not already thought of before. Sometimes, we turn to the same people to brainstorm and generate old, tried and tested solutions. You could solve problems this way but it’s unlikely to elevate you to a creative leader.

4. WE DON’T UNDERSTAND IT (YET)
Truth is, sometimes ideas don’t come because we are thinking of a solution that’s beyond our current experience, understanding and exposure. We have not had that magical paradigm shift yet. For that to happen, staring at the screen for two hours is of no help. We need to widen our perspective and understanding of the issue at hand. It’s good to bounce ideas off someone and create new angles to look at an issue.

5. WE ARE TOO FULL
Do or do not, there is no try. Yes, Voda, in context maybe, but sometimes we must try. And there comes a time when we need to take a break from trying and doing.

When our minds are tired, cluttered and scattered with phones ringing and children screaming, it really is not a good time to try to squeeze some juice out of this fruit jerky. Take a break. Watch a good show, go for a walk or grab some coffee. Look for a better time and place to pen down your ideas.

I’M DRIED UP, NOW WHAT?
There are many well-researched frameworks of innovation and teachings on being creative (you can Google them for some ideas). Here are five tips by yours truly and these have never failed me:

1. I LOOK FOR SMALL SPARKS OF INSPIRATION
It seems like this is becoming a conventional column for me. But you know what? I start off my idea generation with Google, though I must say that my best ideas have never come from the Internet. However, related articles, blogs or videos are good ways to get your brain “in the mood.” Remember, don’t get distracted! Set a time limit, then walk away.

2. I STOP THINKING OF IDEAS, I DO SOMETHING ELSE
I don’t believe in forcing out an idea. It just doesn’t work. My coffee and house chore breaks are often great rejuvenators. If time permits, I come back the next day. While I may write down my ideas much later, I usually start my idea collection process the moment I know of it. Many of my ideas come to me when I read a few articles.

3. I KNOW WHEN MY MAGICAL MOMENT IS
As I have written in my previous articles, self-awareness is key. If I can put a number to it, probably 90% of my great ideas come after midnight, when everyone’s off to bed and the house is quiet. No TV, no phone, no Google.

4. I TALK TO IDEALISTS AND VISIONARIES
Why? Simply because realists usually tell me things that are too common. The idealist is often a visionary and sees things people don’t see, even in areas that they are not specialised in.

5. I OBSERVE
This is the hardest part because it takes time and there really is no specific way of doing this. When all else fails, I sit at a café and just be.

Look around and see what links you can make. Do not check your email and your phone. Just observe your surroundings and take that time to breathe, and catch up with what’s going on around you. You never know what inspiration may come to you when you empty yourself of all the urgent requests and constant interruptions. These methods work for me. Hopefully they will for you too.

Here’s a little nursery rhyme that helped spark off ideas for this article:

“The itsy bitsy blockage, went up the ideas spout.
Down came the ideas, and washed the boredom out.
And out came the brilliance and dried up all the ponders,
And the itsy bitsy idea, bloomed into great wonders.”

Steven Johnson said it best in his book Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation.

“The patterns are simple, but followed together, they make for a whole that is wiser than the sum of its parts. Go for a walk; cultivate hunches; write everything down, but keep your folders messy; embrace serendipity; make generative mistakes, take on multiple hobbies; frequent coffeehouses and other liquid networks; follow the links; let others build on your ideas; borrow, recycle, reinvent. Build a tangled bank.”

Elisa Dass Avin believes that everyone of us are idea generators, it’s just that some of us may not be aware of it. She is currently the director of Learning & Acceleration in Leaderonomics. To engage us for idea generation and realisation for your organisation, email us at training@leaderonomics.com
For organisations to thrive and lead, it takes a holistic ecosystem to identify, nurture and accelerate pipelines of leaders, for both present and future. In order to drive results, we first need to determine critical challenges that can drive or derail success. Our priority is to get to know you deeply, and identify your distinct needs. Our Organisational Diagnostic team is equipped with the heart and knowledge to hear you out and work with you to diagnose root causes.

