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IT’S NEVER TOO LATE FOR A FRESH START

3 - OOPS, I DIDN’T DO IT AGAIN!
4 - HR TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2017
6 - REFLECTIVE LEADERSHIP
THE NEW YEAR IS HERE! NOW WHAT?

NEVER before has a year been so roundly shown the door as was 2016. While celebrity deaths are an ineluctable part of life, the losses of last year seemed to take a heavier-than-usual toll on the collective consciousness of the global media-consuming public. From music icons like George Michael, Leonard Cohen, David Bowie and Prince to Hollywood stars like Alan Rickman and Zsa Zsa Gabor, from boxing great Muhammad Ali to celebrated author Harper Lee, entire generations were bereft of the brave souls, creative minds and cultural pathbreakers who shaped their imaginations as they came of age.

As we finally rounded the last lap of the year only to be intercepted four days before 2017 by the passing of author and actor Carrie Fisher, who played Princess Leia in the Star Wars films, the social media universe erupted once more in dismay. Many individuals who personally had a rough year also added their outrage on social media, declaring they were through with 2016 and that the new year could not arrive soon enough.

Well, now it has. The question is, aside from the change in our desk calendars, does it actually feel that different from the week before?

For this issue of the Leaderonomics pullout, we decided to look squarely at the excitement of “new beginnings” that January 1st typically heralds — but also examine how quickly the euphoria can dissipate through lost momentum, and how we must each respond by intentionally preparing to reap a more rewarding year ahead.

To get things rolling, Prema Jayabalan shares her annual personal struggle with New Year Resolutions. Many of us step into January armed with a list of goals that often don’t get met by the time December rolls around. Does that mean we should not bother trying at all? Prema is a firm believer in persevering, and she offers tips for better resolution-making — and keeping.

For human resource practitioners trying to discern what others in their field are focusing their attention and efforts on, Roxhan Thiran shares some of the rumblings he’s picked up from keeping his ear to the ground in organisational development territory these past few months. Whether it’s culture or “the candidate experience” or big data, he’s got them all listed for your consideration on pages 4 and 5.

If you feel like you and your team are plugging headlong into the next calendar’s worth of challenges without having properly considered how you did in the past year, click on the “PAUSE” button now and check out what Kamini Singgam and Sandy Clarke have gathered from industry practitioners and thought leaders about the practice of reflective leadership.

An excellent companion piece to their articles is Michelle Gibbings’ advice on how to forge a fresh, strong beginning even when our past books checked and uninspiring. Take a break next and sit back with one of our favourites from the story archives — master storyteller Bharat Avalan’s recounting of how two good friends set out with a common goal to scale Mount Everest, only for the story to end with outcomes that neither of them were fully prepared for. We hope that this tale will stay with you and help you to frame the challenges that come your way in 2017.

For those of us who’ve resolved to make stronger and better first impressions all around this year, Darshana Sivanantham reviews some often-overlooked basics on etiquette and social protocol to help you strike up new connections on a positive note.

At the organisational level, Travis Bradberry talks about conditions that drive good employees to throw in the towel, and how employers can avoid such outcomes.

In case you’ve still got the blues from 2016 and are not quite convinced you can turn things around this year, Sandy Clarke brings you the true story of Johan Mahmood Merican, deputy director-general of the Economic Planning Unit in the Malaysian Prime Minister’s Department. In his youth, the former CEO of TalentCorp seemed so destined for mediocrity that even his parents acknowledged as much. However, that one stinging watershed conversation was all it took to galvanise Johan’s quiet resolve — and the rest is history.

It’s important to recognise that not everybody gets to begin the new year on a high note. But no matter how ambivalent or dispirited some may feel about the future this first Saturday of 2017, we believe you will find the inspiration to start strong and start fresh in the pages of this pullout.

May you and the outcomes of your endeavours be excellent this year. Blessed 2017!

Siaw Mei Li
Leaderonomics Editorial Team
I T’S the end of 2016 and I am hav- ing a déjà vu moment. I remember sitting down a year ago to identify the great things I wanted to do or achieve in 2016, and now, as I ment- tally list down my resolutions for this year, I realise that some of these resolu- tions were made years ago. It makes me ask myself: Why do I keep repeating them?

But the answer is simple: I keep repeating them because I never keep to them. Whether it’s leading a healthier lifestyle or spending an hour a day just for myself or saving money each month, somehow I fall off the wagon after a few months. For some, the wagon never even moved in the first place.

