ROCKING THAT BALANCE BETWEEN REST AND PERFORMANCE

4 TELLING BUSINESS STORIES THAT INSPIRE ACTION
6 WHEN YOUR BRAIN URGES YOU TO PROCRASTINATE
11 SNOOZING YOUR WAY TO BETTER LEADERSHIP

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!
TIME TO GET BUSY — WITH REST AND RENEWAL

ANY of us have been there sometime during our student lives. Wake up in the wee hours of the morning with an exam just hours away, you stare blankly at the piles of feverishly highlighted notes in front of you, and wonder which of the following options will yield a better outcome:

CARRY on cramming facts into your exhausted brain and hope this will somehow help you pick up a couple of extra points on the paper? Or put everything down, set the alarm and grab your last chance at a good night’s sleep? (After all, even with a few facts less in your short-term memory, a proper snooze would help you to pull through the exam on the strength of a clear, well-rested mind and perhaps emerge with a decent grade!)

But wait... how did you wind up facing this last-minute predicament in the first place, anyway? This week’s articles remind us of those of us who do not learn from such trials in our youthful student days may well be doomed to repeat mistakes in our adult work life. Was another promising university career derailed by the tendency to procrastinate till tomorrow what should have been done today? More critically, are you still letting the same habits hold you back from excellence today?

Eugene Tee and Choy Tse Leeng walk us through the neuroscience of procrastination, helping us understand why our minds constantly trip us up by dashing the appealing option of “I can do this later.” They also offer 10 tips for beating procrastination in achievable baby steps.

If that’s not enough to break procrastination’s grip on you, Minda Zetlin shares five points that illustrate why time management and timely action are essential to good leadership.

For those who too often sacrifice rest and sleep in their pursuit of deadlines and targets, Michelle Gribbins and Louisa Devadason each have well-researched insights to share on why time spent de-stressing or away in dreamland is a solid and worthy investment.

If you’re persistently feeling overwhelmed by all the things you should be achieving in life and in your career, Kevin Kruse has six nuggets of wisdom to help you get your feet back on solid ground. Check out his article and you’ll see how much of what we perceive as unavoidable demands are actually self-imposed pressures.

At the organisational level, corporate retreats are an example of activities ritually undertaken by business leaders without examining the necessity of it all. Prethiba Esvary discusses a couple of company retreats — both well- and poorly-conceived ones — as she invites us to consider whether a company-wide getaway is what’s necessary for an organisation to meet its objectives.

Sometimes the break we need from work is to step out of the rat race for a bit — not so much to rest but to switch gears and pick up enriching new knowledge or skills.

That is exactly what more than 120 senior business leaders did last Monday when they attended a “Storytelling for CEOs” preview session by Mark Schenk and Bharat Avvali of Anecdote International. Read Lydia Gomez’s write-up on the event and get in touch with us at Leaderonomics.com if you want to be sure of catching the Anecdote team at their next training programme on effective storytelling for business leaders.

Keen to know even more about the state of professional development and training opportunities in Malaysia? Read what K-Pint founder R A Thiagaran has to say about the passion that led him to establish the company, and what’s needed to stay relevant in a volatile business environment. Matthew Naylor has the story.

But before you get down to all of that, you will want to set the tone for this weekend’s reading with Roshan Thiagaraja’s reminder on the value of altruism and genuine espirt de corps. The highest levels of professional performance amount to little once our lives are spent, if everything was all done purely for self-interest. It’s the things we do for others and for a greater cause that give us endurance and ultimately outlast us as a legacy of value for society.

What are the beliefs and insights that have helped you persevere, recharge and renew your passion for what you do year after year? Write in to editor@leaderonomics.com and share your thoughts with us.

Meanwhile, put your feet up as you turn the page and enjoy the read!

Siaw Mei Li
Leaderonomics editorial team

“Every person needs to take one day away. A day in which one consciously separates the past from the future. Jobs, family, employers, and friends can exist one day without any one of us, and if our egos permit us to confess, they could exist entirely in our absence. Each person deserves a day away in which no problems are confronted, no solutions searched for. Each of us needs to withdraw from the cares which will not withdraw from us.” — Maya Angelou

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A few weeks ago, I witnessed the Barcelona football team stage an improbable comeback from four goals down to edge Paris SC 6-5 in the Champions League. Great teams don’t just have the capability to go beyond and deliver much more than the sum of their parts. Yet, in business, we hardly see sustained focus on building high-performance teams. A lot of time, individuals get the limelight and little is done to highlight team performance.