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EMPTY VOID, EMPTY VESSEL?

By EVELYN TEH
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NEW year, new me. It’s one of those common phrases that describes the anticipation and excitement of a new year, and possibly better changes for us as individuals. At the same time, a change in the calendar year is unlikely to lead to automatic change—even more so for those who are feeling empty with a need to fill an internal void.

This sense of emptiness is often accompanied by the anxiety of being directionless, a lack of security in personal self-worth, and a disinterest or demotivation for usual activities. Unfortunately, leaders are not an exception to these emotions.

As a matter of fact, because of the ideals often perpetuated about leadership, leaders feel a significant need to live up to these ideals even when internally they are not emotionally aligned. Bernice Ledbetter from Pepperdine University Graziadio School of Business and Management wrote about the six myths of leadership. One was particularly striking in which we seem to think that leaders always keep their emotions in check. In reality, leaders are also humans who have different emotions and a variety of responses.

There can be various reasons why a leader feels empty, some of which are:

- Feeling overwhelmed from managing constant crises or feeling burnt out from lack of pacing.
- Feeling stagnant from the lack of new learning, challenges or lack of support.
- Feeling lost from a lack of direction, personal vision or increase of ambiguity.

Personally, I still remember that at the end of my first job as a team lead, despite the structure provided, there was a profound sense of emptiness. What follows is my take on how I navigated the emptiness and filled the void meaningfully.

REFLECT AND REFRAME

With everything that happens in life, we need to make sense before we can make a choice and make peace with that choice. Two key steps in making sense is through Reflection and Reframing, which signifies the beginning of every renewal. The key thing with Reflection is the need to be honest with observations on the surface and not discounting what these observations may mean. There’s a need to be open and accepting of the different possibilities that lie beneath these observations. It is only when we have run out of possibilities of reasoning and understandings that Reframing helps us discern what leads to this emptiness. This is extremely important as we need to discern what factors can or cannot be controlled by us. The expectation though is that Reflecting and Reframing happens in cycles before we decide to go on the Recycle or Reinvent track.

RECYCLE

One of the tracks we can take after Reframing is to Recycle. As we accumulate a lot of experiences in our life, inevitably some will be wasted, no longer relevant nor necessary.

However, it is key to remember that one man’s rubbish is another man’s treasure. Being able to “recycle” our experience and knowledge by passing it on to someone else creates generativity which has been shown in psychological research to help bolster the feeling of emptiness, particularly for leaders at their pinnacle of success.

This can be as simple as having an informal conversation with someone who is under your guidance, teaching a new skill, or even actively mentoring within the community, such as youths, who would benefit from career advice. The Recycle track is particularly effective if the leader reflects and realises that they would still like to remain in the current ecosystem. It could be for practical reasons such as family obligations or because they still find it fitting with the overall culture.

Recycling our experience and knowledge for the next generation provides leaders with a sense of fulfilment by understanding how our work impacts another. Sometimes, we may even find that by passing on the baton, we get a third person’s perspective of our goals and vision—this clarity can be rejuvenating to the internal void.

REINVENT

On the other hand, and perhaps on a more extreme level, the emptiness that leaders feel may require a bigger or more obvious change. At this point of time, perhaps a Reinvent may be more helpful to renew oneself and fill the void. A common way of reinvention is to move one’s career, either into a new field, new area or new landscape.

Interestingly, a change of landscape such as from corporate work to entrepreneurship, even when it requires longer hours, can create a sense of renewal even in the most burnt-out leaders. This could be attributed to the ownership the leader now has over his or her new direction that it is no longer about the details such as daily work hours. Some leaders choose to contribute in an entirely different field, such as in the non-profit sector while others take a sabbatical to continue their studies in an area they have been keen to explore.

The idea here is to humble oneself back to the apprentice level which can prove very eye-opening for a leader who is used to his or her high-mastery position.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Truth be told, the follow up from Reflecting and Reframing may not be an either-or question between Recycle and Reinvent. Often, it is possible that one precedes the other, such as my choice to first mentor my team members and then pass on my knowledge before deciding that the bolder step of reinvention is needed. In my own reinvention, I decided to take on a new project role in a different organisational ecosystem albeit in the same field.

