There are more than 12 great leadership articles in this week’s pullout. However, we have some 50 new articles each month, plus a library of 4,000 great videos, podcasts and articles at www.leaderonomics.com.

Don’t miss out on greatness. Surf the site and grow as a leader today!

Saturday 11 March 2017

MARRYING PASSION WITH PLANNING
BEYOND DIVERSITY TO TRUE EQUITY
CONUNDRUM OF THE WORKING MUM

CELEBRATING THE EVERYDAY HEROES AMONG US
T here are several themes and initiatives running in con-
junction with International Women’s Day this year.

On the International
Women’s Day website, the hashtag for 2017 is #BeBoldForChange.
The Women’s March movement, which formed out of growing concern
over misogyny following the election of United States President Donald J.
Trump’s election, declared March 8 the day for an International Women’s Strike.

At the time of writing, allies of the Women’s March in more than 30
countries have pledged solidarity with their sisters in the US by committing
to “3/8 Day Without A Woman”. Among other things, this means taking leave
from work on the 8th and refraining from all shopping except at small-
scale women- or minority-owned businesses.

The irony of the strike is that its impact would be most visible precisely
in societies that already enjoy relatively high levels of women’s participation in the workforce and access to education and information. Which brings us to a third theme for the day.

This year, the rallying cry of the United Nations Entity for Gender
Equality and the Empowerment of Women – better known as UN Women
– is “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030”. It’s a call
for equal workplace gender representation in every sense – not just in terms
of employment but also the quality and level of employment.

UN Women reports that globally, only 50% of working age women are
represented in the labour force. (In comparison, the rate of representation
for men is 76%). Also of great concern is that an overwhelming majority
of the world’s women work in the infor-
mation economy. They tend to contribute significantly to domestic work while
holding lower-skill jobs that pay less, are less stable, and offer little or no
social protection at all.

Although Malaysia has more
women than men enrolled in local
tertiary education and has raised its
female labour participation rate to
55% – higher than the average
overall – local think tank the Penang
Institute noted that many Malaysian
women remain in vulnerable, lowly
paid or unemployed employment.

Despite women outnumbering
their male peers in university, the
Malaysian workforce gender ratio
stands at 60:40 in favour of men.

Somewhere along the line, our female university graduates drop out of the workforce.

Many stop working to care for young
families and never return. It is an inter-
nal brain drain for which our nation’s
talent pool becomes far poorer in the
long run.

The Star reported last year that
women held 26.3% of top manage-
ment positions public-listed companies (PLCs) in 2015. The Malaysian govern-
ment aims to raise this figure to 30% by 2020, but what will it take to reach
and surpass that number?

In this issue, the leadership
team and our contributing writers
weigh in on the challenges we must
tackle to make the workplace more
centric not only for women’s partic-
ipation today but also for their success
and long-term career pathing.

Joana Deodato discusses women’s
representation in the workforce, why it matters and how one of us can help through various roles both at work and outside the office.

Evelyn Teh and Vinesh Naidoo exam-
ine how women and men unknowing-
ly maintain systemic barriers to gender
equality and what can be done to start
dismantling these hur-
dles for women in the workplace.

Be sure not to miss out on
this week’s exclusive online content! Key in your
shortlink or scan the QR code on
our centrepiece to read Vinesh’s
thoughts on what Star Wars’
Princess Leia can teach us
about leadership.

So do women make better leaders than men? Sandy Clarke lays out the
disadvantages for women in the
workplace and government. The time to keep
pushing for that change is now.

Offering a glimpse into the
struggles and second-guessing that
working mothers face every day,
contributing writer Rwan-Ann Lin and Leaderonomics’ Prema Jayabalan write
candidly from their respective personal experiences about juggling the
competing demands of motherhood
and career.

For women contemplating the
challenge of balancing an enduring
personal and professional brand, Adam
Gilad draws timeless lessons from pop
icon Madonna.

We also revisit our interview
with Datuk Mazlan Othman – Malaysia’s first
astrophysicist, the first Director of the country’s National Space Agency
Angkasada, and the woman who led the
Angkasawan Project that successfully
launched the nation’s first astronaut,
Datuk Dr Sheik Muszaphar Shukor,
into space. The insights she shares are
in turns both grounded and practical,
as well as out-of-the-box and richly
imaginative.

And in this week’s Be A Leader
column, our CEO Roshan Thiran
reminds female and male leaders alike
not to get caught up in dualistic
thinking. Both passion and planning
are necessary to achieve and sustain
success, although each in its turn may
play a bigger role at key moments in our
careers and lives.