THE FOCUS OF BUSINESS

When it comes to business, phrases such as “competitive demands”, “personal branding”, and “growth and development” frequently pop up to remind us that we need to “up our game” and “stand out from the crowd” if we wish to be successful.

This dog-eat-dog narrative has been doing the rounds for decades as the de facto strategy for getting ahead in the competition. In a world of scarcity, we’re told, it’s every man and woman for themselves. No one remembers who came in second place.

I remember clearly when I first started working at General Electric (GE) and was advised by a senior leader during my orientation session on the importance of standing out from the pack. According to him, the only way to do so was to work hard, communicate and execute relentlessly. He pumped me up to push, stand out from the pack. According to him, the approach is so effective anymore. As years too.

He pumped me up to push, stand out from the pack. According to him, the approach is so effective anymore. As years too.

But today, I am not sure if this approach is so effective anymore. As the world becomes smaller and more connected, we become increasingly co-dependent and interconnected.

It is no longer the case that we should strive to succeed lest anyone gets there before us: success today is about collaboration and networking, building relationships and creating a legacy. At least that is what I am slowly learning in this brave new world!

When we look at a company’s culture, it doesn’t take an organisational psychologist to see that toxic cultures are usually the ones in which fear, uncertainty and self-interest thrive. In such cultures, success is about who can get closest to the boss, who can get the most out of their colleagues – who can be the most Machiavellian in the pursuit to gain whatever they can for themselves.

"A culture is strong when people work with each other for each other & weak when people work against each other for themselves."

As the quote from Simon Sinek suggests, cultures that are weak tend to become so because people within an organisation stop working for each other and instead look out for themselves. That’s not to say it’s wrong to look out for our own interests, development and growth. But it is problematic when we begin to focus solely on our own progression, goals and achievements.

Even at Leaderonomics, I often am amazed by some employees who appear on the surface to be excellent team players and show genuine care for our vision to transform the nation. Yet, when hardship and trial start to rear its head (who said achieving our mission would be easy!), it becomes obvious to everyone that they put themselves first, even to the peril of their own teammates and colleagues.

However, when people continually put themselves first, it soon becomes obvious to anyone who is able to observe them for a time. And the reason why such people weaken a company’s culture is because they set people on edge, create divisions, and upset a lot of people in the process. They might even convince a few others to follow their lead, which only serves to spread and reinforce the toxicity.

Self-servers rarely succeed in the end, and even if they do, their success either comes at a hefty price or it doesn’t last long. In his book Give and Take, Adam Grant builds on this point, writing: “If we create networks with the sole intention of getting something, we won’t succeed. We can’t pursue the benefits of networks; the benefits ensue from investments in meaningful activities and relationships.”

Martin Luther King Jr. drove home a similar point through one of his many poetic and profound insights.

"Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness."

As a CEO, part of your challenge is to be able to scale and continually grow your business. Many CEOs struggle to reinvent themselves at different phases of their leadership journey and this translates to an inability to grow their own businesses and organisations. CEOs also face significant challenges with little support or people to talk to about their struggles and pains.

In 2016, Leaderonomics, together with the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), pioneered the Leadership Dojo programme specifically designed for CEOs to learn from CEOs, senior CEO mentors and other global leaders who have succeeded in their respective journeys.

If you are a CEO who is looking for a programme to help you grow in your leadership journey and enable your business to scale to the next level, do register your interest for the 2017 intake by scanning the QR code or directing your browser to bit.ly/LDojointerest
**TELLING STORIES THAT INSPIRE ACTION**

**REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES, SHARED FROM THE HEART, LEAD TO BUSINESS RESULTS**

People think stories are about words. But stories are about images, pictures. Your task is to have enough detail for someone to be able to picture what’s happening. If you can’t picture the word, then it’s very hard for people to understand you. Don’t overthink your stories. Tiny moments can have incredible impact.

— Mark Schenk

"With our stakeholders and board members, we use big words and we assume they interpret it the same way as we do. It’s a big mistake, not only because you could get it wrong, but because you can have wildly different interpretations of the very same message," he explained.