What we can sum this up to be is that leaders are still humans and there are “leadership diseases” that will creep in (see Harvard Business Review’s The 15 Diseases of Leadership for a good read) at any point of our leadership journey. When that point comes, we are left with the option of acceptance, and then being intentional about renewing it.

My phase of emptiness lasts a couple of months and that’s where all the resilience in leadership is needed to tide through it. Put it this way, emptiness on one hand can be a void; on the other hand, it can be a new vessel waiting to be filled with your new adventures. Happy ReNewal Year!

Evelyn Teh finds herself often reflecting and feels that in reflection is where we see our potential. Contact training@leaderonomics.com to find out more on how you can see your potential.
By MANFRED KETS DE VRIES
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"Learning without reflection is a recipe for becoming a dangerous – Confusion"

It’s today’s networking society we are at risk of becoming victims of information overload. Inattention and reflection have become lost arts in the temptation to ‘just think this’ or ‘find that’ out that is too good to resist. But working harder is not necessarily working smarter in fact stacking off and setting aside regular periods of doing nothing may be the best thing we can do to reduce states of mind that nurture our imagination and improve our mental health.

BUSINESS VS PRODUCTIVE OCCUPATION

Our lives have become defined by busy-ness. Look around you at the minute distractions in cafés, out on the street, people are glued to their mobile handset or tablet. I once asked an executive and coach how he could possibly fit his work in a day. "My mindfulness technique is to take the time to think," he told me. "But I don’t read any of them. If I did, I couldn’t do my job."

The challenge, she said wasn’t attaining information but “putting away” it so I don’t suffer from information overload. I need time to think. Hence, as I told her, has an assistant who arranges her mail and she spends a few hours every week discussing problems with him. She says: “I’m not paid to do that kind of work,” she explained. “I’m busy doing what people expect me to do, there will be no time left for what I seek to do.” She can’t do creative work at a computer.”

But seeing nothing may be the best thing we can do to reduce states of mind that nurture our imagination and improve our mental health.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING NOTHING

If we don’t know how to calibrate the balance between action and reflection, we may become a casualty of psychological burnout.

WORKPLACE

Unfortunately, in contemporary organisations, work-culture is highly encouraged, supported and even rewarded. The insidious emphasis of the media on fame is difficult to counter because such behaviour is useful to organisations. And there is an element of control. That’s the attitude. “I’m going that person a favour, why aren’t they at their desk working?”

But there isn’t necessarily a relationship between working hard and working smart. In fact, a workaholism environment may contribute to serious personal and mental health problems including low morale, depression, substance abuse, workplace harassment, relationship breakdowns and even suicide. In fact, men in their 50s are most likely to commit suicide. Men are less likely to reveal suicidal thoughts to others who are both in need and asked for attention, and less likely to reach out for help, even to their families.

Incubation time can be introduced as a prelude to something. It can trigger our creativity. In a sense, we are more likely to produce something creative when we’re not thinking about it. Incubation time is one of the best ways to forget the problem and give our minds a chance to resolve it.

Newton’s motto was ‘If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’. The benefit of doing nothing is that our minds wander on to what may be dangerous. Learning without reflection is a recipe for becoming a dangerous – Confusion.”

3 WAYS TO MAKE TIME FOR NOTHING

1. Maintain relationships We need people to feel fully alive. Maintaining our relationships needs interaction, engagement and time.

2. Saying ‘No’ Being able to say ‘no’ is one of the most useful skills we can learn. Saying ‘no’ is not necessarily selfish and saying ‘yes’ to useful skills we can develop. Saying ‘no’ is for personal growth and creativity. Poor In a perfect world, we should all sleep for Doing

3. Managing sleep habits In a perfect world, we should all sleep eight hours a night. Sleep is essential for personal growth and creativity. Poor quality sleep makes us feel we haven’t slept off the treadmill of business.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING NOTHING

By GIVING THE BRAIN ‘DOWNTIME’ WE CAN IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AND ALLOW IDEAS TO INCUBATE.