To all women and allies in the strug-
gle to grow leaders and communities
of love: May the celebrations of this
occasion to encourage and celebrate
our’s efforts to build a more gender
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To all women and allies in the strug-

PASSION WITHOUT A PLAN CAN BE AIMLESS

By ROSHAN THIRAN
roshan.thiran@leaderonomics.com

I speak at many women's leadership sessions and the question of "luck" generally rears its head. Some women truly believe that others are luckier than they are and are always in the right place at the right time. I wrote a piece on luck a few years ago and I always respond that there is more to success than luck.

Invariably, the conversation then gets to passion. Women (and men) who are passionate succeed. Others will disagree and say hard work and planning are much more critical than passion.

So which is most important – to have passion or a plan?

I'll bet many people will have an initial reaction to this question, and everyone will have well-thought out reasons as to why their choice trumps the other. Personally, when I first pondered this question many years ago, I was instinctively drawn towards passion as the most important trait. Without passion, there's no commitment and without commitment, there's no perseverance. And with no perseverance, most people fall at the first hurdle in pursuit of their goals and ambitions.

But passion without a plan can be aimless. It can also become an obsession and, like a raging fire, if there is no careful direction, it can get out of control and consume us. Of course, on the other hand, a plan without passion can be a laborious and cumbersome process – I've yet to hear of any success story that was built solely on a plan. Without an internal passion driving the overall vision.

STEPPING OUTSIDE THE BOX

In business, as with life, we can get caught up in dualistic thinking. The "this or that" approach is more often a hindrance than a help, and yet it's one we see embraced all the time. How many career choices are weighed by this measure? You could try to become an artist, but you probably won't make any money. Better to become a banker, that way, you'll have a solid career and income. Here we see "this or that" in full flow: you can either be creative or sensible, but you can't be both. . . Why not?

This modern-day conventional wisdom directs us to be boxed in, to compact the complexity and range of who we are into a single space. Passion is for the few who are creative enough to put it to good use. And yet, when we think of great minds of the past – those who weren't born great – we see this dichotomy smashed to pieces.

Albert Einstein was told at school he'd never amount to much. The renowned and revered physicist was a genius . . . and one who credits his success to his ability to play the violin. Einstein once said of playing this instrument that the "most joy in my life has come to me from my violin," and he would often play classical music as a brainstorming technique. Another giant of history, Leonardo da Vinci, had a whole range of talents. Many people associate the Italian icon with his famous paintings. And yet, he was also a musician, cartographer, mathematician, sculptor, engineer and geologist, among other things. And don't get me started on my all-time favourite – Benjamin Franklin – who did literally everything and did it well. Also, let us not forget Helen Kellies.

POTENTIAL BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Whenever I advise young students and professionals, I try to remind them to delve into as much of the human experience as possible, just as any great mind of the past and present has done. It's by immersing ourselves in the world that we come alive to the possibilities that we can create through the passions that we discover. We all see things through different perspectives, and so our potential to contribute to the world is absolutely unique.

The flip-side to this, of course, is the requirement for a plan of action. To briefly counter the "luck" objection I mentioned at the start of this piece, yes, there are people who successfully "wing" their way to success thanks to an unyielding dedication to their passion. But these truly are the lucky few who are able to make use of their circumstances, timing, opportunities and other factors that happen to come together at the right moment.

We risk falling into the trap of believing that passion and success are reserved for the few and not the many when we look to exceptional examples of those who both work hard and find Lady Fortune on their side.

But success and deep satisfaction is available to anyone who takes the time to discover and evolve their passion, while at the same time making sure they have a plan in place, an idea of where they want to go and how to get there. Within that plan, there needs to be room for flexibility to allow for unexpected circumstances and challenges that might arise. If we are able to have a framework within which our passion can thrive, it's in that space that we can truly maximise our potential to achieve great things.

It's by dropping dichotomous conventional wisdom that this process can flourish. There's a reason why we're often advised to "think outside the box" – because inside is where well-worn ideas are kept. If we want to make changes for ourselves, we can't make those changes by repeating the same thoughts, words and actions. By marrying our passion and a solid plan, rather than seeing the two as mutually exclusive, we can reach amazing heights. As the saying goes, electric lights were invented by constantly improving candles.

WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

As I interact and observe the best women leaders in the world, from PepsiCo's Indra Nooyi to our top Malaysian women leaders like Anne Abraham, Fatimah Merican, Vimala Menon and Chin Suit Fang, among a few, they impress me with both their vision and relentlessness in achieving their laid-out plans. Their passion stems from their deep desire to make a difference in this world and not from the pursuit of monetary gains. And I think for women the world over to succeed, the combination of hard work, clarity of purpose and focus on our top priorities, is key. They give me hope.

In conjunction with International Women's Day, I would like to wish every girl and woman my deepest and sincerest blessings that you will work hard and push relentlessly and that you may be filled with a deep reservoir of belief, passion and conviction to make your dreams come true. Have a blessed Women's Day!
DO WOMEN MAKE BETTER LEADERS?

By SANDY CLARKE

A development through connect with Sandy, leaderonomics.com showed him what available at www.leaderonomics.com

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you can follow him on Twitter @ RealSClarke

I t is a question that’s likely to be debated for some time to come: Do women make better leaders than men?

To take a brief look at the characteristics of a “woman’s place” prior to the Second World War, there was a big change to 1930s UK—a time when gender roles were clearly defined and consumptive patriarchal views were firmly in place.

Women were expected to stay at home while the men went out to work. Although it was acceptable for women to work outside the home, they were paid less than men (some occupations had rarely remanded intact). If a woman was to be married or have children, she would be expected to leave her job.

As World War II broke out, all that changed. For the first time, as fathers were converted to the armed forces or summoned for other work, women found themselves left with having to work outside the home in order to help support their families. Women had to contribute to the war effort.

Flexible working hours and other necessary arrangements became the norm to accommodate these new working mothers. And if they thought they were stuck in comfortable office jobs, think again—women pretty much held the country together for the first time, working jobs roles away from their loved ones.

A PARADIGM SHIFT

“Before the war,” one of my former teachers told me, “women were seen as emotional, dainty little girls who got up with looking after the children and having afternoon tea. When the war came about, it changed everything.

Suddenly, it was discovered that women could do a man’s job at the same standard, if not better— and all the while, they carried on with their everyday duties outside their new roles.”

World War II (1939-45) was a catalyst for social change: when it ended and finally arrived in 1945, it was impossible to deny that women had been just as capable as men—and often more so. Women were getting the job done, whatever the job may be.

In 2014, a study published in Journal of Applied Psychology analysed the findings of 35 studies from 1962-2013 in order to discover how women within leadership in relation to the gender divide.

Remarkably, the results suggested that environment played a key role in determining each gender’s effectiveness in leadership. In male-dominated environments, government, law, men were shown to be better leaders than women.

Commonly women were seen as most effective in areas such as social services and education—they also came out on top in the swaying horn “business.” It’s important to conclude the validity of results, particularly when we consider the variables; in relation to the findings, the meta-analysis noticed that the average group depended on gender.

When leaders were asked to evaluate their contributions, women tended to rate themselves more highly than women rated themselves. However, when others (families, employees, customers) did the rating, women came out on top, particularly in the studies that took place from the 1980s onward.

MISSING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2011, research by Zenger & Folkman surveyed over 7,000 leaders from successful companies around the world. The study found that 64% of the leaders were men— the higher the leadership level, the more the men were represented.

The stereotype that women were better than men at “feminizing” competencies prevailed i.e. building relationships, listening, etc., which is essentially higher in terms of exhibiting integrity and development.

Interestingly, despite the figures that placed men in the majority of leadership roles, women scored higher than men across all management levels that described overall effectiveness of leadership, as illustrated in Figure 1. In addition, when measured across 16 leadership competencies, women came out on top in most areas, with men scoring considerably higher in just one area— decisiveness. The full outline of the scores can be seen in Figure 2.

The late Christopher Hitchens once said of Third World countries that if they really wanted to alleviate poverty, the best course of action was to empower women. “The whole field flips,” he insisted, adding that when women have control over their lives and can enjoy the same rights as men, the whole of society benefits as a result.

In 1994, Tony Blair declared women to be a catalyst for change, when he and finally arrived in 1997, it was impossible to deny that women had been just as capable as men—and often more so. Women were getting the job done, whatever the job may be.

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**DIVERSITY, NOT DIVERSITY-SITY: FOCUSING ON THE WOMEN’S AGENDA AND BEYOND**

**FEMALE POPULATION AND THE SYSTEM MAY BE PUTTING A STOP TO THEIR PROGRESS**

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**The typical historical connotations or social role.** When we remove the historical connotations or social role, we have to be aware of yourself before you can be aware of others. For instance, when you are aware of the culture that is created by the historical connotations or social role, you can be aware of the other culture. When you are aware of the other culture, you can see the game without any fixations. When you are aware of the fixations, you can see the game without any fixations.

