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Leaderonomics wishes you a Selamat Hari Raya
BY ALISON MILES-JENKINS
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WHEN asked what needs to be improved at work, why is it that staff often cite communication amongst the top ten issues that need to be improved?

Communication is something that can always use some improvement and we are all on a journey of continuous improvement when it comes to communicating at work. Sometimes it doesn’t go well and you find yourself dealing with confrontation at work.

If this happens then we need to find a constructive way of dealing with this. That is not always easy as confrontation triggers an emotional reaction in us, because we are human. So we need some tools in our communications toolbox to deal with this effectively.

Here are my thoughts on how to deal with confrontation at work:

1 Do keep in mind that you need to make sure that you are in control of your emotions.

We are not machines and if we let ourselves go then our emotional response can trigger fight/flight reactions which will not be conducive to dealing with confrontation at work. Indeed, it may only make matters worse.

As soon as you feel yourself getting annoyed or angry, your pulse raises, your blood pressure climbs and you may not be able to think straight. We are not machines and that is not possible then you could try to buy yourself some thinking time by listing your communications. Train yourself to recognise the signs of annoyance and take a deep breath, focus and tell yourself that this is simply a problem to solve.

2 Find a way to plan.

If a situation escalates suddenly, see if you can find a way to defer a discussion for a bit later in the day to give yourself time to plan. If this is not possible then you could try to buy yourself some thinking time by listening to the other side, summarising their viewpoint and reflecting what they say. Ask open questions to give direction.

3 Think about your communication from an assertiveness perspective.

We know that once emotions take charge, an individual may just be reacting rather than thinking rationally and we need a way to diffuse this. One option is to use assertiveness techniques to draw attention to the behaviour and how it makes you feel.

For example, you might say: “I can see that this has affected you greatly. When you raise your voice I can see that this has affected you greatly.” We are not machines and it may be a useful way to encourage a joint approach to resolving issues.

4 Show understanding and empathy.

When the emotion and issue. Perhaps you might say: “I can see this is very important to you, let’s try and find a solution.” The collaborative use of “let’s” seeks to try and encourage a joint approach to resolution.

Understand the perspective of the person who confronts you. Think about why they might be reacting to the situation so negatively. There might be a range of reasons from simple disagreement, to issues of status, surprise or reaction to change.

Different people react differently to change. Understanding the driver behind the response will help give insights into resolving it.

5 See if you can find a “win-win” response.

Something that works for both sides.

Dealing with confrontation at work is often challenging but a strategic and thoughtful approach can be a great place to start.

Alison Miles-Jenkins is the founder of Leading Light Learning, and author of New Manager Secrets. To engage with us on workplace culture and how to deal with confrontation, e-mail us at training@leaderonomics.com. Log on to www.leaderonomics.com for more trending organisational insights.

"Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it."
—Mark Twain
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HOW TO DISAGREE WITH THE BOSS AGREABLY

By JOSEPH GRENNY
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HARSHA thought things were going well. Six months earlier he had been hired by Najib, a wealthy and powerful man in Dubai, to turn around the flagging reputation and prospects of a five-star business hotel. It took little time for Harsha to identify three areas of focus he was confident would rapidly improve ratings at popular review sites. He, too, would update the look; second, he would invest more in cleaning staff; and third, he would curtail the hotel’s reputation as a haven for sex workers.

The sooner in the bars were easily dealt with. Harsha’s security detail discreetly requested they leave, and most did. It was trickier to deter those entering the hall of guest rooms. But within a few weeks of beefed-up security patrols, Harsha was pleased to see mentions of him being “the cleanest hotel in Dubai.” As reputation improved, so did bookings.

Three days after the incident Harsha called Najib’s office, closed the door, and was willing to offer legal measures. Najib now looked directly at him and said, “Mr. Najib, I thank you for allowing me to address you in such a manner under these circumstances. And I also thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain to you what has happened.”

CALL FROM THE BOSS

With that, Harsha doffed his sports jacket and sat on his mat under the Middle Eastern sun—but his face softened a little as Harsha continued.

“I will sit outside your gate.”

Three days after the incident Harsha called Najib and requested a meeting. Najib did not answer. Harsha hadn’t expected him to. He was told to sit outside Najib’s office, closed the door and sat on his mat under the Middle Eastern sun—but his face softened a little as Harsha continued.

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Forgiveness is an essential trait for the success and sustainability of Transformational Leaders, says Clive Fogg. He explains the concept of forgiveness, how it differs from remembrance, and how it can help transform relationships and organizations.

Forgiveness is the ability to move beyond past grievances, whether they are personal or professional. It’s a key component of emotional intelligence and a critical aspect of leadership development. Leaders who are adept at forgiveness can build stronger, more resilient teams and organizations. However, forgiveness is not always easy, and leaders may struggle with how to approach it. In this article, we will explore the concept of forgiveness in leadership, including its definition, benefits, and the practical steps leaders can take to foster forgiveness in their teams and organizations.