By WALTER CHEN
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This method sounds ridiculously easy – or just ridiculous – but it may reveal you’re too vulnerable to accepting and feeling like you’re not really doing anything at all.

Young leaders are driven, passionate, insatiable leaders. And while that sort of drive can be heartening to see, you should only focus on your own growth or setting an example for your team by burning the midnight oil, for instance, you’re also vulnerable for the revolution. Employees feel like they’re being distracted or unimportant or you’re interrupting and you think that’s what it takes to be a manager – even inviting it, is also a fundamental part of leadership.

HOW TO MANAGE BY DOING NOTHING

Here are three tips to consider when you’re trying to ‘do nothing’.

1. Take a stroll around the office, without a specific task in mind. This method sounds ridiculously easy – or just ridiculous – but it may reveal you’re too vulnerable to accepting and feeling like you’re not really doing anything at all.

2. Talk to employees – even if you don’t know them. Find out their pain points and make a real effort to resolve them. That’s because it feels unnatural.

3. Try to get more comfortable with not being liked by everyone. A manager should be rewarded as biased – even if you try to sit together and spend hours talking and build up a business in a garage somewhere.

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SAX IN THE CITY
A TRULY UNIQUE SOUND OF MUSIC

By LIM LAY HSUAN
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THE first thing we associate with when it comes to saxophone (sax) would probably be “jazz”, “love songs” and of course “Kenny G”.

Personally, I have never really appreciated this woodwind instrument until I heard a saxophonist friend played solo at the ending of Bill Withers’ “Just the Two of Us” when we got together in a temporary ensemble to perform at a company annual dinner. I thought she nailed that song perfectly with her sax.

Hence, imagine the anticipation when I was informed of a Chicago-based saxophonist coming to humble Klang town to play at a church service as part of their worship team (November last year) before heading up to the Penang Island Jazz Festival for the real deal.

Thanks to Adrian Chew, I got direct access to Derek Brown, or what he is known as the “BEATBox SAX” guy. Believe me, he is not your regular sax guy.

PROCESS OF CHANGE
Being brought up in fairly straightforward musical upbringing, Derek discovered his early childhood that he was good at music.

Coupled with a strong influence from his musician brother, an encouraging family and his ever-supportive wife Rachel, Derek set his mind to pursue his dream relentlessly, despite realising the tough road ahead to earn money as a musician.

“Prior to my big move to Chicago to go full-time in 2014, I was teaching music at Abilene Christian University, Texas. I was also the director of jazz studies there, directing various jazz ensembles and starting up the annual jazz fest at the university.

“I got my big break when my first ‘BEATBox sax’ YouTube video was released in Chicago. The video caught on and people started to take notice to this unique sound coming from a sax,” narrates Derek when asked about his life’s turning point.

“Windows of opportunity started opening when some jazz companies asked me to endorse their brand of reeds and mouthpieces. And I was paid by these companies to travel to places I never would imagine going.”

A HYBRID SOUND
For the uninstructed, what Derek does is not really beatboxing with the instrument. “BEATBox sax” is just a term coined by people to describe the extended techniques such as the “pop” and “click” percussive sounds made by Derek with his instrument of choice.

A disruptor of some sort to the conventional way of playing the sax, I asked what led him to play so differently.

His response: “I was somewhat envious observing my guitarist and pianist friends doing a variety of stuff with their instruments. You see how guitarists slap their fingers on their axe to produce succinct percussive sounds. And there I was thinking, why I ever picked the sax.”

Being restless and never one to conform to normality, Derek challenged himself to innovate and experiment with different methods of play.

“I wanted to see how full a sound one can get out of one horn, with no electronics help. Using established techniques like slap-tonguing and double-tonguing, and not-so-established techniques like Tartini tones, it’s truly a refreshing sound!” continues Derek.

And at the end of his learning, he continues.

ONE MAN STANDING
Derek always brings in an element of surprise during open mic stands whenever he steps out to perform solo, especially those who haven’t seen his performance.