Just when I thought that I was one of the few facing this problem, I was relieved of this notion by Professor John C. Norcross, a professor of psychol- ogy from the University of Scranton. According to one of his studies, less than 10% of New Year resolutions are actually achieved.

However, this is no excuse for not being able to keep to your resolutions. So, I started doing some reading on resolutions and I found a few interesting insights that I could relate to.

SLIPPING AWAY
There are few reasons why we fail in keeping to our resolutions. First, we have the tendency to set goals that we should achieve rather than the ones we want to achieve. For example, most of us include ‘I want to eat healthy’ on our list but how many of us really mean it and want it? If you are one who enjoys food, then you are especially at risk of defaulting on this resolution. We set such resolutions because of social pressure. If you don’t truly want something for yourself, then you are never going to do justice to the resolution.

Another common mistake we make is putting too many things on our resolu- tion list. I am guilty of that. I remember certain years when my resolution list was a full one-pager. This causes stress and anxiety. We become so obsessed with our overwhelming list that we spend more time worrying about ways to achieve what’s on it rather than actually acting on them. The overload obviously becomes unachievable due to time con- straints and other commitments, which then results in us abandoning our list once and for all.

Creating bigger items to achieve and repeating them each year in our resolu- tions is another error. If you have been including the same New Year’s resolution item in your list for the past two years, it’s time to eliminate it from your 2017 list. This does not mean you should stop pursuing it, since that will also cause you unwanted stress. Instead, plan and go for it when you really want to and are all ready for it. Remember this saying by Einstein: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting differ- ent results.” You don’t want anything like that happening to you!

ONE STEP AT A TIME
Now that I have identified some core reasons for the failure to keep resolu- tions, I am learning how to get them right for the year. Here are some tips I have gathered:

BE THANKFUL
Before you even get started on your resolutions list, give yourself a huge pat on the back and thank yourself because you are an achiever! Look back on the past year and see how you have grown. Appreciate yourself for all the accomplishments you made and the new knowledge you gained. Once you have listed down your accomplishments, you will get a clearer picture of the types of goals to set for this year. This is because you have realised your capability and it gives you the inner drive to achieve your goals for the year.

LIMIT YOURSELF
Time to get that list shorter, everyone! This is what I plan to do and maybe you could follow suit. For 2017, I plan to list down the top four things that I want to accomplish. It may seem little for some but I know that come the end of the year, when I tick off the check list, I am going to be immensely satisfied, as I will have achieved what I had set out to do. Furthermore, I will have developed some good traits that helped me keep to my goals.

BE REALISTIC AND SPECIFIC
Don’t put down goals that are too big or vague. When setting a resolution, you need to ensure that you are specific about what you want to do and that it’s within your control. Don’t get overambitious and set resolutions that are way beyond your limits as this will only make you feel worse when you fail to achieve them. If you had not saved a single cent for a holiday yet and you’re not earning a six-figure income, it’s probably ridiculous to include an extended year-end tour of Europe on your list. Instead, put down something realistic like “I want to go to Bali for a week,” which is definitely achievable. Prevent from writing “lose weight” as your resolution. That’s too vague. Instead, be specific and say that you want to lose 5kg by March. That way, you know you have three months to lose the intended weight and will work towards that goal within the given time frame.

IN A NUTSHELL
We can all achieve our goals if we put our minds and hearts to it. It’s all about carving them out in a way that is simple, realistic and doable. Start small and slowly but surely work towards the bigger picture. Let’s get our steps right this time around. All the best with your 2017 resolutions and Happy New Year, everyone!

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS . . . WHY CAN’T WE KEEP TO THEM?

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This article is available at www. leaderonomics.com, where you can download the PDF version.

Prema Jayabalan has the tendency to get overambitious when setting goals. Writing this article has enabled her to get a real picture on how goals are meant to be set. It’s about taking one step at a time. She is also keen on getting insights from others as well. If you have anything to share, write to her at prema.jayabalan@ leaderonomics.com

OOPS – I DIDN’T DO IT AGAIN!

By PREMA JAYABALAN
prema.jayabalan@leaderonomics.com

T'S the end of 2016 and I am hav- ing a déjà vu moment. I remember sitting down a year ago to identify the great things I wanted to do or achieve in 2016, and now, as I ment- tally list down my resolutions for this year, I realise that some of these resolu- tions were made years ago. It makes me ask myself: Why do I keep repeating them?

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However, this is no excuse for not being able to keep to your resolutions. So, I started doing some reading on resolutions and I found a few interesting insights that I could relate to.
1 HR WILL FINALLY GO DIGITAL IN A BIG WAY
The 2017 theme for HR in Asia could possibly be summarized as “digital HR.” A study by Dan Schawbel, author and research analyst, claims that HR and business leaders would rather HR teams see HR as “digitalizing.”

