CRUCIBLES: DRAWING STRENGTH FROM HARDSHIP

4 WHEN GRIEF IS A CHANCE TO GROW
5 SURVIVING THE ‘MIDDLE MILE’ IN BUSINESS
9 WHAT IT TAKES TO WIN AN OLYMPIC MEDAL
To thrive, we must first learn to survive. At some point in our lives, we have either heard of—or even experienced for ourselves—successes that probably would never have come about if not for a critical life-changing event. In such stories, we learn that it takes great willpower and courage for an individual to come to a decision that would ultimately alter the course of his or her life. These are crucial moments—or powerful events in a person’s life that make way for the transformation of self identity and purpose. The traits that helped a person endure and triumph over a period of intense adversity could very well go on to become the values that allow an individual to persevere and reach greater heights. Also, it is in these moments of intense pressure that an individual would likely reflect upon and rationalise the far-reaching implications of decisions that have been, and will be made. So, how do we rise from a period of great suffering and pain? And more importantly, how do we derive lessons and learn from crucible moments? This week, Bill George tells us how we can respond to our own negative crucible moments by transforming deep feelings of loss into opportunities for personal growth. He brings up a finding by psychologist Abraham Maslow that revealed how tragedy and trauma serve as important human learning experiences and shows how Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) empowers individuals to look at their crucibles and difficult experiences as growth opportunities. Read his take on tough times on Page 4.

Growth that comes fresh from a crucible moment can be rapid and fuelled by the need to make a drastic change. However, when the need wears out, a new lull sets in. On Page 5, Jeff Haden talks about the Middle Mile Syndrome, which is the stretch where leaders need to overcome minor and major setbacks, deal with long-term fatigue and avoid burning out. He gives eight practical ways to master the ‘middle mile’ and keep the momentum going, even when the excitement has worn off.

Crucible moments in one’s life need not always be a negative or damaging experience; deeply challenging experiences brought on by mentorship and second chances could also serve as strong catalysts for change. Leaderonomer Matt Naylor reveals his personal crucible moment, which came in the form of a prank gone wrong on an editor, who chose to use a negative situation to teach, rather than punish. Flip to Page 10 for his story. We hope this week’s issue opens up new perspectives into the defining moments in your lives. If you have a compelling story you’d like to share, write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com. We’d love to hear from you.

Lydia Gomez
Editor

"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. Please remember that your difficulties do not define you. They simply strengthen your ability to overcome." — Maya Angelou

Image credit: Getty Images
**PRANKS & FUN ARE KEYS TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

**Teams that laugh together, stick together**

By SANDY CLARKE
editor@leaderonomics.com

DURING the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, vuvuzelas were all the rage as fans trumpeted their way through matches with as much passion as the players on the pitch. And, one of our customer, who was at the World Cup Final, bought a vuvuzela and presented it to our chief executive officer, Roshan Thiran, as a gift. Roshan presented it to his team at Leaderonomics and it wasn’t long before it was put to mischievous use. You see, pranks are part and parcel of the Leaderonomics culture. It is one of the first things employees learn when they join the company – we have an official prank set up for them as part of the orientation process.

And throughout the company, everyone, including Roshan and our chief operating officer Ang Hui Ming, get pranked. Pranks are a fun way through which Leaderonomics show their affinity while enjoying a good dose of laughter.

Next thing we knew, the intrepid team at Leaderonomics was keen on taking up the ‘vuvuzela challenge’, which was simply: getting a sound out of the thing! Anyone who has ever tried playing the vuvuzela will know there’s a knack to it, and those who got it right first time stood a chance of winning a company car! (OK, maybe not, but they did receive a hearty cheer and kudos for their efforts).

Taking up the challenge was a diverse bunch of buoyant blowers, some of whom proved themselves to be vuvuzela virtuosos, while others sounded more like a broken toilet being flushed but most importantly, we all had fun. Some had a little more fun than others. You can watch the ‘Vuvuzela Challenge’ on the Leaderonomics YouTube page – http://bit.ly/idrvuvuzela.

In true Leaderonomics fashion, every occasion presents an opportunity to play a prank. During the challenge, one of the employees, Andrew, took to slicing open some cili padzi and rubbing it around the rim of the mouthpiece.

And now another one of many pranks to be played on one unsuspecting Leaderonomics which, in this case, would be Owen – a gifted intern who could have done with his talents stretching to include clairvoyance.

As Owen was handed the vuvuzela, he gave it his best shot and the horn burst forth with a sound that resembled an elephant choking on a l Zion.

