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FINDING YOURSELF

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, as the saying goes by the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu. The journey of finding ourselves consists of many “single steps” that we make along the way, some of them cause us to cringe with regret as we look back; others, we are able to punch the air in celebration, experiencing a profound sense of victory over seemingly insurmountable odds and setbacks. ‘Together with all the experiences that we have accumulated in a lifetime, we are often confronted with an identity question: are you an extrovert or an introvert?’

Often, when I’m asked that question, a number of other questions come to mind. ‘Is it really necessary for me to be classified into either of those boxes? What if, I wanted to be in both boxes? What if I didn’t want to be in any of them? What if these boxes didn’t actually exist? In our endeavour to understand our fellow human beings and hopefully in the process to find ourselves, we may categorise each other by nicely packaging them into small boxes called personality profiles—extroverts or introverts—and the list goes on.

With every passing year, I have found these methods of categorisation extremely limiting, both to the immense nature of human potential, and also in our appreciation and understanding of the beauty of human personalities and personas.

Instead of drawing clear, well-defined lines to make sense of people around us, perhaps we could begin by embracing our differences in all their grandeur and uniqueness. We go from nightlong parties surrounding ourselves with people to hibernating in our rooms seeking for much needed space of our own. There are days of relentless activity and when to follow the pack. In other words, adopting to situations isn’t an issue for you.

Traditionally, people were either categorised as introverted or extroverted personality types. You’re either the life of the party, or not. Extroverts generally gain energy from being around people; introverts are exactly the opposite. However, it’s becoming more difficult these days to only choose one personality type. While these two personality types have distinct pros and cons, in recent times however, more people are discovering that they seem to have an overlap of these two. Enter the ambivert: a person with a blend of introverted and extroverted qualities.

There are a number of benefits to being an ambivert. One of those is the innate ability to adapt to situations easily. If you think of these qualities as a continuous spectrum, then the ambivert personality would fall right in the middle, emulating parts of both introversion and extroversion. May the pages ahead be as insightful, engaging and purporseful to you, as they have been for me. Have a wonderful weekend ahead.

Carpe diem,
IAN LEE
Editor
Leaderonomics.com

AMBIVERSION: THE PERFECT BLEND

By DARSHANA SIVANANTHAM
editor@leaderonomics.com

“There is no such thing as a pure introvert or a pure extrovert. Such a person would be in the lunatic asylum.” —Carl G Jung

HAVE you ever felt like there are days where you thrive in the company of others, and other days where all you want is to just stay home with a steaming cup of hot chocolate? If you’re nodding your head right now, don’t worry, you’re not alone.

Traditionally, people were either categorised as introverted or extroverted personality types. You’re either the life of the party, or not. Extroverts generally gain energy from being around people; introverts are exactly the opposite. However, it’s becoming more difficult these days to only choose one personality type. While these two personality types have distinct pros and cons, in recent times however, more people are discovering that they seem to have an overlap of these two. Enter the ambivert: a person with a blend of introverted and extroverted qualities.

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Quotes

“The ability to choose which type of personality you want to portray, according to circumstances, allows for a greater expression of capabilities and strengths.” —Carl G Jung

The opinions expressed in this leadership guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.

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Sit back and enjoy what we have in store for you!
Investors may say, “This leader is charismatic, has a vision, or treats people like family.” Leadership are haphazard and narrow. In our research, we found that investors allocate about 50% of a firm’s market value.

Quality of leadership. Quality of leadership matters. In our research, we found that investors allocate about 50% of a firm’s market value.

The next step is for investors to use a disciplined methodology for measuring the impact of leadership on market value.

Wise, long-term investors recognise that leadership matters. In our research, we found that investors allocate about 30% of their decision-making on the quality of leadership. Quality of leadership predicts intangible value, which in turn produces financial results.

Leadership assessments go beyond isolated observations to more rigorous analytics. To move firm valuation discussions from financials to intangibles to leadership, requires synthesising massive studies and insights about leaders, and leadership into a usable and simple leadership valuation solution.

My book, The Leadership Capital Index: Realising the Market Value of Leadership, draws on a useful metaphor for how to include, conceive, and audit leadership in the assessment of a firm’s value.

Leadership capital index is like a financial confidence index—Moody’s or Standard & Poor’s (S&P). It moves beyond casual and piecemeal observations of leaders to more thorough assessments of leadership.

A leadership index differs from a leadership standard. Standards define what is expected, indices rate how well an activity is performed.

