THE YIN AND YANG OF LEADERSHIP

By TAMARA JAYNE
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THE “yin and yang” expression is an ancient Chinese philosophy used to illustrate how contrary, opposing forces are complementary in nature such as the earth and sky, day and night, or water and fire, to describe how harmony can be maintained in the universe. Similarly, the “yin and yang” concept may be seen in leaders who are able to keep the balance to be firm and the need to be flexible.

Many times, leaders may be seen as being in a state of being unable to balance both the needs of the company and the needs of the employees. Having a strong leader is important to the company, but having a leader who is not able to balance the needs of the company and the needs of the employees is equally important.

As the saying goes, “If you want to make an apple pie from scratch, you have to first make the crust.”

Leadership is not the same thing as management. Leadership is about being able to motivate employees not only demonstrate stability in a long-term, dedicated one. Creating a pleasurable workplace and beyond for their company. A contented team member may result in increased productivity, loyalty, and performance.

However, consider these few tips on how to become a more balanced leader:

TEACHING AND LEARNING
Humility plays a big role in leadership. Being humble allows others to contribute their ideas, voice out their issues, and in turn, helps you grow as a leader. Leaders are still human beings. We all make mistakes. Being open with ourselves and owning up to our mistakes may make you feel vulnerable but it may also show that you can take responsibility.

“The challenge of leadership is to be strong, but not rude; be kind, but not weak; be bold, but not buly; be thoughtful, but not lazy, be humble, but not timid; be proud, but not arrogant; have humour, but without folly.” – Jim Rohn

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE
Sometimes being balanced may require us to make decisions beneficial to the company or team as a whole even if that may require nudging people out of their comfort zones. At times, being a well-balanced leader may require us to see the bigger picture and assess the situation from there.

MANAGE BOUNDARIES, NOT PEOPLE
Having policies and procedures may allow leaders to release some control and allow employees to not feel the need to constantly look over their shoulders. Instead of telling people the dos and don’ts, employees are given freedom to innovate but within certain guidelines.

HAVING BALANCE INTERNALLY

“What’s going on in the inside shows on the outside.” – Earl Nightingale

As the saying goes, ultimately a balanced leader externally is a balanced person internally. Having stability internally can reflect on one’s external self.

LEADERONOMICS IS LOOKING FOR GREAT PEOPLE TO ASSUME THE FOLLOWING RANKS:

1. CEO (Based in Malaysia) – In the past few months, Leaderonomics has expanded to Thailand and Cambodia with a new CEO in place in both these countries. We are also looking to expand to Sri Lanka and possibly Myanmar. However, back home, we are looking for a leader to manage and grow the Malaysian business.

The Malaysia business continues to grow by leaps and bounds. This role is a senior general management role that requires an individual to work closely with our customers (including CEOs, HR heads, CEOs and senior leaders in our customers’ organisations), our employees—to inspire, motivate and grow them, and our key stakeholders and partners—to drive results and growth.

2. GM, Learning & Acceleration Business – Something worth noting is that Leaderonomics was chosen as the #1 management training provider and #1 leadership development provider at the recent HR Vendors Award. One of the contributing arms for this is the Learning & Acceleration unit.

This role thus requires a fairly senior leader who will be able to drive process rigor, work closely with customers to diagnose, design, develop and deploy customised interventions and solutions, and to optimise the team towards high performance and quality.

3. General Manager, Assessments – Leaderonomics was recently chosen as the #1 Assessment provider at the recent HR Vendors Award. We want to continue to build on our great assessments business and are looking for a leader who will take this business forward.

This person should have deep expertise in conducting talent assessments and have the ability to work with our customers to design and develop customised assessments based on their needs.

4. Learning and Talent Management Managers – Experienced individuals out there who are passionate about developing people, who like building deep relationships with their people, who have an eye for designing out-of-the-world development programmes and are able to guide people through challenging development activities, should consider this role.

You must love execution and be able to manage the expectations of multiple stakeholders. The ideal candidate would be a business leader who wants to be part of a real action learning and experiential learning execution team.

As Leaderonomics continues to grow, we will continue searching for great individuals like you who want to put a dent in the World and make a difference in our country and in the communities around us.

To apply for any of these roles, email us at careers@leaderonomics.com

Leadership is a journey of continuous improvement and growth. It requires a combination of skills, knowledge, and experience to be successful. At Leaderonomics, we provide an opportunity to partner with your company.

We practice what we call a BE culture – Synergistic, Be Courageous, Be Excellent and Be Agile. We inspire our customers (including CEOs, HR heads, CEOs and senior leaders in our customers’ organisations), our employees—to inspire, motivate and grow them, and our key stakeholders and partners—to drive results and growth.