2 HR WILL START FOCUSING ON THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE
In the post-2016 era, companies and business leaders have focused on “customer experience” with an emphasis on delighting and “wowing” their customers. To date, organizations have increased customer experience programs, with HR becoming more involved in improving digital learning, digital cocktails and various HR processes. HR will also have to experiment and learn to leverage digital tools for crowdsourcing, whereby we can obtain referrals, ideas, content, and HR services through online platforms.

3 CULTURE WILL BE AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT BUSINESS AGENDA
We have seen organizations that have encouraged teams to think outside the box and come up with innovative ideas. This has led to a culture that is more inclusive, and we have seen organizations that are becoming more agile and flexible. However, companies that have a culture that is too agile and flexible might struggle to implement changes. Organisations are now focusing on improving employee experience to ensure that they are seen as a great place to work.

4 HR WILL START INVESTING IN BIG DATA AND REAL-TIME FEEDBACK
Last year we saw a rise in digital learning. This year we will see more companies investing in big data and analytics. We will also see more companies using data to inform decision-making and improve employee experience. This will help organizations to make better decisions and improve the employee experience across all levels.

5 DIGITAL LEARNING WILL TAKE OFF IN A BIG WAY, AND DEVELOPMENT
Last year we saw a rise in digital learning. This year we will see more companies investing in big data and analytics. We will also see more companies using data to inform decision-making and improve employee experience. This will help organizations to make better decisions and improve the employee experience across all levels.

6 HR WILL FOCUS ON MANY TRAITS
In the past, HR has been mainly about recruiting and retaining employees. But today, we see organizations that are focusing on many traits, including leadership, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and creativity. This will help organizations to improve their overall performance and become more competitive.

7 HR WILL RADICALLY APPROACH THE FUTURE OF WORK EXPERIENCE TO CONTINUE TO GROW
With the rise of automation and artificial intelligence, the future of work is changing. HR leaders will need to rethink how they approach the future of work experience and create new models to support employees in the workplace.

8 HR WILL BEGIN MANAGING THE REAL EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE
In the past, HR was mainly about managing employee relationships. But today, we see organizations that are focusing on managing the real employees experience. This will help organizations to improve their overall performance and become more competitive.

9 HR WILL START TO ENGAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA
Many companies have started using social media to engage with employees. This will help organizations to improve their overall performance and become more competitive.

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Managing analytics and employee’s real-time feedback is increasingly critical for HR.

HR as Business Leader
Outsourcing HR, customer-focused HR, strategy, expert & excellent administrator

HR as Swanaght
Succession planning, people management, people strategy

HR as Functional Expert
Experience in manpower planning, hiring, etc.

HR as Administrator

Like this article? Follow us on @Leaderonomics on Instagram.
A sys turn a brand new year and prepare to embrace the hold development it brings, you may also put aside some time to reflect on the past year. The idea of reflection is not unheard of, but to do so now shows us that we have accomplished an individual and as an organization. It is an essentially essential practice for leaders.

While reflective leadership is not a new concept, it is yet to be the most widely practised approach. This is mainly because, although good work starts, it’s all about moving forward and keeping ourselves busy with the next project, hitting the latest performance target, or catching up with unfollowed business. Not many leaders would take time to do so for personal benefit — or better still, the entire organisation — to pause and look back on the execution of the last game plan and analyse the challenges, goals and results that have unfolded so far. Some might argue that this is even a waste of time.

According to leadership coach Carl Robinson, professionals who practice reflective leadership are able to put aside day-to-day pressures, avoid misinterpretation, miss out on opportunities, experience the unexamined life, and are invited to reflect, contemplate, or contemplate. They move from being just a professional or technical expert to being an authentic leader, which many of us desire.

Leaders who pause to reflect reap benefits in a healthier work environment

By Kamini Singam

As you step into a brand new year and prepare to embrace the hold development it brings, you may also put aside some time to reflect on the past year. The idea of reflection is not unheard of, but to do so now shows us that we have accomplished an individual and as an organisation. It is an essentially essential practice for leaders.

STOP, REFLECT, GO!

The reflection session can then chew out the cookie or offer of the day and make it easier for any leader to engage with the team.

Leadership development should start at the individual level. Here’s our Reflection Starter Kit to help you get started with your plans. These steps can be tailor-made to your needs and the nature of your business.