There is a structure to compelling storytelling, and it’s critical to recognize this, especially if it doesn’t come to someone naturally.

**SO, WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY AT THE WORKPLACE?**

Schenk explains the Clarity Story Pattern (see Figure 1) — a way to identify crucial parts of your story — which divides your story into parts that keep your audience engaged.

"The Clarity Story pattern is very powerful. It’s not as simple as it sounds, but if you invest just 10 minutes, you might be surprised to see how clear your messaging becomes," he said.

"Being a storyteller at work is a skill, and you definitely need some knowledge. But one of the key things that you need is practice, because as you practise more, you understand the things that you need to add in. But most importantly, you would know the things you can get rid of.

Societies the world over know the power of a story well told and refined over time. This is true for narratives ranging from well-loved bedtime stories to folk legends, from urban legends gone viral to favourite anecdotes about our families, friends and communities. “As it turns out, I have been using the power of storytelling without even knowing it,” Avalani said. “But it wasn’t till I met Mark in August last year that I understood how storytelling is a process, and that it can be done deliberately, purposefully and repeatably.”

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By LYDIA GOMEZ
lydia.gomez@leaderonomics.com

**WHAT does it take to get a business leader out of bed extra early and fighting through rush hour traffic on a Monday morning? The desire to tell better stories, apparently!**

Earlier this week, some 120 chief executive officers and senior leaders gathered to hear what Mark Schenk, the managing director of Anecdote International, had to share on this subject. Anecdote is recognised as a world leader in the use of storytelling in business.

About half an hour into the session, Schenk put his audience to a little test. He ran an animated video, just over a minute-long, in which three shapes—a large triangle, a smaller one and a circle—were seen interacting on the screen around a rectangle through a series of energetic movements.

“What do you think this (video) means?” Schenk asked the audience at the end of the clip. “Two men fighting over a girl!” said one audience member. Another said the rectangle was trying to attract the other shapes into it, but was failing and ultimately gave up.

After a few more stabs by the audience at interpreting what they had seen, Schenk revealed that there was no definitive answer and never has been, but the exercise had not been without a purpose.

**ABSTRACT MESSAGES GO NOWHERE**

“I’m not doing this just to have some fun. This was an experiment, done in 1944 by scientists who wanted to examine people’s responses to ambiguity,” Schenk said, referring to the work by psychologists Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel.

If you take that animation and apply it to the communications we make at work you get the No. 1 reason why our brands, our businesses, our leaders make the mistake of just telling. The exercise had not been without a purpose.

**Bullet points and slideshows are good to get consensus. But to inspire action, you need stories.**

— Bharat Avalani

Good to get consensus. But to inspire action, you need stories.
By MATT NAYLOR

matt.naylor@leaderonomics.com

I

n the words of singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, the times they are a-changin’. When Dylan wrote these enduring words in 1963, he could not possibly have known just how much the times were about to a-change with the invention of the Internet that altered the course of human history like so few creations before it. With this, the ubiquity of the smartphone, the instant-gratification era and the introduction of tech-savvy millennials and Gen Z workers, companies in Malaysia face an unprecedented number of problems to tackle, according to K-Pintar’s RA Thiagaraja.

As chief executive officer of the Malaysian training powerhouse, Thiagaraja knows better than anybody what companies should be doing in order to keep up with the times.

“Any industry today is largely automated and driven by technology,” he said in an interview with Leaderonomics.

“The market is constantly changing because the nature of jobs in the future is changing. Even now, universities and colleges are producing graduates without giving them the skills they need for the future.”

When Thiagaraja made the jump from the pharmaceutical industry to start K-Pintar in 2002, he recognised that organisations need to be doing more for their employees’ development – merely teaching them “competency skills”.

EQUIPPING EMPLOYEES WITH IMPLEMENTABLE SKILLS

The onset of the “Google generation” means employees today have every fact and figure in the world available at their disposal but, unless they know how to convert such statistics into making effective business decisions, the numbers mean nothing.

“Universities and colleges teach competencies that can help solve problems by teaching structured thinking skills, but when it comes to the real world these problems are often so not black and white,” he added.

“Skills can be taught but, in the end, there is no substitute for experience in applying these cultivated competencies and thought processes.”

These perceived flaws in the modern education system have led to a huge shift in the way K-Pintar and their elite trainers organise their hands-on training sessions.