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**The essence:**

Create an environment that allows for regular, consistent feedback to help you understand the complexity of the situation. It is also a simple enough skill to be adopted by all firms that want to create an environment that allows for regular, consistent feedback to help you understand the complexity of the situation.

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**3. THE ECO SYSTEM APPROACH: JOB DESIGN**

The job design approach focuses on the ecosystem where you will be able to understand the complexity of the situation. It is also a simple enough skill to be adopted by all firms that want to create an environment that allows for regular, consistent feedback to help you understand the complexity of the situation.

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**4. THE INDIVIDUAL APPROACH: EMOTIONS**

The approach focuses on the ecosystem where you will be able to understand the complexity of the situation. It is also a simple enough skill to be adopted by all firms that want to create an environment that allows for regular, consistent feedback to help you understand the complexity of the situation.

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**The individual approach:**

The approach focuses on the ecosystem where you will be able to understand the complexity of the situation. It is also a simple enough skill to be adopted by all firms that want to create an environment that allows for regular, consistent feedback to help you understand the complexity of the situation.

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**The gender approach:**

The approach focuses on the ecosystem where you will be able to understand the complexity of the situation. It is also a simple enough skill to be adopted by all firms that want to create an environment that allows for regular, consistent feedback to help you understand the complexity of the situation.

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**The gender approach:**

The approach focuses on the ecosystem where you will be able to understand the complexity of the situation. It is also a simple enough skill to be adopted by all firms that want to create an environment that allows for regular, consistent feedback to help you understand the complexity of the situation.
WHEN I was asked to write this article by my colleague, (bless you Tammy) I decided that this was going to be an ode to all the working mothers (WMs) and stay-at-home mothers (SAHMs). I have an amazing group of wonderful friends who consist of WMs and SAHMs. I fall in the former group. I am a mother to an adorable, feisty almost four-year-old Shakthisri who has her mind of her own. I hold a full-time job and I am one of those lucky moms who have Shakthisri’s grandmother looking after her while I am at work.

Nevertheless, I do get overwhelmed with a sense of guilt when I don’t spend enough time with my child. My SAHM friends are inspiring women who were lecturers, corporate executives and journalists but they made a conscious choice to take a break and tend to their children simply because they wanted to.

Hats off to these women. There is one mother who is pursuing her PhD, on top of managing the household. These women face the dilemma of guilt when they do not spend quality time with their children, because they are bogged down with household chores and attend to the needs of their families, from sunrise till sunset.

We all take guilt trips due to the situations we are in.

For example, I once saw a friend post on social media on how she and her kid were having a blast splashing water paint on the canvas at 3pm and I was at work. I will be honest here, I felt guilty that I wasn’t able to do the same with my daughter. At the spur of the moment, the hidden competitive streak in me surfaced as the little voice within me screamed, “Oh no, Shakthisri has not tried her hand at water painting yet and now all the other kids, whose mothers are at home, will master the art before she does.”

Yes, that’s me when paranoia sinks in.

Thank God for my practical husband who knows how to knock some sense into me when these little gremlins emerge. Thanks papa!

Lately, when I met my friends and their children for play dates, I noticed a few valuable characteristics that were being displayed by the children and I ended up chatting with the mums about this discovery. We then realised that we may be WM or SAHMs, but we are instilling leadership traits in our children directly or indirectly. Here are a few examples that I’ve discovered and I am sure that as adults, we are empowering our children to be independent.

**BEING INDEPENDENT**

I was on leave one day as my mother was away. Shakthisri came back from play school and I was about to help her with her shoes but was surprised to see her remove her own shoes and place it on the shoe rack.

Her socks went into the laundry basket, her bag was placed in her room and she proceeded to put her water container in the dishwasher. I was gob smacked. This is the same child who whines when asked to put her toys away.

She then turned to me and said “Amma, I am a big girl now and I know how to put my things away neatly. Aatha (my grandmother) taught me how to do this once I came back from school.”

Her sweet explanation was enough for me to reward her with a hug. I realised that my coping mechanism — my mother whom I sought help from while I was at work – played a big part in getting my child to be independent.

So, dear WMs, I am sure the ‘coping mechanisms’ that you picked will help instill the art of being independent in your child, whether you realise it or not.