For example, consider the Economist’s Big Mac index, which measures the cost of a Big Mac in various countries in terms of its difference from the average Big Mac price in the United States of America. It doesn’t try to tell you how much a Big Mac should cost—instead, it is a crude but useful assessment of the cost of living around the world.

An index guides investors to make more informed choices. When a rating agency like Moody’s or S&P downgrades a company, it is not saying that the company did or did not meet financial reporting requirements. Rather, it is offering an opinion about the firm’s ability to repay loans in the future. Likewise, a leadership capital index would inform investors about the readiness of the firm’s leadership to meet business challenges.

To create a leadership capital index, I also looked at dozens of studies by consulting firms and experts who put substance behind the assessment of leadership.

In general, these studies offered deep insights on one piece of an overall leadership puzzle. Some focused on personal leadership style, others on compensation or training practices, and still others on organisation governance and design. Few attempted to prepare a comprehensive approach to leadership as a whole that could be accessed by investors.

My leadership ratings index has two dimensions, or domains: individual and organisational.

Individual refers to the personal qualities (competencies, traits, characteristics) of the key leaders in an organisation. Organisational refers to the systems these leaders create to manage leadership throughout the organisation and the application of organisation systems to specific business conditions. Using these two domains, previous leadership and human capital work may be synthesised into a leadership capital index that investors can use to inform their valuation decisions.

RELEVANCE TO STAKEHOLDERS

This leadership capital index will have relevance for many stakeholders interested in firm valuation. Equity investors (venture capitalists, private equity, portfolio managers, mutual/hedge fund managers) will have a more thorough and rigorous way to evaluate and realise a firm’s full market value.

Debt holders will have more confidence in a firm’s ability to repay its debt. Rating agencies (Institutional Shareholder Services, government groups, Moody’s) can offer a more refined assessment of the firm’s full value by including leadership in the assessment.

Boards of directors can have a more thorough process for evaluating the quality of leadership within their organisation. C-suite executives who have primary responsibility for firm value can include leadership as part of this discussion.

Leadership development specialists charged with developing leaders can focus less on personal characteristics of leaders and more on how investors might view them.

Realising the market value of leadership could also have a significant impact on many organisational processes: risk management, governance, social responsibility, reputation, and leadership development.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Transferring from a ‘gut feel’ or narrow assessment of leadership to an index that can start to predict the impact leaders have on intangible value creation, changes the game of leadership assessment and development.

It provides stakeholders with a clearer lens through which to see the impact of leadership in realising a firm’s full market value. Thus, it is now time for investors to use a leadership capital index.
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Am sure you’ve been asked many times whether you’re an introvert or an extrovert. For some people, it’s an easy choice, but for most of us, it’s difficult to choose one way or the other.

It’s hard to choose because the introvert and extrovert dichotomy reflects a tired and outdated view of personality. Personality traits exist along a continuum, and the vast majority of us aren’t introverts or extroverts; rather, we fall somewhere in the middle.

Personality consists of a stable set of preferences and tendencies through which we approach the world. Personality traits form at an early age and are fixed by early adulthood.

Many important things about you change over the course of your lifetime, but your personality isn’t one of them.

“How am I feeling?” is a question many of us ask ourselves frequently. How we answer may depend on how much stimulation we prefer—whether we feel more comfortable in the company of others or when we need a quiet moment to reflect on our thoughts. As we get to know ourselves and others, we begin to develop a portfolio of psychological strengths and weaknesses that shape our actions and our responses to the world around us.

The continuum between introversion and extroversion captures one of the most important personality traits. It’s troubling that we’re encouraged to categorize ourselves one way or the other because there are critical strengths and weaknesses commonly associated with each type.

Adam Grant, a professor of management and psychology from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, set out to study this phenomenon, and his findings are fascinating.

First, he found that two-thirds of people don’t strongly identify as introverts or extroverts. These people (aka, the vast majority of us) are called ambiverts, who don’t strongly identify as introverts or extroverts. These people (aka, the vast majority of us) are called ambiverts, who have both introverted and extroverted tendencies. The direction ambiverts lean toward varies greatly, depending on the situation.

Think of introversion and extroversion as a spectrum, with ambiversion lying somewhere in the middle. (See Figure 1.)