Reflection is a process of taking stock of past events, gathering insights, and understanding the outcomes. It involves self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-evaluation. The process of reflection helps leaders to gain a better understanding of their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It also helps them to identify areas for growth and improvement.

Reflection is not just for leaders; it is for everyone. It is an important skill for building relationships, improving performance, and developing a growth mindset. Reflection can be a powerful tool for personal and professional development.

In conclusion

With clearly defined parameters for reflection and feedback, and tools for measuring impact, the reflective thinking process can be made more effective. These parameters can range from reflection on aspects of communication and relationship-building to the outcomes of decisions and actions.

Reflection is essential for growth and development. It helps leaders to understand their own biases and assumptions, to identify areas for improvement, and to develop a deeper understanding of the people and situations they encounter.

Reflection is a powerful tool for leadership development. It helps leaders to gain a better understanding of their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It also helps them to identify areas for growth and improvement. Reflection can be a powerful tool for building relationships, improving performance, and developing a growth mindset.

For more information on leadership development andreflection, visit www.leaderonomics.com.
Begin afresh even when you have unfinished business

By MICHÉLE GIBBINGS
editor@leaderonomics.com

The start of a new year is a good time to think about how you and your team are spending your time at work. As American author Henry David Thoreau said: “It’s not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about?”

If you want to make a difference in your organisation and have a team that makes progress, it’s important to consider the meaning of time.

People often use time as a metaphor for life. The logic is that once time has been spent, you can’t get it back. And you can’t spend “future” time – because you can’t spend what you don’t have.

If you follow that line of reasoning, it’s the present that you should be most concerned with. Why? Because it is only the present time that you can be certain you have.

However, that’s really not the case. To thrive in today’s complex working environment, leaders need to consider all three aspects of time – the past, the present and the future.

Reflecting on the past helps with learning. Thinking about the future helps with goal-setting. Being present and using your time wisely helps advance you towards those goals.

Ask yourself and your team members:

- Which of these elements do you spend the most time on?
- Are you dwelling on the past?
- Are you so focused on the present that you don’t chart future plans? Or
- Are you so fixed on the future that you don’t know how to enjoy the present?

Reflecting on the past and thinking about your future goals while staying focused on what you need to do in the present is a delicate balance. Influential leaders know how to balance all three.

They recognise the need to look behind – but not for so long that they get lost in the past. Reflecting on past experiences and learning from them is essential, but being fixed on something that has passed – and which you cannot change – is very unhealthy.

Influential leaders also understand how to focus on the present – but not to the extent that their concentration on the present precludes them from planning for the future and making decisions that have long-term, sustainable outcomes.

Looking ahead means a leader scans the horizon and thinks ahead. They take a step back and see the bigger picture. This perspective is important as it helps them understand what may be changing in a global and societal context, and what they need to do to help their team and the organisation make good progress, and stay ahead of the game.

DEALING WITH CHANGE

This balancing of perspectives is particularly important if your team has gone through a lot of change in the past year and is therefore feeling fatigued and weary from disruption and adjustment. They need to see the progress they have made and to work through the challenges they’ve faced.

The word “progress” commonly means to “move forward” or “advance”. Its definition implies that progress is always a forward action.

But progress isn’t that simple. It comes in many shapes and sizes. And it’s certainly not a one-way street. When you’re making an organisational change that’s complex, it can feel like one step forward and then one step backwards. It’s certainly never just a straight line to the finish.

As Harvard academic Rosabeth Moss Kanter said: “Everything can look like failure in the middle.”

Persevering despite setbacks and pushing through the hard middles isn’t easy. It’s much easier to lose focus, and to divert your attention to something else.

It’s much easier to lose focus, and to divert your attention to something else – finding ways to show progress.

There were five options:

- Recognition for good work
- Incentive and rewards
- Sense of progress
- Clear goals and targets
- Interpersonal connections

The managers thought the answer was recognition for good work. But for the employees it was progress.

The researchers found that when workers thought they were making headway in their jobs, or when they received support that helped them overcome obstacles, their emotions were positive and their drive to succeed was at its peak.

In contrast, on the days when they encountered roadblocks and setbacks, their motivation was at its lowest, which goes to show that it’s incredibly demotivating when progress is impeded.

STAYING IN THE GAME

Leading change can be challenging and as the reality of change hits home, leaders can become uncertain as they see momentum waning and milestones slipping. The team starts to question their ability to deliver, and teamwork starts to suffer as people look for someone to blame for the lack of progress.