Forgiveness is not just an occasional art; it is a constant attribute. —Mother Teresa

Forgiveness means accepting the fact that the person who caused you pain or injury makes a mistake. It involves releasing the anger, fear, and resentment that you may have had towards that person. Forgiveness is not about forgetting what happened, but it helps you move on from the pain and hurt that the incident caused. It is a process that requires self-awareness, empathy, and compassion.

In any case, tough situations are never easy to overcome. There are always two sides to a story. In forgiveness, however, the focus is on the positive outcome of the situation rather than the negative. For example, in the case of Malala Yousafzai, the Afghan activist for education, she forgave the Taliban gunman who shot her and her sister, even though the incident caused them physical harm and emotional trauma. Malala’s act of forgiveness not only contributed to her recovery but also inspired millions of people worldwide to believe in the power of forgiveness.

Malala Yousafzai

In a 2013 interview with The Guardian, Malala said, “I was not just shot; I was very young, less than 16 years old. And then I knew how bad it was. I didn’t cry.” She then added, “The idea of forgiving… I had no hesitation. I don’t know why, it was right.” Forgiveness is a powerful tool that can help leaders navigate through tough situations and foster positive outcomes.

Malala Yousafzai

On the other hand, holding on to grudges, resentment, and anger can have negative consequences. It can create a toxic work environment, increase stress levels, and hinder productivity. Leaders who practice forgiveness can create a more positive and productive workplace culture. By promoting forgiveness, leaders can also set an example for their team members and inspire them to forgive others.

There are many rousing examples of forgiveness in leadership. One of them is Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch woman who hid Jews during World War II. She was later arrested and imprisoned by the Germans. However, she was able to forgive her captor, the man who had helped her spy on her family. Her ability to forgive is what set her apart from other Holocaust survivors and helped her to heal and move forward.

True forgiveness is when you are ready, Thank you for this experience. —Sir Philip Crosby

Corrie ten Boom

In conclusion, forgiveness is a key trait that separates the best from the rest among leaders. It fosters progress when people aren’t preoccupied with negativism; it demonstrates courage, vulnerability, integrity for compassion and forgiveness if one was to be speaking of it that way. Forgiveness is the kind of strength that comes with forgiving, understanding, and accepting that one’s mistakes can be a part of life. It’s the smart move to make. Forgiveness is not about denying that one’s mistakes happened, but it helps one to move on from the pain and hurt that the incident caused. It is a process that requires self-awareness, empathy, and compassion.

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The statistics are worrying—an article in The Star last year quoted Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Richard Riot Jaem between 2010 and 2013, the number of unemployed graduates grew from 42,954 to 52,382.

Another article quoted the Ministry of Higher Education statistics from 2013. Every year, more than 200,000 young people look for work but one out of four remain unemployed 6 months after graduation.

And a report from Statistics Malaysia has more bad news. From their 2014 survey 399,500 people were not working—by introducing their own soft skills they are already on the right track. Some attendees remarked that soft skills implementation is not the largest factor. But why aren’t graduates getting hired? The struggling economy as well as the type of qualifications they hold has something to do with it, but that’s not the lack of soft skills.

A colleague once told me a situation where her team members frequently got into work conflicts. The root cause? They relied almost exclusively on chat rooms to convey instructions, as opposed to walking over and having a face-to-face conversation. Conflicts inevitably happened because there was a lack of context and tonality in their communication.

The demand is clear, but how do we really teach soft skills on a grassroots level? If you picked a random student from a college cafeteria, and asked him about his presentation skills—would you expect him to say: “Yes, I’m confident to present in English, because of the rigorous training in my university curriculum”? Or would you expect a shy smile?

Universities have been some successful integration of soft skills into academic curriculum. While there are many researchers who have continuously paid attention to the need for soft skills training, it is often neglected, and is in line with the Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education). Focus number one in the new blueprint is called the iCGPA, and is in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education).

The coming iCGPA

In August last year, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh announced a pilot programme that integrates soft skills into students’ cumulative grade point average (CGPA). The new grading scheme is called the iCGPA, and is in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education).

Figure 1 shows a sample iCGPA transcript. This approach is modelled around the world.

Figure 1 – Sample iCGPA Transcript

The coming iCGPA is modelled on a grassroots level. The good news is that all the key stakeholders—academia, employers, and the government all agree on the pressing need for soft skills. If Malaysia is to truly become a developed nation, we cannot allow our next generation to be blinded by the near-neglect of soft skills training.