HOW AMBIVERSION HELPS AT WORK

Ambiverts have a distinct advantage over true introverts and extroverts. Because their personality doesn’t lean too heavily in either direction, they have a much easier time adjusting their approach to people based on the situation. This enables them to connect more easily and more deeply, with a wider variety of people.

Grant’s research also disproved the powerful and widely held notion that the best-performing salespeople are extroverts. He found that ambiverts’ greater social flexibility enabled them to outsell all other groups, moving 51% more product per hour than the average salesperson. Notice how sales increased as extroversion increased, peaking with those who were just moderately extroverted. (See Figure 2.)

Grant explained the finding this way: “Because they naturally engage in a flexible pattern of talking and listening, ambiverts are likely to express sufficient assertiveness and enthusiasm to persuade and close a sale, but are more inclined to listen to customers’ interests and less vulnerable to appearing too excited or overconfident.”

HOW AMBIVERSION WORKS IN THE BRAIN

How social you are, is largely driven by dopamine, the brain’s feel-good hormone. We all have different levels of dopamine-fueled stimulation in the neocortex (the area of the brain that is responsible for higher mental functions such as language and conscious thought).

Those who naturally have high levels of stimulation tend to be introverts; they try and avoid any extra social stimulation that might make them feel anxious or overwhelmed.

Those with low levels of stimulation tend to be extroverts. Under-stimulation leaves extroverts feeling bored, so they seek social stimulation to feel good.

Most people’s level of natural stimulation don’t reach great extremes, though it does fluctuate. Sometimes you may feel the need to seek out stimulation, while other times, you may avoid it.

If I spend too much time alone, I get bored, yet too much time around people leaves me feeling drained.

The trick to being an ambivert is knowing when to force yourself to lean toward one side of the spectrum when it isn’t happening naturally. For example, at a networking event, a self-aware ambivert will lean toward the extroverted side of the scale, even when it has been a long day and he or she has had enough of people. Misunderstanding your approach to the situation can be frustrating, ineffective, and demoralizing for ambiverts.

ARE YOU A CLASS CLOWN OR A WALLFLOWER?

You could very well be an ambivert

Sales Revenue by Levels of Extraversion

Finding out whether you’re an ambivert

It’s important to pin down where you fall in the introversion/extroversion scale. By increasing the awareness of your type, you can develop a better sense of your tendencies and play to your strengths.

If you think that you might be an ambivert, but aren’t certain, see how many of the following statements apply to you. If most of them apply, you’re most likely an ambivert.

• I can perform tasks alone or in a group.
• I don’t have much preference either way.
• Social settings don’t make me uncomfortable, but I get tired of being around people too much.
• Being the centre of attention is fun for me, but I don’t like it to last.
• Some people think I’m quiet, while others think I’m highly social.
• I don’t always need to be moving, but too much downtime makes me bored.
• I can get lost in my own thoughts just as easily as I can lose myself in a conversation.
• Small talk doesn’t make me uncomfortable, but it does get boring.
• When it comes to trusting other people, sometimes I’m sceptical, and other times, I dive right in.

Bring it all together

A research has been conducted with over a million people and it was found that those in the upper echelon of performance at work also tend to be highly self-aware (90 percent of them, in fact). By gaining a better sense of where you fall on the introversion/extroversion scale, you can build insight into your tendencies and preferences, which increases your self-awareness and emotional intelligence. This will help you improve your performance.

Dr Travis Bradberry is the award-winning co-author of Emotional Intelligence 2.0, and co-founder of the world’s leading provider of emotional intelligence tests and training. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries. To learn how to work with emotional intelligence, write in to training@leaderonomics.com.
CAN AMBIVERSION DELIVER THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS FOR BUSINESS?

BY SANDY CLARKE

AMBIVERTS are much more able to adapt easily to different situations that they find themselves in. In contrast, introverts and extroverts tend to thrive solely within certain contexts and environments that resonate with their personality type.

STABILITY

By definition, ambiverts are neither introverted nor extroverted. Instead, their personality type is a balance between two extremes, meaning that they can avoid being overly set in their ways, as introverts can be, or becoming too brash or loud like extroverts.

REFINED GUT INSTINCT

While introverts might remain silent when faced with an uncomfortable situation, and extroverts may become bullish when a particular goal is within reach, ambiverts are able to observe themselves and others in any given situation. This means that they know, for example, when to speak up and when to listen when negotiating a business deal or pitching a sale.

TREATS OF AN AMBIVERT

Ambiverts have several advantages that others may not possess.