For more great leadership insights, including those by John Maxwell, visit www.leaderonomics.com. If you missed any of our past issues, go to www.leaderonomics.com/publications and download for FREE!

Social Enterprise Careers

By ROSHAN THIRAN
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GREETINGS and a Happy Lunar New Year from everyone here at Leaderonomics!

This week, we bring to you Career Connect – linking you to professions in Malaysia and the region.

Each week, we will highlight top class companies that offer exceptional employment opportunities; starting with our very own, Leaderonomics.

Leaderonomics is consistently growing and on the lookout for eager and energetic people to join us in achieving our mission. You can learn more about Leaderonomics’ vision and mission at www.leaderonomics.org.

Leaderonomics boasts a unique, progressive community of Leaderonomists that stands by five cultural beliefs (Be Accountable, Be Synergistic, Be Courageous, Be Excellent and Be Agile). We practice what we call a BE culture – Beyond Expectations.

So, come on and join us if you believe you have what it takes to be a Leaderonomer.

Want more content sent directly to your email? Subscribe to our Leader Digest by emailing leadersdigest@leaderonomics.com

We are committed to providing content that engages and inspires our readers, if you would like to suggest a specific theme or topic on leadership for us to explore, contact us by email at editor@leaderonomics.com.

For more about Leaderonomics’ vision and mission, join us in achieving our mission. You can learn more at www.leaderonomics.org.

For more great interviews, look us up by typing “Leaderonomics Media” on your web browser.
By JOSEPH TAN
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"What got you here won’t get you there." – Marshall Goldsmith

MONKEY DO, MONKEY DON’T
TALK ABOUT ‘PLANET OF THE APES’

SOMEONE once said, “I love people, I really do, it is just their behaviour that I cannot stand.” When it comes down to what really frustrates organisation leaders, it is not the lack of skills or knowledge of their employees. Rather it is a shortfall of desired behaviours. As we usher in the Chinese Lunar New Year, it is a timely reminder that new results and new performance expectations cannot be achieved with the old behaviours of yesteryears. BKU (Behaviours As Usual) cannot be an acceptable leadership culture if the organisation desires to move collectively towards the place of sustainable high performance.

Upon the threshold of any fiscal year, company leaders are usually abuzz about the strategies going forward and are eager to witness a transformation in results and key performance indicators. Yet, we all instinctively know that a well-written proposal and a persuasively-designed PowerPoint presentation cannot guarantee the delivery of results. Here is one often-neglected truth about performance – culture produces results.

Here’s one simple diagnostic question to ascertain if behavioural issues are holding your organisation back from achieving the intended key results. If everyone in your organisation continues to think and act in the same manner as they do today, can they achieve the expected results in the stated timeframe?

If the answer is a resounding “No”, then your organisation would need to embark on a cultural design initiative to determine the right cultural standard for achieving the right results. Companies with a thriving business do not leave their culture to chance, rather culture is intentionally designed and delivered. Left on its own, the culture tends to degrade to a situation of territorialism whereby specific individuals create their own brand of sub-culture – their own monkey kingdoms.

How then do we address this monkey culture and rally the behavioural changes towards a common vision?

BEHAVIOUR IS JAUNTED, NOT TAUGHT

It is what you do when no one is looking that determines the worth of your contribution.

It is interesting that the most common feedback I receive at the end of each Behavioural-related training workshop is this, “Is my boss attending the same training as well?”

This highlights our human need for a moral reference when it comes to the motivation for changing our own personal behaviours and attitude.

Here are five common mistakes made by organisation leaders when they are too quick to implement strategic plans without giving much thought to the foundational need for behavioural alignment.

1. Communicating the results without clarifying the overall vision of the company.
2. Growing the numbers without a specific plan to grow the employees.
3. Non-performers are still rewarded – sending an inconsistent signal to those who do perform.
4. Sending employees for training without involving the direct supervisors.
5. The performance appraisal criteria do not reflect the desired behaviours.

Many organisations are too hung up about corporate values until it becomes a copywriting debate. The fact of the matter is that corporate values are there as a directional guide while a more specific delivery guide requires something more observable.

Here is where we need an executable concept called key behaviours. Key behaviours are personal accountability statements that are communicated as behavioural expectations for every employee.

In Leaderonomics, we have five key behaviours which operationalise our core values:

- Be Accountable: “I take personal ownership to deliver on all expectations entrusted to me.”
- Be Excellent: “I accept challenges and exceed expectations in all that I do.”
- Be Synergistic: “I actively seek out and lead collaborative opportunities.”
- Be Courageous: “I am open to honest and authentic conversations.”
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To find out more, or sign up, contact Gwen at 017 319 0370 or learn@leaderonomics.com
REAL MEN ON MAINTAINING WORK–LIFE BALANCE

By MICHELLE BOON
michelle.boon@leaderonomics.com

“Don’t confuse having a career with having a life.” — Hillary Clinton

One of her articles on work-life balance, Caroline Fairchild expressed her thoughts on the general public viewing the issue as a “woman’s thing”. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that work-life balance is very much a man’s thing too. It was never a competition between genders.