In mere minutes, the valiant intern realised something was amiss and, as his lips flared up like the fires of Dante’s Inferno, the water cooler became his best buddy for the day. Always the good sport, Owen took the prank in his stride (and quick strides towards that cooler they were, too).

The idea of levity and fun are infused in the Leaderonomics culture since the beginning. Roshan explains, “While we’re serious about the science of building leaders, at Leaderonomics, we also make sure that we have some fun. After all, the team that laughs together, gets together and the tradition of pranking at our offices has long helped foster a culture of inclusion and cohesion.

“The pranks that the team play on each other are just one of many light-hearted ways that everyone at Leaderonomics comes together to bond and create the kinds of memories that are still spoken about years later. It really shows how friendly and close-knit the culture is here, and newcomers are quickly embraced into the fold, although they might want to keep their wits about them!”

Another story Roshan often talks about is his encounter with Herb Kelleher, the former CEO of Southwest Airlines. He was astounded by how much levity and fun was embedded in the Southwest culture and how that had helped create Southwest as the dominant airline globally for many years.

To ensure everyone gets equal treatment, the first few big pranks were played on Roshan himself, usually by co-founder Hui Ming. And occasionally, Roshan would get back at her and other employees, with a prank of his own (you can watch all these pranks at this playlist – http://bit.ly/ldrprank).

A key element of Leaderonomics’ philosophy is perhaps best summed up by the words of Steve Jobs who said, “Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes. … The ones who see things differently – they’re not fond of rules. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them, because they change things.”

This multiple award-winning social enterprise is one that seeks to push the boundaries of creativity and innovation in achieving its three-pronged vision of growing people into leaders, building communities of love, and transforming the nation one leader at a time.

Those at the helm of Leaderonomics know that a happy team is an innovative team, which explains the approach of taking the work seriously, but themselves a little less so.

In through team-bonding activities and the marvellous mischief that goes on inside the walls at Leaderonomics, the company certainly has a method behind the madness and it’s one that continues to bring empowerment, personal and professional growth, and successes to communities and leaders from across all walks of life and at all levels.

As Roshan puts it, “If you’re having a relaxed environment that inspires fellowship and it’s one that continues to bring empowerment, personal and professional growth, and successes to communities and leaders from across all walks of life and at all levels.

As Roshan puts it, “In having a relaxed environment that inspires fellowship and communities of love, and transforming the nation one leader at a time.”

We have won over the last few years testify to the strength of teamwork that exists here, and every single person contributes to the success we enjoy.

“Of course, while it’s an incredible honour to work with such talented and innovative people every day, should any of them hand me a vuvuzela in the near future, I’ll definitely be on my guard!”

So, if you happen to visit Leaderonomics office, beware as you may be part of a prank too. Just ask Leaderonomics John Thomas – http://bit.ly/idprank – who was pranked by a group of visitors to the office who played along with the culture of fun and levity.

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COPIING WITH CRUCIBLES

By BILL GEORGE
editor@leaderonomics.com

“Suffering is universal: You turn it around so that it becomes a creative, positive force.”
— Terry Waite

SICKOLOGIST Abraham Maslow found that tragedy and trauma are the most important human learning experiences. Crucibles enable people to learn that life is uncertain, and that they have limited control over events.

In recent years, a new reality is emerging; one that empowers individuals to look at their crucibles and difficult experiences as growth opportunities – we term this approach, Post-Crash Growth.

Think of the most challenging moment in your life. Perhaps it was a time when a loved one passed away, or you had a personal health crisis. Or you lost your job or your family. Whatever it was, it was a time of crisis for you – a moment that caused you to reflect deeply about who you are and what is truly important in your life.

Traumatic moments push many people into a downward spiral. As they refuse to address or even acknowledge their crucibles, they make the memories more painful. As a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are painfully aware of ‘Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder’ – or PTSD — but the phenomenon also applies to war victims or military veterans.

New research shows that traumatic experiences can result in post-traumatic growth (PTG). PTG starts by recognizing life’s uncertainties and embracing them as fundamental tenets of human existence. It also requires self-awareness to acknowledge your responsibility over the choices you make in life coupled with the desire to undergo personal transformation. As Warren Bennis explains in Geeks and Geezers, “Some magic takes place in the crucible of leadership. Whatever is thrown at them, leaders emerge from their crucibles stronger and unbroken.”

All of us face trials in our lives. How can you respond to your crucibles to transform your deep feelings of loss — which are real and natural — into opportunities for personal growth?