1. Natural Assertiveness
   - Ambiverts are neither overly shy nor overly forceful, allowing them to adapt to different situations and environments.

2. Adaptability
   - Ambiverts are able to thrive in both familiar and unfamiliar situations, making them versatile in a wide range of environments.

3. Balanced Approach
   - Ambiverts maintain a balanced approach to decision-making, avoiding the extremes of overthinking or impulsiveness.

4. Empathy
   - Ambiverts are more empathetic, understanding the perspectives of others, which is crucial in building relationships and resolving conflicts.

5. Effective Listening
   - Ambiverts are skilled listeners, able to tune in to the needs and concerns of others, fostering stronger connections and collaborative outcomes.

DRAWBACKS OF BEING AN AMBIVERT

While there are many benefits to being an ambivert, there are also some drawbacks to consider:

1. Decision Making
   - Ambiverts may struggle with making decisions due to their balanced nature. They may need to weigh options more carefully or consult others to reach a conclusion.

2. Clarity of Purpose
   - Ambiverts may have a harder time setting clear goals or directions, as they balance between different priorities, which can lead to confusion or indecisiveness.

3. Risk-Taking
   - Ambiverts may be less likely to take risks or step outside their comfort zone due to their balanced approach to situations.

4. Conflict Resolution
   - Ambiverts may face challenges in resolving conflicts due to their desire to maintain harmony and avoid confrontation.

5. Ambivalence
   - Ambiverts may experience feelings of ambivalence or indecisiveness, which can lead to procrastination or difficulty in making choices.

In conclusion, ambiverts possess a unique combination of traits that can benefit both personal and professional environments. By understanding their strengths and challenges, individuals can leverage their ambivert nature to achieve success and foster positive relationships with others.
10 WAYS TO BOOST YOUR ENERGY

BAN THAT SLUGGISH FEELING

WE have all been there before. Holiday mode is on; we finally get to relax, sleep in, and enjoy the fact that our brains don’t have to worry about the next day’s agenda. Hence, it can be a little tough to get back into the routine of sending children to school, going to work, picking up children, thinking of what to cook for dinner, and other necessities in life.

Here are some tips on how to regain your energy and keep you from feeling sluggish:

1. **HAVE BREAKFAST**
   As Malaysians, we may often skip meals and make up for the rest of the day with larger meals (for example, doubling the portion of rice for lunch). Some of us may even just run on a cup of coffee. However, most nutritionists and trainers say that breakfast is the most important meal of the day as it helps to provide you with energy.

2. **PLAY A SPORT**
   Take a walk or ride a bicycle in the park with your friends or family. If you don’t like doing actual exercises, play a sport like badminton or futsal. Keeping your body active will help you fight fatigue and may even prevent illnesses.

3. **TAKE MINI BREAKS**
   Staring at computer screens and phones for 12 hours a day can be straining on our eyes and bodies. Forcing yourself to go on in hopes that you will be more productive, will drain your energy instead. So, take mini breaks of 15 minutes every hour or every couple of hours. This helps you come back with a refreshed mind and will even help you think and work better for the next full hour.

4. **REDUCE STRESS BY DOING SOMETHING YOU LIKE**
   If you like baking, then bake. If you would rather play a game with friends or watch a movie with loved ones, do it. Don’t wait for the holidays. Relax in between your routine and you will be more likely to find energy in the mundane things that you do.

5. **GET YOUR Z’S AND THE REST OF THE DAY WILL THANK YOU**
   We often cut back on our sleeping hours due to work, family, and other responsibilities. But you might be thinking, “It’s impossible to get a full eight hours of sleep each night.” A tip that might help is to remind yourself that the bedroom is not your office. Turn off the cell phones. Put away the laptops. Let your bedroom be the place you rest, and you will wake up feeling energised and more able to give your best throughout the day.

6. **REDUCE STRESS**
   dehydration can often drain you and leave you feeling tired. By keeping your body well-hydrated, you boost your body’s immune system. WebMD, the health website, states that you can tell you’re well-hydrated when you don’t feel thirsty and when your urine is light-coloured.

7. **TAKE A POWER NAP**
   People often need a nap when they have not been getting enough sleep at night. By taking a short 10–15 minutes nap, studies show that it can improve your efficiency.