But how many of us are aware of the responsibilities taken up by the men in our lives? Are we truly appreciative of what they do for us?

Here, two regular yet extraordinary men share their thoughts on work, family, and life, and how they have found their way of balancing just about everything.

Do you mind sharing a little bit about yourself?

Armand: I’m 49. I have three daughters. I run my own information technology (IT) company for about three years now. Before that, I used to work for an American-based IT company.

Armand's older daughter is a boy, and I have two girls.

Gan: I’m 43 this year. My oldest is a boy, and I have two girls.

Gan's children are growing up so fast and I didn’t want to miss the moments that matter. That’s when I decided to quit and do my own thing.

How do you deal with the more stressful aspects of work?

Armand: Well, stress is always there but you just have to find ways to deal with it. Personally, I believe in finding support with like-minded people. I belong to a peer group of fellow business owners.

We’d meet once a month to discuss business, personal stuff, it’s sort of like a catch-up.

You know they say, “It can be lonely at the top”, so participating in a group really helps.

Gan: Stress is there all the time. It’s important to decide what matters most. I think sharing your issues with others really helps, instead of bottling everything in and eventually exploding.

Do you think there’s a certain stereotype set out for men, e.g. is it fair for men to take leave to tend to their family compared to women? How do you feel about that?

Armand: It’s fair. Everyone is at a different point in their lives. To me, most importantly, you have to manage your finances and think long-term. Life is a journey, and you only have that much time.

So don’t get too stressed out about things.

Speaking of time management, how do you allocate time for work and family?

Armand: When you work for a boss, it’s all about sales numbers, running operations, office politics. It happens to a lot of people too. For me, it was about setting my priorities straight. I realised my kids were growing up so fast and I didn’t want to miss the moments that matter. That’s when I decided to quit and do my own thing.

If you could break down an entire week, how many hours do you think you spend on work and your family?

Armand: I mean, I run my own business so I’m always working. I’d say around 60 hours a week. And the rest, I spend with my wife and family.

Gan: To be honest, I hardly had time for my family when I was employed. Since I have my own business, I have the flexibility to choose what time I start work. Now, I try to spend as much time as possible with my wife and girls.

Please share issues you tackle at work.

Armand: It’s tough when you’re working with clients who are international-based—each with different time zones. For me, the biggest challenge is getting calls all the time. As most of my clients call me on my mobile, I get to screen those calls.

But if it’s something urgent, then I do answer. But if it’s something I know is trivial, I will ignore those calls. Another issue is time management and workload. I make sure to leave the office by 7pm. and to not check emails after 9pm.

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Besides that, I believe in setting low expectations.

Stress comes from all angles. You just have to accept that things are tough and work on it slowly. My family and I attend a retreat in the mountains of Thailand every year, where we focus on reflection and relaxation. I appreciate that very much and it has helped a lot.

If you could go back to when you were first starting a family, what advice would you give yourself?

Armand: When you are stressed out, and you’re busy, you get very short-fused. When something happened – I wish I had never reacted immediately. I wish I had waited before I responded.

When you get upset and respond, you say things you don’t really mean and you regret it after. So I just wait 30 seconds to a minute to calm down before I react, especially when dealing with my family.

Gan: That’s funny! Well, probably to always live as one family. I would focus more of my time on my wife and daughters.

Five tips on how to balance work and life:

1. Schedule in some downtime
2. Stop spending time on activities that take up too much energy
3. Re-examine your errands
4. Start moving
5. Remember to pencil in some “me” time

WALK THE LINE

Consulting Corner

By MICHELLE BOON
michelle.boon@leaderonomics.com

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You just got to be optimistic. No one said that the ride was going to be easy.
ALIGNING YOUR INNER MOTIVATIONS TO YOUR EXTERNAL Expressions

By ELISA DASS AVIN
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By JOSEPH LALONDE
editor@leaderonomics.com

1 WHAT BURDENS MY HEART?
When we ask people what burdens us, it’s really about feeling we need to do something that is beneficial to ourselves, our image, or our content. It’s about doing things that are important to us.

2 WHAT’S DROPPED UPON ME?
I was Indonesia’s first appointee from the private sector. In sharing about having a valley of its form as far as the eye can see, we will see how I was. Yet. At the end of the passage, he says that these times have come to an end and that we should not have to get the draft of a letter where we are currently. Back and forth, huts and mirrors past years can stop us from giving our best in the most part.