Have any of you gone through this dilemma where you’ve tried to get your child to be independent but they’ve refused to listen? Perhaps you could share a successful trick or two with us.

**VOLUNTEERING TO HELP**

When my cousin, who was an aspiring journalist, told me six years ago that she was quitting her job to look after her newborn, I literally laughed my head off. She is an ambitious, go-getter who is always in need of an adventure to stay occupied. Well, I guess she met her biggest challenge because she is still a SAHM and an amazing one at that. I was at her place one day and was shocked to see my six-year-old nephew helping out with chores and even asked her if she needed any help.

I realised that when he saw his mom on her feet all day, it prompted him to offer a helping hand. I am sure this is one of the traits he will carry throughout his life. Likewise, a few SAHMs have also shared that as their children grew older, they voluntarily offered to help when they saw their mothers juggling too many things.

**ADAPTING AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS**

My friend who is a SAHM always plans the play dates for our daughters. Thanks to her, Shakthisri who is an only child has formed a special friendship with her daughter, Riya. My friend had always wanted her child to mingle with others her age since she is always home with adults.

The first time the two children came together, they hit it off well. The arguments and complaints about each other came much later. When her daughter complained to me about mine, my friend was wise enough to ask me to ignore it.

I was surprised, as I thought she would rush to sort things for her child. When I got up to see what was going on, my friend told me to take a backseat. “Relax Premi. Trust me, these are petty arguments that they will have. Let them sort it out for themselves.”

She was right. After a while, we heard them negotiating and compromising. It was a simple issue of who gets the bicycle first, but my friend's action actually empowered these little girls to find a solution and move on. At the end, they took turns to ride the bicycle.

Not only did they learn the art of problem solving, they learnt the beauty of sharing as well.

**WHEN YOU ARE A STAY-AT-HOME MOM OR WORKING, YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO!**

HELLO, you are currently reading an article by PREMA JAYABALAN, a WM and SAHM who is part of the digital learning team in Leaderonomics. She loves to involve her daughter in most of her endeavours through creative methods, in a bid to spend quality time with her. If you have a story to share, write to her at prema.jayabalan@leaderonomics.com

The writer with her husband, Ganaseelan, and daughter, Shakthisri.

Like this article? Follow us @leaderonomics on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.
ADONNA first lept to my consciousness as a savvy business person back in the 1980s when on a late-night talk show, the host derigated an outlandish move by her saying, “But isn’t that just a way to get publicity?” And the young Madonna just smiled. 

The host, the entire audience and I “got it”. Look past the Greenwich Village black leather get-up, there’s a mogul inside plotting to take over the world. And 30 years later, in 2013, she was named by Forbes as the top-earning celebrity in the world at over US$125mil in revenue. Whereas other veteran stars have struggles, her light burns as bright as ever. Beyond her musical talent – which few people claim is what sets her apart – what are the key factors of her endurance? Why is Madonna seemingly eternal, even in the face of massive changes in the music industry whether in terms of fan tastes, culture or the passing of generations? And what can you learn from her to assure your enduring and adaptive leadership?

1 PREPARE SO THAT DETAIL BECOMES MEMORY

Madonna is no prima donna. She doesn’t swash into a stadium 30 minutes before a concert and wing it. It was noted that before every performance of her last world tour, she would run through the complete show, beginning to end, so that her muscle memory and what’s called “proprioception” (that ability to operate on seeming “autopilot”) would take over. This allowed her to “play” on stage to be more responsive and interactive with the audience – that is what makes her live performance so special. Practice (and visualisation) makes perfect. And it frees you up to be extemporaneous.

2 GET FIT

Madonna, whose highly athletic dancing can mesmerise a stadium, is nearly 60. You can use technology to fix someone’s tonality in the studio, but you can’t fake fitness. And when a robust personality is core to your brand, it’s going to take discipline and sweat in the gym – and more than one trainer. When you study most leaders, they are in the gym every morning, or at least married to a rigorous workout programme. And Madonna is known to work out daily.

More than that, she has been very public about maintaining her lean strength by eating whole, organic foods, eliminating processed foods, practising mindfulness meditation and cultivating long-term intimate bonds with family and friends. All of these activities add up to the perfect neurochemical for youthfulness and longevity.

3 STAND (STRONGLY) FOR WHAT’S IMPORTANT TO YOU

Madonna has been a long-term, fearless and vocal advocate for many causes. For example, when most people were hesitant to speak out on AIDS, Madonna stood upfront. Leadership is not a “trick” or a series of techniques. Ultimately, it comes from your core. She famously said, “I stand for freedom of expression, doing what you believe in, and going after your dreams.” And every song, speech, interview and comment she has made has backed that up. Madonna’s consistent, unapologetic and fearless advocacy for the dignity of all people is her unique selling proposition.