“We’re talking about a full one-hour set with just the saxophone, not accompanied by other instruments. The first reaction Derek usually gets from the audience is, ‘Are you sure?’ or ‘Can I help you with the guitar?’”

But once he starts blowing his horn, everyone is captivated and awed.

“In a way, the people behind the Penang Island Jazz Festival took a risk to invite me to play there. They saw something different in me. This one positive response has spurred me on to send more emails to secure gig opportunities.

“Believe me, it hasn’t been easy convincing people to let me perform. To do something so different from the norm, you will definitely face a lot of resistance. And thus, be prepared to face extra rejection,” says Derek matter-of-factly.

For every rejection he faces, he always reflects on what he can do to make it work.

In that, Derek is always re-inventing his performance to engage and surprise his audience. He has started incorporating some comedy elements, and sing and play at the same time.

ACCIDENTAL LEARNING
To be great at what you do, you need the tenacity and discipline to keep on practising. It also comes with sacrifices to forego certain life’s pleasures like hanging out with friends to dedicate time for practice.

“Back in college, there was a sense of competition among those doing music. So having the mindset that ‘I don’t want to be left behind’, I used to practise for five hours straight, with no breaks in between! Today, as I get busier with marketing my music via social media and my blog, three hours of daily practice is considered pretty good.

“I’m also involved in various projects like Low Spark (a funk fusion jazz band), Derek Brown Syndicate where I actually sing and write songs, and of course, my BEATBox sax videos,” says Derek on his journey thus far.

I asked if Derek has role models whom he always looks up to. He said he can’t think of any particular persons specifically.

To this, Rachel responds, “I think Derek is very open to learn from different people for different sets of skills. And at the end of his learning, he cleverly combines them together in a conglomerate of music or in whatever he does.

“Yes, I do listen to a variety of music genres like pop and oldies, and I interact with other musicians, not just saxophonists.

“I learn from mistakes too. Did you know that some of the ‘weird’ sounds from my sax were discovered by accident so I can incorporate them in my music endeavours?” continues Derek.

FINAL MOUTHPIECE
In concluding our interview, I asked for his advice to Malaysian youths, especially for those who want to venture into something out of the ordinary in the music industry.

“Don’t ever be a copycat. You need to come out with something that is uniquely you. But keep in mind that the more different you are from the crowd, the more people will push back.

“That also means that people recognise that you are unlike the others, and that in itself can be your unique selling point. So, learn to embrace the resistance.”

“Continue to press in and enjoy your journey of ups and downs,” concludes Derek.
By PRETHIBA ESVARY
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COLOURING ACTIVITY BRINGS JOY TO READERS

THE LEADERONOMICS COLOURING CONTEST FINALISTS’ AND WINNER’S SAY

FINALIST 1
Eliza Tan, Shah Alam, Selangor

Art helps me to de-stress and unleash my creativity. It also energises me and helps me to find solutions to the problems that I may face because art requires me to think outside the box. “Eureka” moments come when I take a step back to relax.

FINALIST 2
George Koshy, Petaling Jaya, Selangor

There are three main ways how colouring has benefited me:
- Taking some time off, especially at night when the environment is quiet and serene, to do the colouring gives me an initial peace of mind. This enables me to think of what needs to be done, i.e. some mental planning.
- The actual selection of the colours (from a selection of two boxes containing 24 and 30 colouring pencils) enables me to do some matching and to visualise how it would turn out.
- The duration of the colouring activity, which I keep to no more than an hour, enables me to relax and focus on what I am doing. When I am relaxed, my mind is clear and I am able to inject focused ideas on what I want to achieve.

FINALIST 3
Seri Elena Phuah, Ampang, Selangor

The colouring activity helped me to play around with the colours as much as I wished, with no limitations or restrictions.

FINALIST 4
Tan See Kee, Temerloh, Pahang

It’s a miracle. Colouring makes me happy and excited, especially when I’m feeling down. I also like it because it helps to relieve stress.