3 DREAM BIG BECAUSE LIFE IS BIG
Now that you know what matters to you and what’s been slowing you down, it’s time to look ahead and don’ts. Think of all we are about to dream big, because it means a lot of work and many more pain we don’t achieve.

4 WAIT FOR CLARITY BEFORE TALKING ABOUT IT
You are no longer the owner of your burdens and dreams are, usually would be a lot of excitement in telling people about your progress. We often tell ourselves, “I’ll talk about that on my dream board during our Chinese New Year week.”

5 IMPLEMENTATION TAKES TIME
I will not reveal you. Dreaming is hard work! Try to get your life in sync is harder work! Once you are clear on your dreams, and your desires, be patient. Implementation takes time and effort. Being aware of this helps us make decisions on how to spend our time, money and resources.

6 LET IT COME TO LIFE
It may take time—months or years. And sometimes your dreams are achieved in different phases.

7 “We used to be like that game of forming legos we played when I was little. Once logged, you had to heav. I’m the person you won. When something happened, it happened like a fest. No, we can’t forgive the wrong way, too afraid of making the wrong decisions. The problem is, you still did it all wrong. That’s true deci-

By KRISTIN BRADY

THE INS-SYNC LEADER

1 REASON WHY ALL LEADERS NEED TO PRACTICE SELF-REFLECTION

By JOSEPH LALONDE
editor@leaderonomics.com

THROUGH SELF-REFLECTION, WE CAN CHANGE HOW WE SEE OURSELVES AND HOW OTHER PEOPLE SEE US.

I used to think of myself as an unknown, online “nobody.” When I took a look at how far I’ve come in the last two years, I’m constantly amazed. I am now the owner of WordingWell, a writing and editing business. Because I practice self-reflection regularly, I had to add my blog’s readers, put my business and self-help together.

2 SELF-REFLECTION PROVIDES US WITH CLARITY.
Leaders are more successful when they are clear about what their long-term goals are, and what steps they need to take in order to achieve those goals.

3 SELF-REFLECTION RAISES OUR CONSCIOUSNESS.
We all need a pat on the back every now and then. When we focus on our personal and professional growth, we expect to see improvements. By reflecting more on our achievements, we can develop a more realistic view of ourselves.

4 SELF-REFLECTION BOOSTS OUR INTEGRITY.
One of the ways we can improve our integrity is by being accountable to our own goals. When we reflect on our actions, we can see how we can improve and then set new goals for ourselves.

For negative situations, some of the questions include:

1. Why did I make a mistake?

2. How do I think of this mistake?

3. Was I distracted, nervous or anxious?

4. What situation or condition was making me feel this way?

5. Can I imagine how to do differently?

For positive situations, some of the questions include:

1. Why did I succeed?

8. How can I maintain this success?

9. What motivated me to do what I did?

10. How did I feel after doing well?

11. Did I feel motivate this start?

12. Did I receive any praise or reward from doing well?

13. How did I feel about the success?

14. How do I think of this success?

15. What did I do differently?

16. What are the major lessons I learned?

17. How can I make these lessons a part of my routine?

18. What are the positive consequences of this success?

19. What are the negative consequences of this success?

20. How can I use these lessons to help me in the future?

For situations that are neutral, some of the questions include:

1. Why was the situation neutral?

2. How do I think of this situation?

3. What motivated me to do what I did?

4. How did I feel after doing neutral?

5. Did I feel motivate this start?

6. Did I receive any praise or reward from doing neutral?

7. How did I feel about the neutral?

8. How do I think of this neutral?

9. What did I do differently?

10. What are the major lessons I learned?

11. How can I make these lessons a part of my routine?

12. What are the positive consequences of this neutral?

13. What are the negative consequences of this neutral?

14. How can I use these lessons to help me in the future?

15. What are the situations that I need to keep in mind for the future?

16. What are the situations that I need to avoid in the future?

17. What are the situations that I need to work on for the future?

18. What are the situations that I need to celebrate in the future?

19. What are the situations that I need to be more prepared for in the future?

20. How can I use these lessons to help me in the future?
By LAUREN SVEEN
editor@leaderonomics.com

I have previously written about strategies employers can utilise to attract and retain millennials. But judging by the fact that I have spoken on two such panels in the past few months, this continues to be a hot topic.

A recent discussion with alumni at a Penn Club Career Panel was filled with millennials, most of whom were surprised when I recounted some recent experiences I have had recruiting from their generation. Which leads me to propose that we all need a primer—not just on how employers can attract and retain this enigmatic generation, but also how this robust generation of rising stars can alter their approach to help bridge the gap and dispel misperceptions.