8. **WATCH A VIDEO OF A DANCING GORILLA**
   Laughter decreases stress and boosts your body’s immune system. Michael Wood, chief fitness officer of Koko FitClub, stated that, “When we laugh, our pulse and blood pressure go up, we breathe faster and send more oxygen to our muscles and organs. That increased level of oxygen in our blood gives us more energy.” So go ahead and laugh when you need a little energy boost.

9. **MINIMISE ON TOXINS**
   Royale Scuderi, owner of Productive Life Concepts said, “Avoid toxic people (complainers, whiners, poor attitudes). If you can’t completely avoid them, at least minimise contact and tune them out as much as you can. Surround yourself with positive, supportive, can-do people whenever possible.”

10. **WORRYING IS FOR THE WEAK**
   “Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere.” — Erma Bombeck
   Essentially, worrying about an issue gets you nowhere. All it does is heighten your anxiety. There will always be problems in life but worrying about them does not change anything. Accepting what cannot be changed will help you reduce your worry and focus on better things in life.

**W**
COURTING YOUR CAREER
STARTING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FUTURE JOB

By JUSTIN YAP
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T
HE decision-making process for your career can be daunting. Now, allow me to compare it with the decision-making involved in matrimony as these two decisions have many similarities.

How will you know who is the right person to marry? What if you have doubts about spending the rest of your life with this person? Getting hitched can be as intimidating as choosing your future career path.

Imagine this—you are a guy, deciding whether it’s time to buy the engagement ring and plan a proposal, or you are a girl who is just proposed to. There can be lots of things going through your mind but I’d like to think that the crux of the matter comes down to these few factors:

- This decision has long-term implications—can you support a family doing this? How about your folks?
- It has far-reaching consequences—quality of life, social status etc.
- As it affects your future, there are significant amount of risks that you have to consider.

Now, let’s change the context. You are a 17-year-old, fresh-out-of-secondary school teenager. You are burdened with the task of deciding which course to enrol in. You are deciding which course to study, major “is an intentional one. Even though you are a girl who just got proposed, you are thinking of both every day.

The minimum three to five years spent pursuing your degree is but a fraction of the time you will be spending in your job.

SO HOW DO YOU COURT A JOB?

Well, you try them out, similar to dating. Look for opportunities for part-time work or internships. And if you can’t try them out first-hand, ask people who have, just like you would ask people who knows your would-be partner well. Scour your extended family for relatives who are in a particular profession.

If all else fails, you could consult the modern-day oracle, Google. There are many websites which contain the job information you are looking for and a favourite of mine is www.onetonline.org. Be as thorough in your online research of a job. All these actions should be able to yield you information about what the job looks like and hopefully, help make the decision-making process less stressful.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST . . .

I’d like to point out that there will still be some amount of anxiety when making this decision. However, one does not need to stress as much about making the perfect career decision as much as making the perfect marriage decision.

Unlike marriage, it is relatively easier to leave your job, not to mention, more socially acceptable too. Employers today are increasingly looking for key characteristics like attitude, work ethics, and willingness to learn more than the degree you specialised in.

In the modern world today, it’s common to find individuals working in fields totally unrelated to their tertiary education. I’d like to think that this is a reflection of life—you can prepare and plan as much as you like, but things do not always go according to plan.

What you can do, however, is to gather as much accurate information as needed before making critical decisions. Ensure it’s an informed decision rather than a foolish one. While you cannot guarantee that you will find happiness in your job as much as you cannot predict whether you will be happy with your partner for the rest of your lives together, make the most of both every day.

So carry on. Woo your career. Happy courting!

Justin Yap is a Counselling Psychologist who is currently a counsellor, lecturer, and trainer with CAREerBreeze HELP. He is also a counsellor, counseling supervisor, and trainer with The Mind Psychological Services and Training. To connect with him, drop him a note at editor@leaderonomics.com.
WHY JOB DESCRIPTIONS ARE A DYING ART

By KARIN HURT  
editor@leaderonomics.com

A client called and said, “Karin, I'm going to send you the job description for the new role we designed, but ignore all the HR mumbo jumbo. Just concentrate on the competencies and see if they seem right to you based on the strategy we've been working on.”

Game on. We were going to have the conversation that was most worth having: How do we find the right person with the aptitude for this vital job?

The 25% this, 37% that of traditional job descriptions was a crap shoot at best. We needed a thinker who would work with us to be as creative as possible and build this role into more than we ever imagined.

Planning out roles and functions are vital. Pricing jobs for fair market value makes sense.

But, when job descriptions serve to confine, or when "swim lanes" become too narrow, you’re headed into dangerous waters.