In Thiagaraja’s words: “The biggest change that has happened in the training industry is engagement – how we engage the new generation and help them achieve their goals.”

“In the past, training was very interpersonal, with a trainer offering a lot of knowledge and input. Today, the technology has made a huge difference in the way we engage the trainee through various methods.

“Concentration skills have waned with the advent of the technological era, so classroom training alone no longer works like it used to. Now, the training needs to be more interactive – with more discussion, more activities and more simulations.”

THE NEXT GENERATION

There is perhaps no greater hot-button topic right now than that of the millennials – a generation that grew up in the technology-infused era and now brings a new wave of thinking into offices all over the world.

Expecting rapid career progression, needing to engage with

CEO of K-Pintar, R A Thiagaraja

K-Pintar has spent the last 15 years providing quality, internationally-recognised certification programmes, thanks to affiliations with top industry centres in the United States, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany and Australia. Its goal of “enhancing capability” takes a holistic approach to developing human capital and bringing out the best in each trainee.

The upcoming Fifth Cranfield Global Leadership Programme at Cranfield University in the UK is set to be one of K-Pintar’s largest events with business minds from around the world converging for one week, from May 7 to 13.

To learn more about K-Pintar and their programmes, visit www.kpintaracademy.com or e-mail enquiry@kpintar.com

R A Thiagaraja speaks about the vision that motivated him to start K-Pintar.

How did you come to start K-Pintar? Back in 2002 when I was working as a product manager for a French pharmaceutical company. Despite the job being extremely exciting and challenging, I felt an emptiness inside me. I felt a calling, if you must, to give back to society. Even during my university days, I was highly involved in helping underprivileged children, who could ill-afford education or books.

With this deep-rooted belief that imparting knowledge is more valuable than mere monetary donations, I was inspired to start K-Pintar.

How have K-Pintar’s programmes evolved since you first started out? When K-Pintar kickstarted in 2002, we were very much a market follower – a training outfit offering supply-driven courses just like every other training company. It was very competitive.

We wanted to break away from the pack; we were also keen to provide better solutions to our customers. After extensive research and studies, coupled with the World Bank report in 2010 – dismal statistics that noted Malaysia only had a 25% skilled workforce – we realised there was an almost negligible availability of demand- and needs-based programmes.

From 2010, K-Pintar’s offerings evolved, and will continue to evolve, to address today’s career landscape in Malaysia.

What are some of the biggest challenges Malaysian companies are facing today? Getting the best talent and getting the most out of them is key. Secondly, retention of customers is becoming harder and harder – the needs of the customer are changing and building that loyalty has never been more pressing issue. You may have a talent that is good at their job, but they can sometimes stumble when it comes to making a business decision or conceptualising a strategy.

A lot of employees in an organisation have access to all the information and facts and figures in the world, but unless you know what to do with that, it is meaningless.

What kinds of skills are more easily taught than others? Technical competency and anything that is very job-centric can be taught. Management skills, as well, can be taught. The development of internal behaviour and inner drive can be coached rather than taught, but must also essentially come from within.

Now, training needs to be more interactive – with more discussion, more activities and more simulations.

company values in order to achieve job satisfaction and famously fickle consumers, there are no shortage of studies nor opinions on how the 20-somethings of today both help and hinder modern companies.

As Generation Z – those born after the year 1997 – prepare to enter workforces and marketplaces, the need for companies to assimilate with the times is far greater than ever before.

At K-Pintar, the needs of each specific industry or job function is taken into account when developing solutions for clients, whereby Thiagaraja exercises a unique level of expertise to handle the different challenges companies are facing at the moment.

While much has been said of what organisations need to do to retain top millennial employees, trying to build consumer retention through brand loyalty and constant innovation presents itself as one of the biggest challenges today.

“Because of the Internet, customers have so much information about different products right at their fingertips and they are more aware than ever of what the newest and best products are in the market,” said Thiagaraja. “Customers value online reviews and word of mouth more than ever, so the decision-making process itself has changed. Previously, a customer would walk into a shop to find out more information about a product,” he said adding that today, customers can get the same details through their phones today and know exactly what they need when they enter a shop.

While the exact extent of what the future holds for companies in Malaysia, and all over the world, remains very much to be seen, the one constant is change and, unless organisations understand the needs of their employees and customers, they will forever struggle.