Beyond that, she defends her core values vociferously and is not afraid to wrestle with the powers that be. Over the years, she has been denounced by the Vatican, politicians and parenting groups. Her fans don’t care, and neither does she. “Better to live one year as a tiger,” she said, “than a hundred as a sheep.” With this, she has managed to stay in the spotlight for 30 years as a tiger.

4 EXPERIMENT WITH STYLE

Just because your values don’t change doesn’t mean your hairstyle or shoes don’t! Part of Madonna’s genius has been to deliver her consistent message of bold self-expression through different packaging. And that packaging often exactly represented her response to a culture that tried to box her in, define her or trivialise her voice. When they tried to demean the early Madonna as a has-been big-hair pop act, she electrified the music world with Like A Virgin. When her financial success caused so many to dismiss her as just another rock star, she redefined sacred music with Ray of Light, inspired by her work with kabbalah, an ancient belief that reveals how the universe and life work.

“I am my own experiment. I am my own work of art,” says Madonna. By living it authentically, she has inspired many to have the courage to do the same.

PARTING THOUGHTS

Constant reinvention keeps you and your personal brand alive. Madonna is not afraid to be outlandish and she never confuses her current stylistic expression with her core values as a person. She’s versatile and keeps herself relevant to each generation. Each time, she remakes her image to fit in with the current trend while still maintaining her ‘Madonna-ness’.

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Hiring Women Matters

EVERY SEGMENT OF THE SOCIETY HAS A ROLE TO PLAY WHEN IT COMES TO GENDER EQUALITY

By LOUISA DEVADASON
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“Whatever I learn from talking to so many women around the world: if you can empower them with the right tools, the right tools, they can lift up their family. And that ultimately lifts up their community and their society.” — Melinda Gates

ART of being a leader, particularly one in the working world, is selecting the right team to fulfill your vision and hit your targets. As no man is an island, an effective leader must gather a team of people who fill gaps in his leadership and who will simultaneously support and challenge him.

However, no matter how experienced we are in our fields, humans are fundamentally vulnerable to association biases. Meaning, we often think of a certain type of person as better suited for specific jobs largely based on superficial qualities.

Men, who make up most of senior management, naturally gravitate towards men when recruiting because they think they understand their own gender and men are often more likely assumed to be natural leaders. So, women are often overlooked in filling key leadership roles due to these unconscious biases.

More often though, women are consciously overlooked; a survey of 500 managers found that 40% admitted that they prefer to hire men in their 20s or 30s over women of the same age because they want to avoid the possibility of them taking maternity leave.

It is particularly rampant for women to be passed over in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields. Research in Silicon Valley found that without any information other than a candidates’ appearance, both men and women were twice more inclined to hire a man over a woman.

Worse still, when recruiters received objective knowledge about all candidates’ past performance – they still preferred men over women despite being equally qualified. As we know, STEM fields are growing and becoming increasingly important so the exclusion of women in these areas is particularly alarming and needs to be addressed.

Besides doubt shrouding women’s competencies, the idea that women, through maternity leave etc, will cost companies more money or reduce efficiency is simply not true. In 2015, McKinsey Global Institute reported that if women participated in the workforce just like men, a whopping US$12 trillion could be injected into the global economy by 2025. South-East Asia would see an 8% increase in their GDP, if this were our trajectory.

However, this can only happen if the public, private and social sectors start taking significant strides to close gender gaps in both work and society.

PARENTS
Parents should take strides to learn how to raise children in a gender-blind way, equally encouraging boys and girls to develop values that make them competent in dealing with household management as well as in education and leadership development. While it’s rare the intention, some more traditionally rooted beliefs lead us to raise boys and girls with different views of the world and different sets of responsibilities. It need not be this way.

EMPLOYERS
The first and easiest step employers can take is to introduce blind résumé screening – removing candidates’ names, address, age and gender from CVs – will eliminate unconscious biases against a candidate’s gender, race, or socio-economic background. Furthermore, companies should create anti-harassment and discrimination trainings that include unconscious bias into its programme so colleagues can learn to treat each other with respect and support one another more effectively.