CONFINED TO JOB DESCRIPTIONS

I remembered the time the union in the United States fought so hard to prevent "service reps" from doing higher paid "customer rep" work, and kept a careful watch, telling both groups to be careful not to do too much outside their "role".

Once the lawyers got involved, the path disappeared, and really great people were disappointed and stopped trying.

I was devastated to see good people fail. And doing what you're paid to do, or giving a little more than expected over time fail.

But I’ve also never forgotten the time when we were in the middle of a touch- ing measure of a huge rehearsal and the conductor put down the baton between beats, because it was time for a union break.

Most examples are not this dramatic, and often not articulated. But in almost every company I work in, I see signs and often not articulated. But in almost every company I work in, I see signs of the "it’s not my job" virus gaining momentum, and the "A Players" are shooting themselves in the foot while the mediocre get by just fine.

Why Job Descriptions Are Old School

I can’t claim to fully understand every circumstance, and I know there are grave situations where good people are being exploited. I’m not talking about that. What I do know is the hundreds, at this point, likely thousands of people I’ve met over the years in reasonable-paying jobs, whose fear of working outside their job description absolutely damaged their careers and sabotaged their long-term earnings.

And it's even more critical now. We’re in a knowledge and technology economy where even lower-level jobs change faster than human resources (HR) can keep up.

Your job description is the skeleton—the unimaginative view of minimal requirements. Many will stop there and stay put. And that’s a tragedy.

The game changers will understand this limited view, and know that the real work is to think past the basics and add innovation and additional contribution?

The call to HR

Of course you need job descriptions. It’s just time to get more creative. Imagine the possibilities if every job description had the 75% skeleton as it exists today, and then 25% encouraging innovation and additional contribution?

• Continuously seeks new ways to enhance the customer experience and shares them with peers.

• Collaborates across departments for innovative solutions to improve quality and reduce costs.

• Builds a deep bench of talent through recruiting, mentoring and organic employee development.

Parting Thoughts

The old Field of Dreams idea of “build it and they will come” sometimes fail as a short-term solution. But I’ve never seen a genuine effort of a competent person giving a little more than expected over time fail.

Let’s talk about this important issue. Your turn. What’s riskier? Holding back and doing what you're paid to do, or giving too much and risking being taken advantage of?

"A union break refers to an agreement made between the employer and employees (who are part of a union) about the duration and frequency of a break or rest period between working hours."
FOCUSING on our phone, working on the laptop, gazing at the television—these are all very normal and acceptable things to do, except when someone is speaking to you. How much of your divided attention is the person actually getting? Fifty per cent? Five per cent?

Sadly, we are all guilty of focusing too much on electronics while neglecting the other person who is trying to have a conversation. Ironically, we are also the ones who complain about the lack of focus and attention during a typical face-to-face interaction.

As broadcast journalist Karen Hellevig-Gaskell states: “Hearing is a passive occurrence that requires no effort.” It is an involuntary process that starts with noise, vibration, the movement of fluid in the ears and sound sent to the brain.

“Listening, on the other hand, is a voluntary act where we try to make sense out of the noise we hear,” she added.

“Listening, on the other hand, is a voluntary act where we try to make sense out of the noise we hear,” she added.

According to Horowitz, the phrase “[y] ou never listen” is not just the complaint of a problematic relationship but it has also become an epidemic in a fast-paced world focused on convenience and speed.

So, has not listening become a habit? Has it become something that is part of our culture or just the effects of a fast-moving world of technology? Ultimately, is the lack of eye contact and attention acceptable?

WHY IS LISTENING IMPORTANT?

All of us want to be heard. When someone knows you are really listening to what they have to say, amazing things can happen. Understanding something which initially seemed impossible can be reached. Solutions that were never imagined can be found. Past anger and resentments can be overcome.

According to an post on Forbes, titled 10 Steps to Effective Listening, Dianna Schillings wrote: “In today’s high-tech, high-speed, high-stress world, communication is more important than ever, yet we seem to devote less and less time to really listening to one another. Genuine listening has become a rare gift—the gift of time. ‘It helps build relationships, solves problems, ensures understanding, resolves conflicts, and improves accuracy. At work, effective listening means fewer errors and less wasted time. At home, it helps develop resourceful, self-reliant kids who can solve their own problems. Listening builds friendships and careers. It saves money and marriages.’