Plenty of reform is needed across every industry, but for a company that moves with the times, there is no shortage of opportunity.

M O V E W I T H T H E T I M E S , S A Y S K - P I N TAR CEO

GLOBALLY-RECOGNISED CERTIFICATION PROGRAMMES HELP LEARNERS STAY RELEVANT IN A VOLATILE CAREER LANDSCAPE

Seattle, WA, USA

Globally-recognised certification programmes help learners stay relevant in a volatile career landscape.
THE NEUROSCIENCE OF PROcrastination

HOW BRAIN SCIENCE CAN HELP LEADERS BE MORE PROACTIVE AND PRODUCtIVE

By Eugene YJ Tee and Choy Tsee Leng

Procrastination can be managed despite having a neural or genetic susceptibility to it – especially if we become more aware of how our environments trigger our tendencies to procrastinate.

Knowing how procrastination can help us in its management, can include reframing or breaking timelines into manageable chunks.

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I later found out she was battling breast cancer at that time. I used to have a business partner that “had it all.” Gorgeous wife, perfect kids, expensive sports cars and he went to courses around the world. He had everything. And then his wife caught him cheating and worse than “losing half,” he lost his relationships with his kids completely. He never had it all, and ended up with nothing.

EXETER shares a framework that she calls “practical perfection.” Imagine three overlapping circles—a Venn diagram—that represent passions, priorities and productivity. The zone in the middle—where all three circles overlap—is the practical perfection zone.

If any one of these three items is missing, we are going to feel it. The goal is to take notice, and adjust our lives until we’re back in the middle, living in the zone.
Are Employee Retreats Necessary?

Companies Should Plan Them Carefully

By PRETHIBA ESVARY

We spent three hours under the scorching heat running, walking, solving riddles and finding the next clue based on information gathered from signboards, landmarks and general knowledge. Oh, and we squeezed in a five-minute video shoot that tells a soft-nosed tale about the epic warrior Hang Tuah and his search for a successor while trying to win over the heart of Chinese princess Hang Li Po.

The above is a short glimpse into a treasure hunt activity conducted during my company’s annual retreat this year. Yes, I had a lot of fun exploring Malacca’s Jonker Street with my colleagues, but I must say I also thoroughly enjoyed the Authentic Lives workshop led by Andrew Chua as it gave me the opportunity to delve deeper into my strengths, character and personality as well as those of my team members. A corporate retreat is meant to get us out of our office frenzy for a specific period of time to brainstorm, realign and rediscover our individual, team and company’s core purpose and passion with minimum distractions. As working professionals, we probably know the advantages and disadvantages of corporate retreats. Some believe that retreats are great for team-building and strategy planning, while others think it’s a waste of time.

Retreats, however, can be costly and money as the objectives set can be achieved in the office. So, how do and money as the objectives set can be accomplished in the office. So, how do we tell if a retreat is necessary or not?

My Personal Take

Is any business growth a necessary but painful process. Looking back at 2016, my management wanted to reward its employees for all their hard work, help us develop a stronger sense of self-awareness, foster better understanding within teams, and let us have fun while doing all of the above. I particularly enjoyed the reflection sessions where we could analyse our strengths and personalities, and connect them to the work we do. We discovered that the majority in the company are highly relational people. I found this knowledge incredibly valuable as it is a rare occasion for employees to explore ourselves and see how we fit into the team and the organisation as a whole. Being in a different environment helps us achieve this objective as it set a comfortable platform for everyone to reflect and share. The key highlights for me were the pajamas party—an appreciation camp fellowship event—and an Amazing Race-like treasure hunt. While our company does present opportunities for inter-departmental interaction through events, sports and bi-weekly sports activities, the retreat gave us all the opportunity to explore each other’s strengths and weaknesses and build a greater bond along the way.

Communicating Openly

Mark Lovatt, chief executive officer (CEO) of Trident Integrity Solutions once said, “The most successful one (retreat) I have attended was over two days where the CEO and some of the top management employees came for dinner on the first night and presented their vision for the company. We then utilised this new knowledge over the next two days to develop our own division’s strategy.” To him, dinner in an open, relaxed and informal setting opens up room for communication and allows people to ask pertinent questions that are important for workshops and brainstorming sessions. “I don’t think we would have had the same result just conducting a session in the office for one morning or two.”