EDUCATION
Education has long been a stepping-stone to a better life and opportunities. However, sometimes education misses those in the lower income bracket by not addressing their needs and setbacks – focusing instead on driving As. By doing so, the system fails to redirect girls and boys facing hardship – whose parents might be incapable of supporting them and educating them in ways mentioned above – on to a track that elevates them to middle-class living through more skilled work etc.

ADMINISTRATIVE
According to McKinsey Global Institute, there are six interventions pivotal to bridging the gender gap.

i. Financial incentives and support
ii. Technology and infrastructure
iii. Economic opportunity creation
iv. Capability building
v. Advocacy and shaping attitudes
vi. Laws, policies, and regulations

These are interventions that companies can independently work on without governmental intervention and something which many non-governmental organisations are already trying to address in rural areas and around the country. These are issues we should use our voice for as citizens and as leaders. If we know better, we should do better and raise each other up.

5 REASONS WHY THE CORPORATE WORLD NEEDS MORE WOMEN

1. DIVERSITY
Women are more conditioned towards customer service, teamwork, and nurturing capabilities. The inclusion of this in the workplace, particularly ones that are male-dominated, brings a challenging but complementary edge to decision-making and problem-solving.

2. FEMALE CONSUMERS
Women make up a large percentage of consumers. Having more women on board means being able to more efficiently conceptualise, design and strategise ways to market products and services to this demographic.

3. BALANCE
More women in the workplace leads to women and men having more equal representation in society and at work. This creates more role models for young women and girls looking to step up in their careers or seek a less traditional home life. It also means greater workplace dynamism and diversity, which translates to more varied and innovative ideas.

4. FINANCIAL INCLUSION
Giving women and families more purchasing power is good for the economy. It also gives women independence and freedom to live and protect herself.

5. WOMEN ARE HALF OF THE WORLD
Women need to be as represented in the workplace as they are in terms of population. At the end of the day, women can legally work and many want to work and be independent, so depriving these women of their dreams and rights is inhumane and counterproductive to society.
CAREER OR MOTHERHOOD?

NOT EVERY WOMAN CAN JUGGLE MOTHERHOOD AND CAREER AND THAT’S OK TO?

By Kwan-An Lim
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BEEEEEPP beep beep... goes my alarm clock.

It is 5am on Monday. After hitting the snooze button multiple times, I force myself to get up and start my day. I go through the motions of my morning ritual. I check off items on my to-pack list, lock my bags and get dressed in semi-corporate attire that is also airport-comfy.

I hear a car pull up on the driveway. I grab my luggage, give my husband who is still in dreamland a goodbye kiss and zip out of the house to be chauffeured to the airport to catch my 6:30am flight.

What I just described is the typical Monday morning of a management consultant. As a consultant, the joys are many—the work is challenging and meaningful. No two days are the same. However, as with most jobs, it is not perfect. I would go so far as to describe it as demanding and consuming. Working on projects with remote clients may mean interstate travel and being away from home five days a week.

The hours are long when there is a looming deadline. Assignments to projects are often down to the luck of the draw meaning that you could be travelling with only a week’s notice for a period of three months through the cold winter season. Now try picturing holding down a job like that while juggling motherhood.

MY PERSONAL STORY

“So just in case you were wondering, I haven’t just been gorging myself lately—I’m actually having a baby!”

That was how I broke the news to my colleagues at our annual Christmas get-together. I kept my pregnancy a secret for five months; unsure about the reaction my worksmates would have towards my news, dreading the questions that would follow, or the potential prejudices that I might have to endure.

Let me give you a narrative of the thoughts that raced through my mind when I first found out about the baby: “Will I be treated differently after I tell my bosses about the baby? Will they question my drive and motivation at the workplace? Will I be given fewer opportunities to work on interesting projects? Will I be passed over for work opportunities and promotion? How will my colleagues react to the news? How will I balance work and motherhood when I return from maternity leave?

As a management consultant in a small consulting firm, women in leadership positions are few and far between. Only 20% of the senior leadership team are women, with the majority of them being mothers. Out of 35 employees, only two are working mothers and both work part-time clocking in just three days per week.

Partnering with these working mums has made me acutely aware of the impact the motherhood has on work. While this may not be representative of all working mothers, there have been times where I have been driven to tears—having to leave work early at 4pm to pick up children or missing out on crucial meetings on off-days—I have witnessed the quality of work delivered to the client.

These experiences have made me dubious as to whether or not women can really do it all—a successful, thriving career and be a committed mother.

WHAT’S YOUR PERSONAL NARRATIVE?