There are many tips on active and effective listening on the Internet. Here, I’ve managed to summarise some of the key points on important listening skills that you can pick up and practise with your loved ones or colleagues.

1. Face the person speaking and maintain eye contact.

Do your conversational partners the courtesy of turning or looking up to face them. Put aside your laptop, phone, book and other distractions.

This is the most basic aspect of a communication skill and the most sincere form of respect.

2. Be attentive but relaxed.

You don’t have to stare at the other person. Eventually, that can feel intimidating, or worse, creepy! You can look away now and then and carry on like a normal person. But the key word here is attentiveness.

Don’t allow yourself to be distracted by your surroundings, technology, and your own thoughts, feelings, or biases.

3. Don’t interrupt and don’t impose.

Everyone thinks and speaks at different rates. If you are a quick thinker and fast talker, remind yourself to relax your pace for the slower, more thoughtful communicator, or for the person who has trouble expressing himself or herself.

At the same time, try not to impose your solutions on the other person. Most of us don’t really listen very well. If we do manage to listen very well, we are often just waiting until the other person finishes so that we can say what is on our mind. But that’s not really listening.

Allow that person the respect of speaking his or her thoughts and feelings. Somewhere down the line, if you are absolutely bursting with a brilliant solution, at least get the speaker’s permission to share.

START SOMEWHERE

Now, of course there are many other advice to improve on your listening skills. But, you can always start with the aforementioned points and see where they take you.

Here’s a simple test: try listening for just one day to someone you are close to, like your spouse, child or parent. Try listening to a difficult business colleague or client.

And when they finish, don’t let yourself jump in with, “Yes, but . . .” Instead, if you do say anything, try asking, “What else?”

FINAL THOUGHTS

The final piece of advice from Tim Jarvis, columnist of O, The Oprah Magazine, is this: “No matter what, you can’t go wrong by showing interest in what other people say and making them feel important. In other words, the better you listen, the more you’ll be listened to.”

“MAN’S INABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IS A RESULT OF HIS FAILURE TO LISTEN EFFECTIVELY.”
— CARL ROGERS, AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST
We have ushered in 2016 and celebrated the Lunar New Year. “New year, new you” messages are all around and you might be feeling like it’s time for a new beginning. Look no further. This weekend, a Mega Careers and Study Fair will be held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and now’s your chance to make a fresh start. The fair will run from 11am–6pm at halls 2–5.

The fair is a collaborative effort of Malaysia’s 100 Leading Graduate Employers Careers Fair, JobsCentral Career Fair and postgradasia Postgraduate Studies Fair.

Each organiser offers specialised services that, when brought together, makes this fair a one-stop destination for all who are looking for change through their career or postgraduate studies.

Malaysia’s 100 Leading Graduate Employers Careers Fair brings together the most popular graduate employers under one roof. Prospective postgraduate students have the opportunity to browse through a wide range of institutions like Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, SEGi University, The University of Nottingham (Malaysia Campus), The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Universiti Malaya, Monash University Malaysia and over 20 other established institutions. Furthermore, you can put yourself in the running to win weekly prizes by registering online right now! Attendees also have the privilege of meeting the winner of The Apprentice Asia, Jonathan Yabut.

Besides getting you out of the house, this fair offers countless opportunities that you may have not been aware of, which may also be something that you are looking for. Here are some of the reasons why you should be at the fair this weekend:

1. Meet typically hard-to-reach company representatives in a less formal setting
   Companies send representatives that are sometimes directly involved in the hiring process and this is a great time to impress them without the formality of sitting across each other in a corporate office.

2. Practise your elevator pitch, improve your confidence and learn how to build a better first impression
   Much like the 30 seconds you might have to impress someone in an elevator ride, your chance to talk with a representative may be brief, so you need to impress quickly. Doing this helps you learn and do better the next time. You’ll find that the more times you do it, the more confidence you have.

3. Research and apply
   Instead of being overwhelmed with online searches and websites, this fair will give you the opportunity to explore the various study and career options available to you. Plus, you get to meet face-to-face with someone who can provide you with the information you need, and discuss your options. If it feels right, you can apply there and then with the guidance of a representative.

A fair like this is an opportunity not to be missed. You’re opening yourself up to endless possibilities.

So, what are you waiting for?

Louisa believes you should never leave any opportunity wasted. To engage with her, send an email to louisa.allycyn@leaderonomics.com.

“Opportunity does not knock, it presents itself when you beat down the door.”
— Kyle Chandler