After reading True North, Pedro Algorta, one of the survivors of the famous 1972 crash in the Andes mountains, reached out to me. In his letter, he wrote that while flying with 45 friends, his plane crashed into the Andes. “After 72 days barely surviving in the mountains without food or clothing, sixteen of us were finally rescued.”

For 35 years, Algorta never mentioned being part of this experience to anyone other than his wife, despite the worldwide publicity the event received. As an MBA student at Stanford, he didn’t even share it with his classmates. After reading True North, he began to process how this event had shaped his life.

When he visited my Harvard Business School classes in 2008 and 2013, he shared three ways to deal with crucibles:

1. Focus on the event, and live your life looking backward, often an angry life of blaming others.
2. Embrace the event as an opportunity for personal growth.
3. Use the event to heal your wound and transform it into a pearl.

In the aftermath of her death, I could look at cancer with a new perspective. The longer we lived, the more we realized and appreciated the gift of life.

When I think of the most challenging moment in my life, it was when I was advised to have a brain tumor removed. “Do it,” the surgeon said. “Your life goes on.”

Are you turning your wounds into pearls?

In times of personal crisis, the power of faith and the support of close friends can provide the basis for healing.

When he visited my Harvard Business School classes in 2008 and 2013, he shared three ways to deal with crucibles:

1. Focus on the event, and live your life looking backward, often an angry life of blaming others.
2. Embrace the event as a learning opportunity to turn your crucible into a pearl.
3. Use the event to heal your wound and transform it into a pearl.

In my new book, Discover Your True North, Algorta shared the metaphor of the oyster pearl. When sand grates against the oyster, its natural reaction is to cover up the irritant to protect itself with a substance called nacre (mother-of-pearl), which eventually forms the pearl itself.

Are you turning your wounds into pearls?

To do so, you would need to reflect on the impact your crucible has had on your life and what you learned from the experience. After discerning its meaning, you can reframe it as an opportunity for personal growth.

My crucible came when I least expected it. In my mid-20s, I was engaged to be married, just 18 months after my mother’s sudden death. A few weeks before the wedding, my fiancée started having severe headaches. I took her to a leading neurosurgeon, but all her exams were negative. On a Saturday night three weeks before the wedding, we talked about final plans. The following morning her parents called to say she died during the night from a malignant brain tumour.

In the aftermath of her death, I could have easily become bitter and depressed and even lost my faith. In times of personal crisis, the power of faith and the support of close friends can provide the basis for healing. If you do, you will lead a fuller, richer life, and you can help others cope with life’s challenges.

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8 ALWAYS LEADERS GET THROUGH THE MIDDLE MILE

BETWEEN THE INITIAL RUSH OF YOUR LAUNCH AND YOUR ULTIMATE SUCCESS, LIES A LONG, TOUGH ROAD.

BY JEFF HADEN
editor@leaderonomics.com

S TARTING a business is exciting. Selling a successful company, or going public, or handing it off to your children – that’s exciting, too. But what about all the stuff in between?

The real work gets done in what Daniel Steenerson, the founder of Disability Insurance Services, the largest wholesale distributor of disability insurance products in the US, calls ‘the middle mile’. That’s where you burn the most energy: overcoming minor and major setbacks, dealing with long-term fatigue, working through cash flow shortages, and simply trying to keep from burning yourself out.

“During the middle mile there’s a huge temptation to quit,” Steenerson says. “That’s why such a huge percentage of businesses fail in the first five years. Poor management and lack of capital are the two main reasons, but from my standpoint the real culprit is losing sight of the finish line. While you can’t be myopic, and focus only on today – you also must keep your eye on where you ultimately want to go.”

Here are Steenerson’s tips for mastering the middle mile:

1 CONSIDENTLY VISUALISE THE FINISH LINE
Many business owners reach a certain level of success, and then they settle. When you get to the point where you’re good, good becomes the enemy of great. The bad stuff often doesn’t keep you from succeeding; the good stuff does not your age. And your journey is never finished.

2 KEEP PUTTING ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER
Stay disciplined. Focus on taking small steps. The time and energy you invest will pay off. Every day, know what you’ll accomplish, how you’ll accomplish it, and keep putting that foot forward. Then measure the success of your activities. We achieve what we measure – so keep measuring and keep moving.

3 BELIEVE THAT SURGE WILL COME
Very rarely does progress come in an even pace. You may work incredibly hard for three years and suddenly there’s a big surge, and then growth levels off. Then work incredibly hard, because the next surge will come. Stay motivated during the flat periods by planning and preparing for that surge.