It is at this point that project deliverables start to be de-scoped, activities are re-prioritised and the project team is often restructured. This, too, is the time that change leadership really needs to come to the fore. Everyone wants to see that they are making headway, and that their contribution is making a difference.

Make the progress visible. Don’t miss out on celebrating achievements and keep the support system strong when team energy seems to be slipping away.

Progress is stalled. However, when you check your progress, you may be surprised at what you see. You may have progressed further than you think.

The importance of progress was demonstrated by a 2010 study reported in the Harvard Business Review. Researchers Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer asked leaders and employees what they thought motivated employees the most.

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Make the progress visible. Don’t miss out on celebrating achievements and keep the support system strong when team energy seems to be slipping away.
By BHARAT AVALANI
editor@leaderonomics.com

O
nce you have traveled, the voyage never ends but is played out over and over again in the quietest corners. The mind can never break off from the journey. I recently travelled to Sri Lanka and sat next to Johann Pienis, the first Sri Lankan who almost made it to Mount Everest in May this year. Coincidentally, both of us had missed our flight from Kuala Lumpur the previous day.

A CHILDHOOD DREAM
Johann is a prominent hairstylist. He happened to mention to his client that it was his childhood dream to climb Mount Everest. His client then introduced him to Jayanthi Kuru Utumpala, a gender activist, who shared a similar dream. Johann and Jayanthi met in 2011 and over five years, planned and trained together. Collectively, they gained mountaineering experience by climbing several peaks. In 2011, they scaled Island Peak in the Himalaya, and in 2014 they climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. They went rock climbing at every opportunity. This included the Spanish Pyrenees and Argentinian Andes. They also climbed mountains in South Africa, Thailand and the United Kingdom.

THE ULTIMATE CLimb
It had been three years since anyone made it to the summit of the world’s tallest mountain due to the 2013 earthquake and avalanche that claimed 18 lives. In 2016, Johann and Jayanthi were fortunate to be chosen to climb Mount Everest. In May, Jayanthi climbed 8,848m to stand on top of the world. It wasn’t an easy climb. In earlier rotations, Jayanthi was slow on one of her climbs. Her guides cautioned her that unless she was up to speed by a certain timing, she would not be allowed to adhere to the timing.

Unfortunately, a few climbers were slow and it resulted in Johann running out of oxygen. Just 300m short from the summit, he was told by his shepa guide that he would have to turn around. At that moment, Johann thought of his loved ones, his clients, his sponsors and how people would remember him (for his near win).

From where he stood then, stuck so near, yet it was still far from his reach. At that moment, Johann thought of the lights at the summit. He had no choice but to turn back. It was one of the hardest things he ever had to do. It was too near, yet it was still far from his reach. Jayanthi, his mountaineering partner, shed tears when she found out that Johann couldn’t make it, as it had been their dream to reach the summit together.

SAME MOUNTAIN, DIFFERENT OBJECT LESSONS
While Jayanthi was slow, she made it to the peak with the support of her teammates. Johann, in spite of being physically stronger, didn’t make it to the summit due to circumstances that were beyond his control.

Even though Johann didn’t reach the peak, he received a hero’s welcome on his safe return to Sri Lanka. People still celebrated his efforts for braving himself to climb Mount Everest, despite his unsuccessful attempt to reach the top. “It has made me stronger. Mentally and spiritually, I feel completely changed. I can still say that I’ve stood on one of the highest places in the world,” Johann said.

The climb has also changed Jayanthi personally. Although she was not the strongest or the fastest in the group, her unexpected feat in conquering Mount Everest through sheer willpower has renewed her strength and commitment to furthering the cause of women in society.

“A story of two friends and one mountain

WIN OR LOSE, CELEBRATE EFFORTS ANYWAY
I had a chance to share Johann’s and Jayanthi’s story at the Unilever Annual Sales Conference in Pakistan. My key message was that both effort and success need to be rewarded and acknowledged accordingly.

In the corporate world, the environment we’re in plays a significant role in ensuring sustainable success as a team. If you want to win as a team, your team needs to move at the same pace as you. Essentially, we are only as strong as our weakest links.

Likewise, members of the team who are less strong can be challenged to go beyond how they see themselves and are less strong can be challenged to go beyond how they see themselves and society.

Essentially, we are only as strong as our weakest links.

Johann (left) and Jayanthi.

My question to you: Are you ready to conquer your own Mount Everest?”