FINALIST 5
Hui Ming, Petaling Jaya, Selangor

I enjoyed colouring this piece. I loved seeing how the vibrant colours blended in. In fact, I got crossed eyes a lot, so I had to learn to focus.

FINALIST 6
Swanie Lim, Klang, Selangor

Colouring helps me to reflect on the beauty of God’s creation around us. It helps me to be more aware of the colours of nature around me, and that itself gives a calming effect to me.

WINNER
Melinda How Wei Cheon, Klang, Selangor

Colouring helps me to concentrate, to focus on one thing and it brings me joy.

By Warner Brothers and Escape to Wonderland: A Colouring Book Adventure by Good Wives and Warriors.

As many of you are aware by now, the adult colouring fad took off last year and surprisingly enough, the trend doesn’t seem to be dwindling away just yet as some would assume.

In conjunction with this trend, my colleague Millie Ong wrote an article titled Colouring Away Stress (published Dec 5, 2015), and Leaderonomics conducted a colouring contest for our readers.

The purpose of this contest was to provide our readers with the opportunity to test it out for themselves, to see if colouring really does help in relieving their stress, and also to encourage them to take a little time out from their hectic day.

Featured below are the six finalists and winner of our contest. Each of them has provided a little description of how colouring as an activity has been beneficial.

We would like to thank all those who have participated in the contest. Our heartiest congratulations goes out to Melinda How Wei Cheon, who will be receiving an adult colouring book and a chance to meet Millie and the CEO of Leaderonomics, Roshan Thiran.

Prethiba Esvary is a writer and content curator with Leaderonomics. She recently began colouring in ‘Lost Ocean: An Inky Quest & Colouring Book’ by Johanna Basford which her boss had given her for Christmas, and is reminded of how invigorating it is to colour, without a care in the world.
FLY feet up the trail and already I knew things were going to be rough. My dad turned to me and said, “Wow, I didn’t think I’d be out of breath this quickly. I need to stop for a minute.” We were about one minute in to a 2.5 mile hike up the very steep, varying terrain to Prekestolen, or Pulpit Rock, which juts out 2,000 feet above the Ryfylke fjord in Norway. At 77 years old, with diabetes and a growing balance problem, this was not going to be a walk in the park for my dad. 

“Now, of course it was my dad so I was not going to let him fall, but it got me thinking about the goals we set in our organisations and how we go about achieving them. ‘ME’ GOALS VS ‘WE’ GOALS

It seems that there are two types of goals – “Me Goals” and “We Goals” – “Me Goals” are about accomplishing something by ourselves, for ourselves. “We Goals” are all about working together with others that we need to rely on, to accomplish something that is impactful and fulfilling to all of us as a collective. 

With a “Me Goal”, the determination and drive may be intense and very real, and if we apply ourselves correctly we will even achieve that goal. But at what cost? If we are honest with ourselves, we cannot achieve anything great alone.

IS IT REALLY AN INDIVIDUAL EFFORT?

Going back to my dad’s case, simply declaring that he was going to do it by himself, did not stop me from catching him more times than I can remember, just so he would not fall backwards onto the sharp rocks behind him. It did not stop me from physically supporting him the entire way down the mountain and from picking him up each time he fell onto his hands and knees because his legs gave way.

How often do we think we are “doing it ourselves” when we actually have others supporting us? Truth be told, others may only be supporting us because it is their job, which only makes it feel even worse. Using others to accomplish a selfish goal (especially as a leader) can cause mistrust and lack of loyalty, if not active disengagement and undermining.

“A We Goal” on the other hand, helps to create a strong “Circle of Safety” as it is something we are all inspired by and energised to reach together.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I’ll go back to the example that inspired this story. How cool would it have been for my dad to say, “Son, this is my last trip to Norway. It’s the land of my forefathers and a place that means a lot to me.” “One of the things on my bucket list is making this climb and I’m so glad we’re doing it together.” “Now, I’m not as strong as I used to be, so I’m going to need your help. What do you say?” When we set “We Goals” and then provide context, meaning and purpose to them, we inspire others to join us, to help us no matter what the cost, to sacrifice ourselves for a shared vision.