My goal is not to add to the criticism millennials often receive, nor to tell employers they have to change everything they do. Rather, I hope to offer guidance to both millennials and other generations who make up the workforce—a type of yin and yang in the workplace. With millennials expected to make up as much as 75% of the workforce in the next 10 years, according to the Brookings Institution, everyone is going to have to learn to give a little.

So, with that in mind, here are some tips, both for employers (which for this conversation are broadly defined as baby boomers and Gen-X) and millennial candidates (broadly defined as those born after 1980).

DEALING WITH CONVENTIONS

Employers: Modernise conventions.
Adapting to meet a new audience isn’t just a nice thing to do; it’s becoming a necessity. Attracting and retaining millennials will require you to work differently. I’ve talked many times about how implementing flexibility is crucial and a big part of the paradigm shift. But eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy is also key. A Deloitte Consulting survey conducted recently found that 61% of millennials interviewed felt that operational structures and procedures were among the biggest barriers to innovation.

Millennials: Adhere to conventions. Even in the midst of a paradigm shift, conventions have a place. While some ways of operating seem outdated, others remain because they’ve been proven to be effective. When it comes to interviews, expectations about dressing professionally, being on time and doing homework about the company exist because they provide a way for the employer to get to know you and determine if you’re a good fit. A friend who works for a technology company recently shared her experience of trying to set up a phone interview with a programmer candidate. When she called at the scheduled time, the candidate thought nothing of asking if she could conduct the interview while he drove his girlfriend to the airport. His focus on his convenience rather than taking the commitment seriously spoke volumes about how he would approach the job.

COMMUNICATE OPENLY

Employers: Embrace new ways to communicate. Whether it’s by using WhatsApp, Skype or LinkedIn Messenger, be ready to communicate on the platforms where millennials are comfortable with. You might actually find it more efficient than waiting for a phone call or email response.

Millennials: Pick up the phone! While your boss is making an effort to text you when news arises, show the same respect when he or she tries to reach you by voice calls. If you receive an email or call, don’t reply through text—especially in job-search situations.

I recently had a client who was interested in making an offer to a younger prospect. The client and the candidate had arranged to speak via GoToMeeting, but the candidate never received the link. Instead of enquiring about the missing link, the candidate ignored the issue and the meeting never took place. Perhaps the thought it was rude to point out the mistake or assumed the meeting was cancelled. Either way, her failure to follow up cost her the job.

GIVE REGULAR FEEDBACK

Employers: Provide frequent and fast feedback. Millennials are accustomed to the world of social media where they receive instant affirmation for their actions. By comparison, waiting six months for a review can feel like an eternity. Make an effort to update millennial employees on a regular basis and be approachable so they feel comfortable asking about their performance.

Millennials: Accept constructive criticism. Be comfortable with the idea that not all feedback is going to be positive, and use that information to improve. Not everyone can be an A player all the time!

TRANSPARENCY IS KEY

Employers: Be transparent. Millennials want to be a part of the process and are more likely to stay with employers that include them as an integral part of the team. One of my clients facilitates dialogue by having an open workplace where partners don’t have offices. Employees at every level are encouraged to share ideas with management. While this may not work for every organisation, adopting a more open approach can yield big dividends with millennials — and for productivity and innovation.

Millennials: Embrace opportunities. If your company provides extended opportunities to contribute, seize them. But by being transparent, your employer is trust- ing you to be discreet, and to also help play a pivotal role. Take those responsi- bilities seriously.

Forging a successful partnership with millennials will require compromise and understanding on all sides. Blending our unique experiences will surely build successful teams and thriving workplaces.
**PRINTS, PATTERNS FOR YOUR LUNAR PALETTE**

By WENDY LEE

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HERE’S the thing. Prints have always been in style. In fact, we’ve moved on to fashionistas telling us to mix and match floral prints with polka dots, stripes with checks, and the list goes on. However, open up any girl’s closet and you’d generally find 80% of their wardrobe comprises solid colours and only 20% are prints and patterns. This may partly be due to work attire making up most of their wardrobe, but I also think it is because of the association that prints have with potential bumpiness (largely due to not wearing them appropriately). Fret not! Prints and patterns add a visual illusion work, you will be itching your body. With an added intricate your body. With an added intricate

1 **HIDE AND CONCEAL**
Create balance by adding prints to areas you wish to accentuate. If you have narrower shoulders, you could wear more printed tops. You can thereby draw attention away from a particular area you intend to hide by wearing prints in the opposing direction. If you have a larger bust line, conceal by adding diagonal patterns towards the waist – as shown on Tiffany’s red and beige dress. The optical illusion of the diagonal flowers will create a more slender shape. If hips are your problem area, then darker colours will do the trick of hiding and minimising the lower half of your body. With an added intricate embroidery on your upper torso, your dress simply shouts “look up!” and you will immediately look 25cm taller!