“IT IS NOT THE MOUNTAIN THAT WE CONQUER BUT OURSELVES.” — Sir Edmund Hillary

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Bharat Avalani is a faculty member of Leaderonomics who specialises in branding and marketing education and insights to organisations. He is a memory collector and a great storyteller. To share your thoughts on this story, write to editor@leaderonomics.com. To experience challenging and inspiring fast-paced Mount Everest climb through the Silega Expedition business simulation, e-mail training@leaderonomics.com for more information.
GOOD MANNERS: YOUR FIRST BUSINESS CARD

By DARSHANA SIVANANTHAM
editor@leaderonomics.com

FIRST impressions matter. We are raised in a society that places high regard on good manners and values. It doesn’t come as a surprise that most of us were taught to say our please and thank you’s early in life. In fact, it is very much an integral part of the Malaysian culture. Leaderonomics had a chance to attend an insightful talk by Idriz Konjari, Albania’s former ambassador to Malaysia, on social graces and the relevance of etiquette and protocol in current times. Read on to see how a little bit of good manners can take you a long way.

SOCIAL GRACE, ETIQUETTE AND PROTOCOL

Social grace is simply how we interact in social situations. These include the spectrum of etiquette, manners, dressing, and refinement. In earlier times, these were required skills taught to young women in finishing school. Etiquette and protocol are a customary code of polite behaviour in society. It’s a guide for good behaviour and commendable manners. Etiquette constantly changes, to suit society as it evolves; protocol however, rarely does.

As we probably encounter more occasions where there is a need to practise good etiquette, here’s a set of simple etiquette tips for every day engagements.

INTRODUCING PEOPLE
Yes, there is an art to introducing people. The right way to introduce someone, is to first state the name of the person, followed by a formal introduction to another.

For example, “Dave, I would like to introduce you to Ken.” Other phrases you can use include “please meet” or “this is”. A proper introduction is only complete when you also offer some details about each person. If you have some knowledge of common interests that they may share, this will help them to connect and subsequently carry on the conversation.

DRESS CODE

This is a rather tricky one. Typically, there are a few general categories of dress code that we follow – black tie or formal, white tie, cocktail, smart casual and casual.

Black tie events call for formal attire. Men are expected to wear dark suits or tuxedos, while women should be dressed in elegant gowns or dresses over knee length. Hair must be styled, worn up or down. In some countries, traditional and ethnic attire is also acceptable as formal or black tie attire.

White tie events are more formal than black tie events. Dress code for these events require men to be in full formal attire (white tie, vest and shirt). Women must wear their hair up, and be dressed in elegant gowns. Some common white tie events include charity and society balls. A more familiar dress code is the cocktail – which usually refers to semi-formal short or long elegant dresses for women, and dark suits for men.

Smart casual is one we hear often, being a common dress code at the office. The general rule of thumb for smart casual requires at least a smart jacket, and closed shoes. It is also acceptable for women to wear pants with this dress code. Although denim (and jeans) are not considered smart casual, in some cultures, it is perfectly acceptable to pair this with a smart jacket.

Finally, the dress code we all love – casual! Here’s where we wear our jeans, summer dresses and skirts. However, even the casual dress code has some rules. We may assume that flip-flops or slippers are suitable to wear with this dress code, but it’s inappropriate in some settings.

DINING

There’s a whole list of do’s and don’ts when it comes to dining. To get started, it is always important to remember that burping, slurping, talking with your mouth full, and hands or elbows on the table are considered bad table manners. It’s also important to remember that when dining, it isn’t only about the food; it’s also about the company. When seated at a table with other guests, always remember to politely engage others in conversation.

There’s a whole list of cutlery that needs some remembrance in a formal table setting. We’re not going to go into ample information available online on how to use forks, spoons and knives the right way. The key is to always remember that like everything else in life, even this can be learnt and applied accordingly. After every dining experience, do take time to send over a personal thank you note to your host.

CARRYING CONVERSATIONS

While starting conversations can be easy for some, sustaining them can be difficult. Some key pointers to keep in mind when carrying conversations include:

Talk less, and listen more
Be prepared with topics to discuss
Tailor conversations to suit your listeners
Avoid sensitive topics such as politics and religion

IF ALL ELSE FAILS – JUST SMILE

The above serve as a guide to practising good etiquette in various situations that arise in our lives. Having the knowledge of good etiquette and practising it helps us in many ways, and reflects highly on the way we carry ourselves as individuals interacting in a society that places high value on good practices and manners.

If all else fails – then just use the most important curve on your body – your smile! A genuine, warm smile makes up for anything. If it comes from the right place.
By TRAVIS BRADBERRY
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It’s tough to hold on to good employees, but it shouldn’t be. Most of the mistakes that companies make are easily avoided. When you do make mistakes, your best employees are the first to go, because they have the most options. If you can’t keep your best employees engaged, you can’t keep your best employees. While this should be common sense, it isn’t common enough. A survey by technology company CEB found that one-third of star employees feel disengaged from their employer and are already looking for a new job.