A workmate shared this story with me: “Before the baby arrived, my wife planned to return to work after eight months of maternity leave. At the sixth month, she called work to resign instead and ended up taking eight years off to be a full-time mum.”

I couldn’t help but wonder, will this happen to me as well? I know deep inside now that being a stay-at-home mum is not for me, it is simply not in my nature, but what’s to say that I won’t change my mind after the baby comes? Why do women feel obligated to stay at home with their kids? Perhaps it is these narratives that are driving more and more women to be full-time mums.

IT’S TOO HARD

There is no shortage of people who have called out my ignorance and reassured me that raising a baby is much harder than going to work each day. The sleep deprivation, the loss of freedom for an independent woman, the vomit on your clothes that you don’t notice until you turn up for an important appointment, the never-ending clutter in your home.

“You will change forever,” they all chime in unison, as if performing a choreographed ditty straight out of a Broadway musical. Add a stressful job to the mix and it is little wonder that so many women decide to leave their workplaces.

I FEEL GUILTY

Think of the bawling baby left under the charge of a nanny or distant relative crying out for you while you leave for work. Imagine the regret of missing your baby’s first smile, first words, first steps, first time eating solids and other life changing milestones. Picture receiving a call from the child-care centre explaining every detail of your little one’s mishap: “Oh, it’s nothing really, she fell and hit her chin on the corner of the table, she cried and there was blood but it’s stopped.” They reassure you that she is fine but all you want to do is drive over as fast as you can and give her a cuddle; instead you are stuck at a client presentation, distracted, distracted, no longer on your maternal ‘K’ game.

That night as you put her to bed, feeling guilty as hell you wonder: do we really need the extra income? Isn’t it better if I stay at home and make sure this never happens again?

Be it the right time to return to our careers, or never at all, as women have to make the decision to do what is right by us each step of the way. We must have the confidence to choose what is best for us, our child, our lifestyle and our priorities.

IT’S WHAT WOMEN DO

Traditionalist culture, society expectations and a woman’s physical body dictate the roles of a male and female. The male as the hunter-gatherer is responsible for looking for food while the female cares for the offspring through breastfeeding, nurture and love.

Consider the role reversal option where the woman provides for the family. A quick Google search on this topic will result in tons of articles, research, books and even movies (think: The Intern) dedicated to this topic.

There is a wealth of advice out there that if we want, we can spend hours researching, swinging from one end of the spectrum to another. The risk of emasculating the man and drawing resentment from the woman is just too high. It may even break your relationship. You may end up divorced. Isn’t that worse?

THE KEY TO BALANCING WORK AND PARENTHOOD

There will always be a book, a hospital childbirth class, an experienced parent, or even a stranger on the street who can’t wait to dish out advice about the right way to birth, raise and discipline your child.

At seven months pregnant I have already received more advice than I know what to do with. Having a natural birth is better because the hormones released—endorphins and oxytocins—are transferred to your baby, making them more likely to breastfeed. Don’t take drugs because it reduces those happy hormones. Breastfeeding is better than formula milk. The list goes on.

Don’t get me wrong, as a first-time mum I welcome it because knowledge is power, right? However, every woman goes through labour, breastfeeding and mothering differently. Experiences are vastly different for each child. Ensuring a certain way of life may be helpful for some, but may bring on unnecessary guilt or even postnatal depression for others if it doesn’t go well.

Be it the right time to return to our careers, or never at all, as women have to make the decision to do what is right by us each step of the way. We must have the confidence to choose what is best for us, our child, our lifestyle and our priorities.

We must remember that there is no right or wrong answer, no matter what others say or what society dictates. We have to trust our motherly instincts. We must stand strong and be willing to make mistakes, then learn from them, because there are more at stake if we don’t. We could be sacrificing the happiness, satisfaction and wellbeing of not just ourselves, but our children and partners as well.
A LEADER OVERCOMES

At 19 months, Helen Keller suffered “an acute congestion of the stomach and brain” which left her deaf and blind. Despite this handicap, drawing inspiration from her teacher Anne Sullivan, Helen overcame being deaf and blind to become a great leader and an inspiration to millions.

Winston Churchill, Jack Welch and Sir Isaac Newton overcame their speech impediment and stuttering. Thomas Edison, Leonardo da Vinci and Richard Branson all suffered from dyslexia, but they overcame great odds to achieve their vision of a better tomorrow.

Leaders are not born. Everyone has the potential deep inside to overcome adversities and be great.

Be A Leader.

We can help your organisation develop leaders. To find out more, email info@leaderonomics.com