As a result, the reward gained will be worth much more than the achievement of the goal itself – the bond, the relationship, and the foundation that has been strengthened in preparation for the next climb.

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A ‘ME GOAL’ VS A ‘WE GOAL’

By KARIN HURT
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GREAT leaders help teams visualise a winning future. They arm their team with the courage and audacity to remove roadblocks and galvanise people towards “impossible” feats. Take John. He had been in tough situations before, but this time the cocktail of challenges was just too much. He needed more time, more resources, better systems, and the uncertainty of the structure was distracting to everyone, including him. He confided, “I don’t think we can do this.” I was sure he was right. Not because of the systems or the resources, or even the organisational chaos. But, if the leader lacks confidence, the team knows it’s nearly impossible for a team to win when their leader loses faith.

Here are five reasons teams lose confidence:

1. **A DOUBTING LEADER**

When a leader loses faith in his/her team’s ability to perform – with these players, in these conditions, on this field – the team will sense it. Even if the words are encouraging, the underlying emotions speak louder. If you’re not sure you can win, find a way to get your own head there, or let someone else call the shots for a while. If you don’t believe it can be done, neither will they.

2. **UNDER-PREPARATION**

The team is tired, so the leader backs off on the training and preparation. They cut the team some slack when it comes to additional research or practice. The team feels initial relief, and thinks the coach is “nice”, but on game-day doubts they’re truly ready.

3. **DISCOUNTED WINS**

The team has wins, but every time the leader discounts it or fails to understand it. Success without understanding is hard to replicate.

4. **OVER-DIRECTION**

The leader is at the centre of every move – calling the shots, holding a huddle, directing the moves. Teams feel lucky to have the leader, but question their own contribution to the matter.

5. **RELIANCE ON A STAR PLAYER**

Players get hurt, move on and become hard to deal with. It’s dangerous when a team begins to attribute success to just one guy (or girl). The most confident team believes in the team and its synergies. If the team starts to bet against themselves when one player is injured (or obnoxious), you’ve begun a downward spiral.

By KARIN HURT
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BY CHRISTIAN BONILLA
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NOT long ago, I listened to a former colleague describe the situation in which he found himself at his new job. This job itself was fine, but his new boss sounded diabolical.

The worst part for my former colleague (we’ll call him Adam) was that he had only been at the company for a few months and felt that it would reflect poorly on him rather than the company if he left so soon.

Adam didn’t want to look like a stereotypical malcontent millennium who couldn’t handle a culture with a few sharp edges.

Because Adam was getting good opportunities at the company, I advised him to stick it out for at least a year unless he was truly miserable.

Having a terrible boss sucks, but as long as the opportunities are good, leaving jobs so soon probably wouldn’t be worth the transition costs.

I’ll say this about bad bosses: they perform a vital role in the economy. By eventually repelling people like Adam who want better for themselves, they inadvertently send talented people out to pollinate other teams, companies, and industries with their brainpower.

From a macro perspective, bad bosses may be a net benefit to the ecosystem. Of course, that matters not a bit to the people who are jerks and demonstrate many of the characteristics that people also happen to wrongly associate with leaders.

When I read the above quote, I thought back to an instance years ago when my colleagues and I decided to extend an offer to a candidate who was obviously both smart and a classic narcissist.

I’ve never seen someone show less humility during an interview.

However, the résumé was a perfect fit on paper and we had a gap in our team so we brought this person on board.

Eighteen months, some notable contributions, and one psychologically battered team later, I was relieved when the person finally left the company (a feeling I’m sure was mutual).

Those of us who remembered interviewing this person used it as a teaching moment.

Of all the mistakes we made, the most insane part about the hiring was how taken in we were by the autodidact ego displayed.

“No one would act like that if they weren’t the real deal,” was my line of thinking, as if that somehow made it a good thing. And sure enough, this person was whip-smart.

Unfortunately, that mental horsepower was bundled with hostility to feedback and a bruising communication style.

Not all of the decisions this person made were winners, either. We ended up living with some bad decisions made by this person for quite a while because the debates were so exhausting for those who had to engage with the person often.