Waste of Resources

Retreats, however, can be costly and a waste of time and energy when there are deep-rooted issues that need to be tackled such as low morale, disgruntled employees, poor financial performance, etc. Journalist Rohit Vivekananda is one of those who think company retreats are unnecessary. He had a horrible experience with his former employer. What started out with the objective to appreciate employees turned into a dubious agenda that patronised employees in an effort to get them to stay on. Attendees included employees who had tendered their resignations two weeks before the retreat. What ticked him off was the fact that someone from the human resources (HR) department spoke patronisingly to one of the employees who had tendered her resignation, saying that “for a young girl she wouldn’t get a good salary elsewhere” and tried to woo her into staying. To make matters worse, the entire retreat was held at what seemed like an unsafe place with numerous “do not enter” signs and barbed wire. Creepy indeed.

On a slightly positive note, though, there was a birthday celebration and a sharing session that allowed employees to share how they felt about the company and how they could contribute to make things better.

Objectives Are Not Always Met

Founder of TerraCycle, Tom Szaky believes that while it is important that his employees are doing work that is “fun, rewarding and enjoyable”, going off for a retreat to increase employee morale and to strategise is ineffective. He wrote in the New York Times, “In the past, as a compromise, I have hosted full-day off-sites at my house for the entire business to discuss these kinds of issues. The cost was always high and the results were generally modest. People liked the off-sites but didn’t learn much.”

“When I was recently asked about doing another, we decided that instead of a company off-site meet, we would just have the senior team for an hour every month to discuss big-picture issues. The results were significantly better.”

An Analysis

The first two retreat stories had clear agendas and focused goals that resulted in good experiences. The third story seemed unrelated on the part of the employer (including HR) and I would have to take Tom Szaky’s point into consideration that we can’t really meet the set objectives when there are underlying issues which can’t be resolved in a retreat, especially one that was planned rather haphazardly.

The last point shared by Szaky, which speaks about undesirable results derived from full-day off-site meetings, does justify his next point on why retreats may be a waste of time.

So to answer the question I posed earlier on whether retreats are necessary, it comes down to knowing your objectives and what you intend to accomplish. This also includes knowing who to involve.

Lolavatt says that most outputs can be just as successfully achieved by having a well-designed brainstorming session in a familiar environment like the office, retreats may do the job from time to time.

Johan Merican, deputy director-general at the Malaysian Economic Planning Unit, says what works best for an organisation depends on its people, culture and situation.

“Say if an organisation is going through a challenging period, it may send conflicting signals when the company suddenly spends a lot of money on a retreat while employees are being given the daily drill on cost-cutting.”

He also made a great point in saying that, “A once-a-year retreat to foster social bonds can often be short-lived in its benefits. Organisations should be more focused on creating a platform and culture that fosters greater team cohesion throughout the year.”

So, before you start ooh-ing and aah-ing over how company A & B takes all its employees out for lavish retreats, go back to your objectives and intentions. Think them through and see if retreats can indeed help you achieve the intended outcome.
By LOUISA DEVADASON
louisa.allycyn@leaderonomics.com

Our bed is a magical place, one that we yearn for intensely, and that yearning gets greater with every meal we have. Our beds are a place for us to regroup and retreat from the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. This is especially true if you are a city dweller. Alas, this modern world has far too many distractions and many maddening things going on. Whenever you are on the bed is often the moment you remember all the things you need to do, or when you scroll through Instagram, or become lost on some bizarre Wikipedia article. And yet, according to some, we need to know but now know everything about. Is or that just me?

**PERFORMANCE KILLER**

For many working adults, the demands of their jobs and the workload that keeps piling up often prevents them from getting an adequate amount of sleep. This is a problem because getting enough sleep is essential to keeping our neocortex – responsible for language, sensory perception, motor-function and higher-order executive functions – in peak condition.

A study found that people who were awake 16 to 19 hours a day performed tasks as well – or rather, as poorly – as a person with a blood alcohol level of 0.05% (the legal drinking limit in many countries). Anyone getting less than four to five hours of sleep a day therefore is essentially performing tasks like a drunk person no matter how many cups of coffee they are chugging back.