2 **DISTRACT AND DIVERT**
Let’s say you have larger upper arms that you prefer covered up. You can utilise prints and colours to divert people’s gaze elsewhere. The black and green dress that Connie has on, not only serves to cover her arms, but the emerald embroidery adds interest to her outfit, and visually pulls the eye to the middle.

3 **ENHANCE AND EMPHASISE**
We all know that placing a dominant pattern on the bust, waist, stomach, hip or rear end, draws attention and enhances that body region. In the case of Tiffany, where her body is quite straight, the prints on her yellow dress add volume, thus making her upper body appear more curvy. The added flare on the bottom of her A-line dress does a perfect job in giving her an hourglass silhouette.

4 **SIZE-UP AND SCALE**
As our eyes travel between prints, do take note that in order to appear harmonious, the size of a pattern needs to be in proportion. Do note that size is relative what appears medium on one person may appear smaller or larger on someone else. In general, small and medium-sized patterns work well on a small or medium-sized body. Larger scale patterns may overwhelm a petite-sized person, whereas small, widely-spaced patterns may cause a large figure to appear even larger.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**
So, for the year 2016, shy away from prints no more! Once we begin to embrace the way we are created, we can dress in harmony with our appearance!
A FATAL ATTRACTION
TO DRIVE EMPLOYEES

WHY THE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES BULLET MISSES THE MARK TO MOTIVATE THEM

By SANJEEV NANAVATI
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A NOTHER fatal attraction. Reaching for financial incentives to solve most problems is the corporate equivalent of the gun duel in western mov- ies — the go-to option for everything. There is an unhealthy tendency amongst leaders to look for a silver bul- let, to oversimplify business problems and to establish a linear cause and effect relationships.

In many large companies, financial incentives are the default option adopted by chief executive officers (CEOs) and boards to solve most issues. It is overserved and the bullet often misses the mark. Why? The answers lie in the field of psychology, not economics, from where most business leaders derive their inspiration.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE

To solve a problem, you need to define and understand it properly. The use of financial incentives as the cornerstone for motivation comes out of neoclassical eco- nomics, where individuals are deemed to be self-serving and to act rationally. Behavioural economists have shown convincingly that this assumption is full of holes. Frankly, if one wants to understand how people think, act and how the brain functions, it’s best to look to psychology.

For psychologists, rewards and punishments can be counterproductive because they can undermine intrinsic motivation.

The prevailing narrative in favour of financial incentives to drive moti- vation and performance is based on three pillars:

1. The relationship between the company and the employee is a transac- tional. The contract is that you work, follow rules and for that, you get paid.
2. People work to make money which is necessary to make a living and they are always interested in making more money.
3. The only question management needs to address is the design of the incentives and measure- ment of performance. The faith in the magical qualities of financial incentives is quite pervasive.

THE YIN AND YANG OF GENERATING MOTIVATION

As far back as 50 years ago, the psychologist Herzberg offered two key insights. First, dissatisfaction and satisfaction are not one continuum. Eliminating dis- satisfaction is merely the absence of it and not the same as generating motiva- tion.

Dissatisfaction and low engagement are dependent upon hygiene or extrinsic factors such as work conditions, compensa- tion, job security and relationships with supervisors and peers. Lack or absence of hygiene can make you sick, i.e. dissatis- faction and low morale.

However, good hygiene simply leads to absence of sickness but does not pre- pare you to run for a marathon or climb a mountain. For that, you need different routines.

Second, generating motivation depends upon separate intrinsic fac- tors such as achievement, recognition, autonomy, purpose, and job design, but interestingly not compensation. In other words, once compensation reaches a hygienic level, more money does not equate to more motivation.

It is better to attract people for the intrinsic drivers of the job such as the company’s purpose, recognition, and achievement rather than for the financial rewards alone. The most effective financial incentives are those that serve to provide rec- ognition, strengthen and further the purpose of the company, and create some excitement but are not so large that they distort behaviour or cause divisiveness.

HIGH ENGAGEMENT = HIGH PRODUCTIVITY + HIGH PERFORMANCE?

Do high levels of satisfaction and engagement lead to higher productiv- ity and performance? The relationship is not so simple and direct as it is often assumed. Performance is rarely an indi- vidual effort.

The underlying system of the organi- sation, teamwork and collaboration all matter when it comes to improving per- formance. These interlocking factors are harder to change and take time.

Financial incentives provide the false attraction of an easy fix. To the limited extent that they do work, incentives aimed at rewarding groups work better than individual incentives. Financial incentives have limited impact and that too in limited circum- stances. Also the size of the incentive does not have a linear relationship with the desired impact.