Parting thoughts

The road to a comprehensive soft skills programme nationwide has proven to be a challenging task which will not be solved without massive effort. While there are huge challenges ahead, the good news is that all the key stakeholders—academia, employers, and the government all agree on the pressing need for soft skills.

The root of the problem is a lack of awareness from parents—on the importance of soft skills. Teachers still lack skill still prevalent with over-emphasising academic excellence to the neglect of soft skills development.

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ANGER is a strange emotion. It can appear, seemingly, from nowhere and just—in seconds—create a powerful energy that destroys lives, families and nations. In anger, terrorists kill, husbands and wives fight, stranger rage against each other on the road and nations wage war against each other.

To get rid of this powerful but destructive force here are some tips to help you stay in control of your anger:

1. **NOTICE AND ACCEPT YOUR ANGER**
   - When you are angry, notice it. Acknowledge your anger and accept it. Realise fully that “I am getting angry.”

2. **REALISE THAT ANGER IS SELF-CREATED**
   - Anger does not come from anywhere else but rather it is your unconscious response to a situation. It is self-created. It is not from outside.

3. **ANGER IS CREATED BY THE FALSE**
   - Anger comes from the ego or the fear that is inside of you. These feeling feelings are untrue and unreal; they are nothing but the inventions of the mind.

4. **BREATHE**
   - Take a few deep breaths when you have recognised the anger emerging in you. Breathe deeply till you feel calm. Relax. As you do so, the anger will gradually disappear and you will feel calmer.

5. **LET IT GO**
   - Anger is like a poison that destroys you before it damages others. It is like wildfire that can cause damage everywhere. Release the anger; see it dissipate like a cloud, emerging from the top and vanishing into the air.

6. **LETTER CAN ONLY BE CONQUERED BY “NON-ANGER”**
   - A father told his angry son to pull a nail in the wall every time he gets angry. He put many. Then the father asked him to pull out a nail for every day that he was not angry. He did. The father then said, “Look at the wall. You may have pulled out the nails but the holes remain. Anger damages things permanently.” Let go of all anger. Let go of the toxicity. Breathe.

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**FILL YOUR LOVE BANK**

WHEN was the last time you told your mum you loved her? Or bought your wife or girlfriend a rose? Or gave your father a book written by his favourite author? Or surprised a friend with a gift? Or took your boss out for a surprise lunch? It’s simple and cheap too.

So here are five simple ways you can put some love into your love bank:

1. **Pay a compliment to someone today and make sure you mean it.** For example, notice what your spouse is wearing or when someone does a good job. Pay the compliment face-to-face or send an e-mail. It will come as an unexpected surprise.

2. **Bring flowers for your spouse, your mum, your daughter, your assistant or a teammate who has done a great job.** Even one rose will create a magical feeling by writing a warm and memorable experience for the receiver. He/she will not forget it.

3. **Give your friends a nice birthday greeting by writing a warm and personal greeting for each person.** Make it heartfelt and wish them a great year ahead.

4. **Create a gift box in your home.** You can try by taking an empty box or piece of luggage and start filling it with small, inexpensive gifts that you find whenever you go. When the right time comes, you will be able to find something there to give to someone you care about.

5. **Put a note with a poem or a quote to say thanks to someone you care about.** Say thank you to your boss, your spouse, your parents, your friends or even to the person who cleans your office. They all have contributed to your success and happiness. They would be delighted to know that you remember their contribution.

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**IT’S A SAD REALITY THAT WE OFTEN TREAT THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO US WITH THE LEAST AMOUNT OF AFFECTION.**

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**PARTING THOUGHTS**

Say thanks. Say I love you. Notice the good in others. Fill your bank of love. Then feel free to take out a little bit of love in the tough times. The secret to a healthy relationship is a healthy bank balance of love.
BE KIND TO OTHERS, BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU? YES, YOU.

It’s said that we judge ourselves most harshly, that we hold ourselves to ludicrously high standards, and that we are far more forgiving of others than we are of ourselves. We focus on others’ failings and forgive them, while we are more self-critical and forgiving of ourselves. Being self-compassionate means treating yourself with the same level of kindness as you would a good friend, or a loved one. It’s about being kind, even when you’re at your lowest.

Self-forgiveness involves forgiving ourselves for our own failures and for the mistakes we make. When we make mistakes, we often feel guilty or ashamed, especially when we feel we have let ourselves down, or have not done well. Self-forgiveness is the act of letting go of these feelings and moving on.

There is no one way to self-forgive. One method is to write a letter to your own self. Try envisioning that you are writing a letter to your friend who is experiencing some difficulty. The letter can be simple or complex, but it should be from the heart.

WRITE A LETTER TO YOURSELF

One suggestion for practising self-compassion is to write a letter to your own self. Try imagining that you are writing a letter to your friend who is experiencing some difficulty. The letter can be simple or complex, but it should be from the heart.