When you lose good employees, they don’t disengage all at once. Instead, their interest in their jobs slowly dissipates. Michael Kibler, who has spent much of his career studying this phenomenon, refers to it as brownout. Like dying stars, star employees slowly lose their fire for their jobs.

“Brownout is different from burnout because workers affected by it are not in obvious crisis,” Kibler said. “They seem to be performing fine: putting in massive hours, grinding out work while contributing to teams, and saying all the right things in meetings. However, they are operating in a silent state of continual overwhelm, and the predictable consequence is disengagement.”

In order to prevent brownout and to retain top talent, companies and managers must understand what they’re doing that contributes to this slow fade. The following practices are the worst offenders, and they must be abolished if you’re going to hang on to good employees.

THEY MAKE A LOT OF STUPID RULES

Companies need to have rules—that’s a given—but they don’t have to be shortsighted and lazy attempts at creating order. Whether it’s an overzealous attendance policy or taking employees’ frequent flyer miles, even a couple of unnecessary rules can drive people crazy. When good employees feel like big brother is watching, they’ll find somewhere else to work.

THEY TREAT EVERYONE EQUALLY

While this tactic works with school children, the workplace ought to function differently. Treating everyone equally shows your top performers that no matter how high they perform (and, typically, top performers are work horses), they will be treated the same as the bozo who does nothing more than punch the clock.

THEY TOLERATE POOR PERFORMANCE

It’s said that in jazz bands, the band is only as good as the worst player; no matter how great some members may be, everyone hears the worst player. The same goes for a company. When you permit weak links to exist without consequence, they drag everyone else down, especially your top performers.

THEY DON’T RECOGNISE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

It’s easy to underestimate the power of a pat on the back, especially with top performers who are intrinsically motivated. Everyone likes kudos, none more so than those who work hard and give their all. Rewarding individual accomplishments shows that you’re paying attention. Managers need to communicate with their people to find out what makes them feel good (for some, it’s a raise; for others, it’s public recognition) and then reward them for a job well done. With top performers, this will happen often if you’re doing it right.

THEY DON’T CARE ABOUT PEOPLE

More than half the people who leave their jobs do so because of their relationship with their boss. Smart companies make certain that their managers know how to balance being professional with being human. These are the bosses who celebrate their employees’ successes, empathise with those going through hard times, and challenge them, even when it hurts. Bosses who fail to really care will always have high turnover rates. It’s impossible to work for someone for eight-plus hours a day when they aren’t personally involved and don’t care about anything other than your output.

THEY DON’T SHOW PEOPLE THE BIG PICTURE

It may seem efficient to simply send employees assignments and move on, but leaving out the big picture is a deal breaker for star performers. Star performers shoulder heavier loads because they are passionate. Providing opportunities for them to pursue their passions improves their productivity and job satisfaction, but many managers want employees to work within a little box. These managers fear that productivity will decline if they let employees expand their focus and pursue their passions. This fear is unfounded. Studies have shown that people who are able to pursue their passions at work experience flow, a euphoric state of mind that is five times more productive than the norm.

THEY DON’T MAKE THINGS FUN

If people aren’t having fun at work, then you’re doing it wrong. People don’t give their all if they aren’t having fun, and fun is a major protector against brownout. The best companies to work for know the importance of letting employees loosen up a little. Google, for example, does just about everything it can to make work fun—free meals, bowling alleys, and fitness classes, to name a few. The idea is simple: if work is fun, you’ll not only perform better, but also stick around for longer hours and an even longer career.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Managers tend to blame their turnover problems on everything under the sun while ignoring the crux of the matter: people don’t leave jobs; they leave managers.
By SANDY CLARKE
editor@leaderonomics.com

JOHAN Mahmood Merican knows failure all too well. As a young man, his parents were worried about his academic ability. He flunked his first interview at Cambridge University, and he was among the worst performers in the first year of his first job.

Had anyone told young Johan that he would end up graduating with a first-class degree in Economics from Cambridge – one of the world’s most esteemed institutions – he would have shaken his head in amused disbelief. If they added that he would go on to enjoy a successful career that would include a stint as chief executive officer of TalentCorp and becoming deputy director-general of Malaysia’s Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister’s Department apart from being a notable motivational speaker, he might have advised the person to take a much-needed lie-down. And yet, Johan’s career has included these impressive milestones and more – and it all stemmed from a moment when his father addressed his mother’s concerns by saying, “Maybe we just need to accept that he’s not as bright as his siblings.”