People have a tendency to assume that those with low aptitude in one area have corresponding extremely low aptitude in another one.

My colleagues and I assumed that the person we interviewed would be a brilliant contributor not in spite of this person’s total lack of self-awareness, but because of it.

We unconsciously became apologists for the person’s bad habits, as though the person was so focused on being brilliant that it would be trivial to treat people with basic kindness and respect.

Our sin was inferring a causal link between bad interpersonal skills and success.

Too busy to be nice? Think again.

While the fictional anti-heroes can be bad enough, there are just enough examples of brilliant misanthropes from real life to lure people into thinking that being callous is part of their path to success.

I worry that people are prone to take the wrong lessons away from stories of someone like Steve Jobs.

There’s little new left to say about the once-in-a-generation visionary that hasn’t already been said before. He was known to be a control freak, which for him was justified by his unparalleled vision.

Look, if you’re inventing new industries out of whole cloth, maybe you should be the one who approves the advertising copy and how the packaging looks. Most chief executive officers of course have no business getting their hands in that many things – not that they don’t try anyway.

But among the many ways in which most bosses can’t behave like Jobs (or Dr House or any other abusive genius you might think of) is that they simply aren’t brilliant enough to treat people like he did and still succeed.

Sure, there are numerous examples and anecdotes floating around that paint a picture of Jobs as someone who was prone to cruelty toward those who crossed him or disappointed him. But in addition to you, know, being a genius, he also sat the tip-top of the most valuable company in the world and could offer his employees the opportunity to be a part of something that few people would ever turn down.

So lest you ever think you’re too busy or important to be civil to people, let’s just go ahead and set the bar there: if you have done something as significant as helping to bring the personal computer into the world, you can be a jerk if you like and you’ll probably be just fine. If you haven’t, don’t forget your manners.

PARTING THOUGHTS

The worst, saddest kind of jerks are the ones who adopt that persona as an affectation and deliberately make no effort to be considerate.

If you take pride in your lack of communication skills or civility because of a (misguided) belief that it somehow lets you concentrate more on other things, you should really reconsider what you do.

If not for your employees and colleagues, it’s worth being nice to others purely out of self-interest. While you concentrate more on other things, you should really reconsider what you get out of the arrangement. There really is always time to be nice to people.

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ATTRACTION
THE YOUNG AND
TALENTED

SETTING A COURSE FOR
THE JOB YOU WANT!

By NINA TI
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T
he Sector Focused Career Fair (SFCF) Big Bang is as good as its name – giving jobseekers the boost they need to get one step closer to their dream jobs. This highly anticipated annual event by Talent Corporation Malaysia (TalentCorp) will blast off on Jan 19–20 at the TM Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

As one of the premier career fairs in the country, the SFCF Big Bang is sure to be an eye-opener for graduates and jobseekers who are keen to explore possibilities of internship or employment through direct engagement with employers, who are made up of key industry players.

In return, companies will have direct access to interviewing prospective talent, and to collate a database of resumes from the newly graduated and the career-hungry.

LAUNCHPAD FOR 2016
The SFCF Big Bang is the start to TalentCorp's calendar of other upcoming SFCFs in Malaysia throughout the year featuring key sectors such as engineering, information technology, global business services, banking, finance and many more.

What makes these events unique is its grassroots appeal – the follow-up SFCF events will be a collaborative effort between TalentCorp and local universities targeting students.

The names of the host universities for 2016 will be unveiled during the fair. These universities will be tasked to carry on the good work from previous years – that is to raise career awareness and instil a better understanding of job opportunities in Malaysia's key economic sectors while enabling graduates to find employment within the industry of their choice.

MEETING EMPLOYERS OF CHOICE
Visitors to the SFCF Big Bang will be able to meet prospective employers and fill out applications on the spot. The two-day event will feature activities such as Coffee Talks, The Chief Speaks and walk-in interview sessions. Admission is free.

For more information on SFCF, check out facebook.com/SectorFocusedCareerFairSFCF