4 PUT YOUR TRUST IN EXECUTION
Good ideas come to many people at the same time. The people who execute are the people who succeed. Execution is a function of discipline. Without relentless execution, you will never achieve greater results.

5 SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY
Whenever you can simplify a task, a process, the way you achieve a goal, etc, you can accomplish more in less time because you aren’t bogged down in complexity. The same applies to training your staff; it’s quicker and easier to share what you know and do when you simplify.

6 EMBRACE DISCOMFORT
If you’re willing to put yourself in a position of discomfort, you can learn anything. Reaching a certain skill level and a certain level of affluence makes most people comfortable, and that’s where they stay unless they expand their area of comfort into areas of discomfort.

Sure, you’ll fumble for a while and you’ll struggle because you must stretch in order to do new things. Most people eventually feel they’ve paid their dues, but to gain something new, you have to give something up – and usually, that’s something you’re comfortable.

7 STAY NOURISHED
Don’t let your creative juices run dry. Remember, what got you here won’t get you there – and in this case, ‘there’ is past the middle mile. We change in two different ways: the people we meet and with whom we associate, and the books that we read.

Read. Try to be an expert in a particular subject. Or, expand into areas you know little about. Or both. Entrepreneurs should always have a book on their nightstand. And talk to people; meet people inside and outside your industry.

Get informed. Get motivated. Learn from others. Everyone you meet knows something you don’t know that you should know. No matter what, don’t stop learning. It’s all about your journey, not your age. And your journey is never finished.

8 HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE
The best way to hold yourself accountable is to develop the right relationships: healthy relationships, both outside of your business and especially in your business with your management team and staff.

See yourself as a servant – because you are – and be truly accountable to those you serve.

THE SEVEN LAWS OF THE RUT

By DAN ROCKWELL
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LAW #1 Stop spinning your tires
The first law of the rut is the most important. When you’re stuck, the more you spin your tires, the more stuck you become. To get unstuck, first stop doing things that get you stuck. If possible, take time off for reflection. What old dream needs to be cut out of it by adopting new behaviors?

LAW #2 Stop lying to yourself
Your choices got you into this mud hole. Blame prolongs ‘stuckness’. An excuse is a fabricated reason for why it’s okay to stay the same. The first responsibility is taking responsibility for yourself.

LAW #3 Reflect on patterns
Do relationships often end in the same place? Are you persistently unhappy about the same thing? Have you dropped the ball in the same way, repeatedly? What patterns need to change?

LAW #4 Find someone who will tell you the unvarnished truth
If you’re stuck, you’re listening to cuddlers and ignoring confronters. The things that change us often hurt. What are you afraid to let go?

LAW #5 Ask yourself who you want to become
If you’re stuck and happy, stop reading right now. Go play in the mud. But, if you’re unhappy, think about who you want to become. The only way to get unstuck is to grow out of it by adopting new behaviors.

LAW #6 Define life in terms of contribution
Credentials are nice, but contribution is better. Where is your greatest contribution to people? Do more of that.

LAW #7 Try stuff
See what you enjoy. Adapt the good. Reject the bad.

What helps leaders get unstuck?
What laws of the rut would you add?

Dan Rockwell is a coach, speaker and is freakishly interested in leadership. He is the author of a world-renowned, socially shared leadership blog, Leaderships Freak. To connect with Dan, e-mail us at editor@leaderonomics.com
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**Gandhi wrote a letter to his father, stating his willingness to accept punishment.**

**Gandhi'\'s hardships were mostly defined by conflict.**

**Gandhi left his father\'s house and moved into a family with three siblings, none of whom he ever really knew.**

**Gandhi was an 18-year-old student in South Africa, briefly serving as a lawyer in Durban.**

**Hitler's eventual seizure of power led to his eventual capture.**

**Gandhi's philosophy, born from his many years of prayer, was the concept of **Ahimsa**, the principle of non-violence.**

**Ahimsa**

A

**THEIR LEGACY**

**How Hitler and Gandhi Changed the Paths in History**

**PAINFUL MOMENTS THAT DEFINE LEADERSHIP**

**TURNING CRUCIFICES INTO LEADERSHIP GOLD**

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2 WAYS TO DEAL WITH CHANGES IN LIFE

HOW WE CHOOSE TO REACT TO OUR CIRCUMSTANCES DEFINES US

By JESSLYN LAI
editor@leaderonomics.com

The same success and creative ways to overcome challenges. There will always be opportunities for a point to take small initiatives. There might be gaps at the moment, but don’t throw them away because they are never harvested.