That was all the motivation young Johan needed to push himself to success. In an interview with Leaderonomics, he explained how that moment hit him hard – it’s a painful thing to know those closest to you openly expect little of your abilities. He flunked his first year, as he found himself among the worst performers. The first interview at Cambridge University, following the award of a Sime Darby scholarship, he was a top student; however, in his first graduate job at a London audit firm, his performance bombed in the first year, as he found himself among the worst performers.

That moment taught him humility, as well as the importance of examining where our strengths and weaknesses lie. Johan has clearly made great use of the lessons learnt from his failures. Indeed, he advocates a fearless approach to failing. We are all bound to make mistakes – what counts is how we move forward and learn from those mistakes. Perhaps, it’s the fear of failing that holds many of us back from realising our potential and contributing to society with meaning and purpose.

For Johan, it’s in daring to fail – to take chances on ourselves – that we can make and give the best of ourselves. That’s all the motivation one needs to push himself to success. In an interview with Leaderonomics, he explained how that moment hit him hard – it’s a painful thing to know those closest to you openly expect little of your abilities.

JOHAN’S TOP 4 TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. PROVE YOURSELF
People may doubt you. Certain skills and qualities don’t come easy for you – but your fate is far from sealed. If you want to succeed, take control and push yourself beyond your comfort zone. Use those who doubt you as motivation to prove to them – and yourself – that you can succeed.

2. RESPOND TO LUCK
Johan failed in his first interview at Cambridge University, but through a stroke of luck, he gained admission through a scholarship programme. Regardless, he still had to put in the work. Rather than thinking he had “made it,” he took full advantage of his good fortune and put his all into his studies.

3. WHAT DO YOU WANT IN LIFE?
Ask yourself this question – too many people fail to do so. You don’t need a detailed plan to begin with, but having some idea of the direction you want to head will allow you to have a better idea of what you need to do.

4. PUSH YOURSELF
To Johan, if you’ve never failed, it’s likely that you’re playing it safe. As he says, “success zones are beautiful places, but nothing ever grows there.” Stretching the boundaries, learning, getting rid of the fear of making mistakes and pushing yourself towards realising your potential will lead you to great accomplishments.

HOW FAILURES CAN PUSH US TOWARD SUCCESS

REAL AND REEL LEADERSHIP
Johan is not your typical leading business figure. His soft spoken manner betrays a resolute humility, and the movie buff loves to squeeze in film analogies – whenever the opportunity arises – to get his message across. But Johan also has a steely determination that radiates from his core – however tough a situation may be, he never gives up trying to make the best of even the most challenging circumstances. He explains how he “felt like a hero” after gaining a first at Cambridge, following the award of a Sime Darby scholarship. He was a top student, however, in his first graduate job at a London audit firm, his performance bombed in the first year, as he found himself among the worst performers.

Fear Failure, Not! Johan has clearly made great use of the lessons learnt from his failures. Indeed, he advocates a fearless approach to failing. We are all bound to make mistakes – what counts is how we move forward and learn from those mistakes. Perhaps, it’s the fear of failing that holds many of us back from realising our potential and contributing to society with meaning and purpose.

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THE MORE SETBACKS, THE MERRIER

To our interview with Johan on Dare To Fail, head over to leaderonomics.com/tag/dare-to-fail or scan the QR code on the left.

3 LEADERS WHO FAILED BEFORE SUCCEEDING

ALBERT EINSTEIN
When the professor who revolutionised physics with his theory of relativity was 16, the head of his Munich school wrote in a damming report: “He will never amount to anything.” Einstein, who died in 1955, at the age of 76 – after a career garnished with honours including a Nobel Prize – clearly took the criticism on the chin.

OPRAH WINFREY
The undisputed queen of the United States TV was fired from her job as a news anchor in Baltimore within seven months for getting “too emotionally invested” in the stories, back in the 80s. Her boss said she was “unfit for TV news.” Winfrey called it her “first and worst failure” but she went on to have a daytime show for 25 years, her own TV channel and a fortune estimated at $2.5 billion.

JACK MA
Ma has come a long way from the student days when he failed multiple school exams and had to take his college entrance exams twice. Prior to founding his e-commerce company, Alibaba, he was turned down for some 30 jobs. Today, Ma has navigated his company through highs and lows to become the world’s largest retailer in April 2016. His net worth is estimated at around US$27.9 billion.

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