Where work is not interdependent, where performance does not depend upon teamwork and where individual input directly determines output, finan- cial incentives can work. However, very few jobs and roles satisfy all these condi- tions. It is ironic that Frederick Taylor’s out- dated prescription of financial incentives which was aimed at piece-rate workers continue to be applied out of context to knowledge workers where teamwork and collaboration are critical for success.

THE FLIPSIDE OF FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Financial incentives can be downright toxic when supplied in big doses. When they are aimed at influencing behaviour and it’s all about the money, individuals will often do anything as the ends justify the means.

Spectacular examples such as Enron, the global financial crisis, the Libor rig- ging scandal provide cautionary proof of the peril of excessive financial incen- tives.

Skewed financial incentives increase the risk of mis-selling and irresponsible lending at banks and insurance com- panies. Apart from harming the end customer, it exposes the financial institu- tions to future liability from litigation. Less than one-third (31.5%) of the US workers were engaged in their jobs in 2014 according to Gallup. However, a majority of employees (51%) were still “not engaged” and 17% were “actively disengaged” in 2014.

Gallup defines engaged employees as those who are involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace. The fact that simplistic, archa- ic and ineffective tools continue to be applied simply because they are easy, and solid research on motivation continues to be ignored, is a terrible indictment. Motivation can be enhanced by restructuring work with increased opportuni- ties for advancement, personal develop- ment, recognition, and responsibility.

NO EASY TASK

Motivating employees and improving engagement is hard work. It gets harder if you focus on the wrong things. Why do leaders reach for the financial incentives gun? The simplicity of financial incentives is a fatal attraction for CEOs and boards. It is expedient and safe to be doing what everyone else is doing even if it is ineffective.

However, the much needed improve- ment in morale and engagement remain a mirage. Companies such as Google seem to have found a way to leverage these intrinsic factors such as job design and are able to be creative and to do things dif- ferently.

One needs to look deeper than the beanbags and pool tables. Since it is hard to replicate and companies are under pressure to adopt the best practices, they copy the superficial and less relevant factors.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A motivated and engaged work- force is the Holy Grail for CEOs and boards. Complex medical conditions often require a cocktail of medication. Individuals are influenced more by emo- tion than by rationality. Employee motivation is complex and requires a carefully calibrated cocktail of autonomy, mastery, purpose and a strong sense of affiliation. CEOs and boards who look to simplistic financial incentives clearly misun- derstand the problem.

Hard issues require hard work and if CEOs and boards are not working hard, they are not working hard enough.
W

E often hear about the importance of parents being good role models for their children. However, being a parent brings with it challenges and hurdles. At times, mums and dads can feel like they’re not doing a good enough job. Some parents wonder whether their children are actually aware of their presence in the home and in their lives instead of looking at them as just financial providers and housemates. But then again, don’t most parents feel this stress and experience guilt-driven feelings at some point in their lives?

My guess is that most of them do, but many feel alone in their parenting struggles. Therefore, wouldn’t it be great if parents have role models to look up to? Regardless of a positive or negative experience, remember these top role models to help you through any parenting challenges you might encounter.

SO, WHO ARE THESE ROLE MODELS?

This is certainly a tough question to answer mainly because there is no perfect parent. Even as adults, our role models are either our own parents, close friends or sometimes even celebrities! But let’s forget all of these celebrities and fictional characters for a moment; get back to basics, and look at our own parents for inspiration.

Not everyone is fortunate enough to have a great relationship with their parents. Regardless of a positive or negative relationship, there is always something to take from their teachings or their outlook on life. You may not realise this until you see them playing with your children or offering advice on how to look after them.

Think of things that your parents have inspired you to do, think or believe. How much of those values have you held onto till your adult years as parents? Another significant group of people in our lives are our friends. Many of us have friends who have become our most trusted confidants over the years. These could be friends whom we’ve known since we were in school, in college or even from work. Who better to learn from than people we trust and who are a big part of our lives? So why not look to them for support and maybe even share our struggles of maintaining a “sane” work-life balance.

I have often encouraged parents to meet up with their friends and have conversations or discussions regarding their struggles. It can be a good outlet for anyone to have a safe space to vent, feel reassured and most importantly, know that you are not being judged.

Now what about famous parents? Is it a good idea to look to celebrity parents as role models? As we often tell our youth, it’s important to question who you admire and why. Many of these values have you held onto your entire lives? So why not look to them for support and reassurance and most importantly, know that you are not being judged.

Many celebrity parents have often discussed about their struggles as parents. For example, Gwen Stefani, a singer and mum of three boys has said that, “Finding that balance between work and family is the hardest thing I’ve ever done, by far. I’ve always worked really hard, and the hardest thing I’ve ever done is have kids!”