S O the question arises, “Why do we have a hard time being kind to ourselves?” There are several reasons why self-forgiveness can be so difficult.

1. THE NEED FOR SUPERIORITY

One reason may be that we have a natural inclination to judge ourselves by the standards set by others. In order to feel good about ourselves, we must meet the expectations of others.

2. THE REMEDY = FORGIVING YOURSELF

When things don’t go well, we often blame ourselves. When we blame ourselves, we feel guilty, and we may feel that we are not good enough. We may also feel that we are not worthy of kindness.

3. THE NEED FOR AUTONOMY

Another reason why self-forgiveness can be difficult is that we may feel that we are not in control of our own lives. When we feel that we are not in control, we may feel that we are not worthy of kindness.

4. THE NEED FOR ACCEPTANCE

We often blame ourselves when things don’t go well. We may feel that we are not worthy of kindness. When we feel that we are not worthy of kindness, we may feel that we are not worthy of self-forgiveness.

5. THE NEED FOR CONTROL

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9. THE NEED FOR SUPERIORITY

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By JEFF HADEN  
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Back then you didn’t always stay in your car when you were pulled over by a policeman. Sometimes you have got to take the walk of shame to the officer’s vehicle while other people drive smugly past.

That’s what I did. I mentally replayed pulling up near his vehicle at a stoplight. While it had looked like an unmarked car, there were no lights, no antennae, no snarl of equipment on the dashboard, and he wasn’t wearing a uniform. So I didn’t give it another thought until I looked in my mirror and saw the lights flashing in his car’s grill.

Boy did I want those few seconds back. In the meantime his expression had turned serious. “Now,” he said. “You want to explain why you were going so fast?”

“My alarm didn’t go off this morning,” I answered, “and I was afraid I’d be late for work.”

“What’s it?” he said, “but I’m a gamblin’ man.” When you took off at the stoplight back there I thought, hey, I bet he didn’t notice me.

“I was right. When you hit 65 miles an hour I thought about pulling you over but I thought, nah, wait, I bet he’ll go faster.”

“Then you hit 75. I should have hit my lights but I thought, you know what? There aren’t any cars around, he’s not really putting anyone in danger, and I don’t think he’s done yet.”

“Then you hit 85 and I was really, really tempted... but then I thought, no, hang on, call me crazy but I do believe this boy’s got a little more in him.”

“And sure enough,” he said laughing, “you did!”

IF ONLY I COULD TURN BACK TIME

You know how just after you do something stupid you desperately wish you could turn back time and do things differently?

It was a day I never will forget—same way the people you lead, work with, and care about will never forget the day your first reaction was not to scold or punish but to forgive.

REFLECTING ON MY ACTIONS

And here’s the funny thing: I had gotten tickets before but getting caught didn’t change my behaviour. I focused on the punishment. However foolishly, I resented the punishment. I didn’t think about the fact police officers just want to keep people safe. I didn’t think about the risks I was creating for other people.

Forgiveness made me think about myself and my actions in a way punishment had never had. In the meantime his expression had turned serious. “Now,” he said. “You’re going to be late.”

I whipped my head up. “Look, I know that thing is fast,” he said, nodding towards my bike, “just keep it down. Don’t get yourself hurt.”

“I said thank you at least fifty times in ten seconds and jumped out before he could reconsider. As I was starting my bike he rolled up beside me, passenger window down, and leaned across.

“You can still make it to work on time,” he yelled. “Follow me. I’ll at least get you to where I turn off for the court—so for the second time that day I was speeding—only this time while following a policeman.

PAYING MY PRICE OF PUNISHMENT

Of course, the officer raised his eyebrows.

“That’s it? That’s all you’ve got?” “Yes sir,” I said, turning away to look down. “That’s it. I was in a hurry and...”

FORGIVENESS MADE ME THINK ABOUT MYSELF AND MY ACTIONS IN A WAY PUNISHMENT HAD NEVER HAD.

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“Ahh,” he said. “Wait, I bet he’ll go faster.”

I shrugged and shook my head. “I really was late.”

The officer raised his eyebrows.

“Go on, son,” he said, pretending to be frustrated. He pushed the reset button on the radar. “You’re going to be late.”

“Huh,” he said. I waited for him to start writing the ticket. Instead he sighed.

“Fair enough,” he said. “Next time just go ahead and be late. Showing up late for work isn’t the end of the world.”

“94 mph,” he said laughing, “and I was afraid I’d be late for work.”

“Look, I know that thing is fast,” he said, nodding towards my bike. “Just keep it down. Don’t get yourself hurt.”

Boy did I want those few seconds back. In the meantime his expression had turned serious. “Now,” he said. “You want to explain why you were going so fast?”

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