What’s more, manic-paced corporate culture compounds sleeplessness with poor performance and reduced vitality. People rushing around and living coffee to coffee – surviving on five to six hours of sleep a night – put their peers, company and the general public in danger. Encouraging a culture of sleepless bravado is not only foolish and unsustainable, it is dangerous. It is counterproductive to any leader or executive seeking to create any kind of effective management system. It’s interesting to note that while companies often push employees to the brink of a breakdown – functioning and moving around at work (and to and from their home) as impaired as someone intoxicated.

**LISTLESS LEADERS**

According to McKinsey sleep specialist Els van der Hel, sleep deficiencies inhibit important forms or leadership behaviour and eventually hurt financial performance. Leaders have differing thoughts regarding sleep. Bill Gates, for instance, says being able to empathise and support employees needs to be handled in a work day or work week.

Leaders and corporations needs to get serious about addressing the importance of sleep and the dangers of not getting enough of it. The following are recommendations from experts in organisational leadership and sleep:

- Reassess the volume of work and pace of your company. Does it need to be delegated to more people? Can the workload be handled in a work day or work week?
- Are the deadlines reasonable, factoring in work-time limits. Countries like Mexico and South Korea have longer average work hours than Switzerland or France.
- Develop training programmes focused on increasing awareness and creating enduring behavioural as well as attitudinal change towards sleep and work-life balance. Companies acknowledging that sleep is important are reaping positive effects on employee well-being and performance.

The link between effective leadership and a good night’s sleep is clear.

**Mental capacities affected by sleep**

- Attention
- Concentration
- Creativity
- Development of insight
- Emotional reactions
- Pattern recognition
- Decision making
- Learning and memory
- Seeking different perspectives
- Supporting others
- Results orientation
- Solving problems
- Developing trusted relationships
- Pattern recognition
- Development of insight
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- Developing trusted relationships


Source: McKinsey analysis and synthesis of neuroscience research. See article for additional citations.

"Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." – Benjamin Franklin
5 REASONS WHY THE BEST LEADERS DECIDE QUICKLY

By MINDA ZETLIN
editor@leaderonomics.com

Making thoughtful decisions is good. But thinking for too long before deciding is very, very bad, especially for a leader. If you don’t believe me, consider the fate of newly former University of Missouri (UM) president Tim Wolfe.

Wolfe made headlines when he announced his resignation. He had little choice. In a state that’s been ripped apart for more than a year after a white police officer shot a black 18-year-old in Ferguson, Wolfe’s been accused of indifference to the hostility facing Mizzou’s black students.

Whether he actually is indifferent may be up for debate. But one thing’s for sure: He’s been too slow to act and react, too slow to make decisions, and too slow to communicate his thoughts at every stage of this controversy.

It’s a mistake that’s easy to make. As president of The American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASA), I’ve made it myself. Being slow to react can derail a career at the best of times. Being slow to react during a time of crisis almost always leads to dire consequences.

For Wolfe and everyone else, here are some reasons it’s essential to make leadership decisions quickly:

1. TIME MAY WORK AGAINST YOU
It’s human nature to think that conditions don’t change, and that whatever you have to decide can wait a few hours, days, or weeks until you’ve given the question thorough consideration. But that’s almost never true — few situations stay static for long in our changing world. Sometimes waiting can work to your advantage, for instance when you’re trying to decide whether to fire someone and he or she decides to quit. More often, the situation will deteriorate while you decide what to do, as it did at UM.

2. YOUR LACK OF RESPONSE CREATES MORE PROBLEMS THAN RESPONDING WOULD
This is a lesson Wolfe learned the hard way. A small but very well organised group of black students linked arms in front of his car during the school’s homecoming parade and made short speeches about racial inequality throughout the history of UM. This went on for about 10 minutes, during which the protesters were confronted by some white onlookers and then joined by others, till they were finally removed by police. Wolfe sat in his car saying nothing throughout the entire event.

Any response — from ordering the students to move to getting him out of the car to talk with them — would have been preferable to just sitting there. In his subsequent apologue, Wolfe explained that he was not uncaring, he was “caught off guard in that moment.” But that apology came way too late.

In the weeks that followed the protest, Wolfe stayed silent while tempers continued to fray. On Nov 2, one of the protesters went on a hunger strike — after a swastika was drawn in feces on the wall of a new residence hall.

In fact, he did not issue his apology until this past weekend — after 10 Mizzou football players, joined by their coach, announced they would refuse to play until Wolfe resigned and the hunger strike ended. This move raised the stakes considerably, since canceling an upcoming game with Brigham Young could have cost US$3 million.