Even the president of the United States, Barack Obama, who is a father of two girls has expressed that, “Too often, these issues (caring for the family) are thought of as women’s issues, which I guess means you can kind of scoot them aside a little bit. But anything that makes life harder for women makes life harder for families, and makes life harder for children. This is about you too, men.”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These famous parents and many others can certainly be good role models because they are open in sharing about their thoughts and difficulties in raising a family.

Nonetheless, I believe that the most important role model to look up to is yourself! You work hard, you care for them, you make them laugh and you might even have an interesting hobby. All of these traits make you an inspirational figure in your children’s eyes as you can do so much that they can’t—and teaching them these things only makes them admire you more.

Keep this in mind the next time you start doubting yourself as a mum or dad. Remember that your children look up to you and think you’re brilliant (most of the time). If you’re a working parent, you know all too well the struggle to balance your never-ending personal to-do-list with your never-ending work emails. While you might really love your job (or just really need two incomes), finding a way to make it in every meeting and every game, dance recital, and parent-teacher conference is enough to send your parents guilt into overdrive.

Therefore, to give you a boost of confidence and faith, remember these top role models to help you through any parenting trial (and to remind you that you’re pretty great too).
I remember watching the trailer for Ip Man 3 on New Year’s Eve and thought to myself, Wow! Donnie Yen is finally coming back as the kung-Fu grandmaster, and the film even has Mike Tyson in it. The action scenes are going to be oh-may-zing!

On New Year’s, my family and I decided to go watch Ip Man 3. Halfway into the movie, I realised it wasn’t an action movie per se. It was more than just kicks and punches.

It was a beautiful story of life and love and of how one man, with the right values, can make a difference. There were moments in the film that highlighted the choices made by Ip Man that set him apart from the other characters; choices that defined him as man, father, husband, teacher, but most importantly: an inspiring leader.

At the end of the film, my eyes were swollen from all the crying because I tear up at almost anything. I couldn’t help but feel I had a renewed purpose in life. I was very inspired by the titular character and I thought of sharing it with our readers.

There were many great highlights but I’m just going to share three main quotes from Ip Man that brought attention to him as an inspiring leader in society, work and family. Simple and moving, here are some of them.

1 PILLAR OF SOCIETY AND EMPOWERMENT

“All that we do, is not for today, but for tomorrow (the future).”

Ip Man has always been portrayed as a well-respected and honourable man, who upholds justice.

In the film, Ip Man dedicated himself to protecting his son’s school from local gang members who were after the land on which the school is situated. He would literally stand watch at the entrance of the school even when it was late and his wife and child waiting at the entrance of the school even when it was late and his wife and child waiting at home.

Not only that, he would actively engage with the local authorities to protect them from such bad influences. Are you bold enough to stand up for what is right?

2 THE HUMBLE GRANDMASTER

“Learning Wing Chun is not about being the best fighter.”

Humble. A word fitting to describe Ip Man. Never one to show off his mad skills, he feels that there’s no need to challenge other forms of martial arts to prove which is best.

Often, he stays out of the spotlight and only engages in a fight when he senses a potential threat to his family, friends or people around him.

He takes pride in his profession as a Wing Chun grandmaster. His teachings often involve philosophical lessons that form the foundation of the martial art.

He believes in doing what is right. Learning Wing Chun is not to be the best, but to fight when necessary for the greater good. Do you believe in leaving behind a legacy that you would be proud of?

3 HUSBAND AND FATHER

“Nothing is more important than being around your loved ones.”

As the days draw near, we see so many people prepping for Chinese New Year festivities. So much time is spent on shopping for decorations, food, and of course, there are people like me preparing for Chinese New Year festivities. So much time is spent on shopping for decorations, food, and of course, there are people like me prepping for Chinese New Year festivities.

But have we forgotten the true meaning of Chinese New Year? Have we placed material possessions above the more fundamental things in our lives? Throughout the film, we see Ip Man struggling to maintain that balance between being a family man and responsible citizen. However, as the film progresses, he clearly shows commitment to his wife and child. He values the relationship he has with his wife more than anything else.

Despite the fact that his pride as a Wing Chun grandmaster was hanging on the line, he chose to forfeit a match for the title of “True Wing Chun”. Instead, he spends all his time caring for his wife who was dying of cancer.

It was beautiful to watch as he would do little things like cooking, accompanying his wife for walks and dance lessons, and also having meaningful conversations with her. Towards the end of the film, he admitted to his wife that he would have taken up the challenge if it weren’t for her being ill. Indeed, it was a tough choice for him to make but it was not one that he regretted simply because he loved his wife very much.

CONCLUSION

Being an effective leader takes a lot of courage and requires one to have strong core values. Ip Man is a wonderful example of how one person can make so much difference not just in the family, but at work and in the society.