It’s fair to guess that without the football players’ stance, Wolfe never would have apologised. Even if that’s not true, the move was likely seen as much too late.

By MICHELLE GIBBINGS
editor@leaderonomics.com

WHEN was the last time someone asked “How are you?” and the answer was “busy”? It seems like everyone I talk to is busy. Being busy is the new normal.

But what are the side effects of busyness?

There’s the usual culprits of lack of sleep and increased stress, while on the positive side busyness is usually associated with getting things done and achievement.

What may surprise you is that busyness can interfere with ethical decision making. In fact, research shows that when people feel presssed for time they can make decisions that normally they wouldn’t have made.

KNOWING HOW YOUR BRAIN FUNCTIONS
In the early 1970s, John Darley and Daniel Batson (Princeton University) examined how time pressure affects behaviour. They invited seminary students to participate in a series of experiments. In one of these experiments the students were told to move from one building to another. The testers varied the amount of ‘urgency’ in this message.

To move between the buildings the seminary students had to go past a person slumped on the floor and moaning.

What the researchers found is that the more urgency in the message, the less likely it was for the person to stop and offer assistance. At the same time, for those who didn’t stop many of them appeared agitated when they got to the next building. This was because they were conflicted in their desire to help and the instructions they were given to get to the new building quickly.

People can fail to see what is going on around them when they are busy and preoccupied with timeliness. This has interesting implications for leaders who are leading in an increasingly complex and ever-changing environment. Ask yourself:

Are you paying attention to what is going on around you?

If you don’t, you’re in danger of making decisions when your brain isn’t at its peak.

Your brain is like a muscle. When you work out at the gym your muscles get tired and need to be rested. If you want to be at peak performance you need to get the right balance between “working” your muscles and “resting” them.

It’s the same for your brain. Your pre-frontal cortex, which is the part of the brain that’s involved in thinking, analyzing and reasoning, gets tired easily.

Consequently, your brain, very cleverly, has found a way of conserving energy. It takes short-cuts. A mental short-cut is known as a heuristic. Your brain uses heuristics to make big things and complex issues easier to manage, and ultimately remember.

As your brain takes in new information it tries to make sense of it, so that it knows what it needs to do. To ease the cognitive load this processing takes, it compresses information and sorts it into patterns. It looks for things that are familiar and goes — “I know what to do”.

Of course, your brain’s short cutting process isn’t always reliable, and it gives rise to bias in decision making. For example, your brain may expect to see something in a certain way, and so it will seek out information to validate that view. It filters out information that doesn’t fit with its view of the way things should be.

Bias can easily and usually unconsciously, invade your decision making.

SLEEP ON IT
When your brain is tired it eagerly takes the path of least resistance, and this is where it gets dangerous. Because taking the path of least resistance means that you will let expectations and assumptions drive how you think and act.

If you want to make better, more deliberate decisions you need to be conscious about when you make decisions.

The concept of “sleeping on it”, isn’t silly. Your brain processes over-night, and you are far more likely to make better decisions early in the morning, when your pre-frontal cortex is rested.

Next time you need to make an important decision — get some sleep. And, don’t check social media as soon as you wake up. If you want to process and think about some-thing use that precious early morning time wisely.

Checking snapchat, Instagram and Facebook isn’t a good use of your brain’s precious energy reserves!

By Minda Zetlin is a business technology writer and speaker, co-author of The Geek Gap, and former president of the American Society of Journalists and Authors. This article first appeared on inc.com

IF YOU SNOOZE, DO YOU REALLY LOSE?

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A LEADER IS A TEAM PLAYER

Having won the FIFA World Player of the Year Award in 2009 and subsequently the UEFA Best Player in Europe Award in 2010-2011, Lionel Messi is arguably one of the best football players in the world. Messi however would be hard-pressed to work his magic without the support of his teammates.

Great leaders are team players. Michael Jordan, Walt Disney and Akio Morita all achieved great success because of the teams they worked and played with. They know that successful teams do and achieve more together. What would a film be like without its extensive team of directors, producers, artists and cast? The greatest scientific discoveries to date are all also based on a pooling of knowledge and resources.

Exceptional teams deliver brilliant work. A leader recognises this and believes that everybody wins when they work together.

Be A Leader.

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

www.leaderonomics.org