Viktor Frankl certainly didn’t feel like rising above his circumstances. He certainly could have blamed many people for his suffering, but when it came to his situation based on his values—choosing to be proactive, grow his personal strength of character, and rise above his circumstances to be positive.

In one of the best examples I have seen of someone choosing to be proactive, he chose to share his thoughts about learning from one’s hardships, and overcoming them. He recorded his observations on tiny scraps of paper and hid them, so he could keep writing. Those scraps later became a book, “Man’s Search For Meaning,” after his release.

When we choose our response based on values—we are proactive. When we choose, our response based on emotions or feelings—we are reactive.

The proactive person will rise above his or her situation, take personal responsibility, and choose to be proactive by developing their character. The reactive person will blame anything and anyone else for their circumstances and choose to do nothing.

Often, we don’t feel like being proactive. When the server gets your order wrong at a restaurant and your steak is well done instead of medium rare, how will you respond? A response based on your feelings of frustration and disappointment would cause you to blame the server, blame the restaurant, get angry, and become demanding. A response based on your values (assuming you value people) would cause you to assure the server you understand mistakes happen and politely let the restaurant correct the mistake. Easier said than done? You bet. But we all have two choices when it comes to dealing with change. We can be proactive, respond based on our values, and choose personal growth; or, we can be reactive, respond based on emotions and feelings, and choose to adjudicate our personal responsibility for growth.

Here are three reasons why we should always seek to be proactive when responding to change.

1. Being proactive will help you manage your emotions.

Your happiness is not dependent on your circumstances. That doesn’t mean you aren’t striving to improve, but it does mean you can learn to be grateful for what you have.

2. Being proactive will allow you to stand out as someone who is a leader or who has leadership potential.

Those around you will realize you have good character and take responsibility for yourself and your growth. You will shine because not everyone can embrace change.

3. Being proactive will help equip you to meet the challenges of change and turn them into opportunities.

Changes are not something to be afraid of but rather something to be hopeful about because there is potential for something better.

SETTLE FEARS TO CHASE YOUR DREAMS

Have you thought about trying something new but haven’t gotten to it yet? When was the last time you delayed doing something that its priority gets constantly pushed back? How many times have you felt a prompt to do something, but did not do anything about it? It might not be all about procrastination.

FORGOTTEN SEEDS

The lack of resources, knowledge, skills and opportunities are some real reasons we keep certain ideas and desires in the back of our minds. If they are kept aside for too long, they become seeds that are not planted; they have so much potential, but its fruits may never be harvested.

We may not have all that we need at the moment, but don’t throw these seeds away just yet. Instead, write down these ideas and desires even if we don’t know how to make it happen.

Slowly but surely, we can move towards our goals when we make a plan to take small initiatives. There will be obstacles along the way but as long as we are willing to press on, there will always be opportunities for creative ways to overcome challenges.

AN ENDING MUST HAVE A BEGINNING

One morning as I was creating an event in my calendar, I accidentally marked an end date before the start of the event, and a pop-up window alerted me with this message: “Sorry, you cannot create an event that ends before it starts.”

I smiled to myself thinking that it’s so real how our doubts and circumstances can kill something before it even happens. If prolonged, we go into a circle of unfilled possibilities.

It happens, but take courage!

A STIR IN OUR HEARTS

Something deep inside of us knows the things we cannot avoid with—desire, vision, passion, will. We cannot avoid things that way. By nature, we have preferences and interests that we want to pursue. But these things are often buried, and it takes circumstances to stir us to do something about it; an immediate need of a situation, an event or a calling that hits like an arrow through the heart and says: “Let’s do this.” Suddenly, we’re able to make it happen.

Yes, there will be other urgent things that occupy our schedules. And we will constantly put these needs ahead as priority. However, we must also be aware of how much time we end up spending on these tasks.

When we look back a year later, would they still matter? How can we minimise the time and effort needed to complete those tasks so that we can do what may be more subtle, but important to us? Can we find a way to increase efficiency in a way that works best?

But first—we need to slow down, stop, and think before we accelerate again. It doesn’t have to be a getaway or a holiday. Micro steps, like being still for five minutes to reflect on the bigger picture, can put things back into perspective.

IT STARTS WITH ONE TINY STEP

Recently, I’ve been inspired and encouraged by a few friends who picked up their interest in art again. For many, art may not be a priority at all, which is one of the reasons why it is easily shielded and forgotten. But they did the smallest but most important thing—they got started. It doesn’t have to be perfect, and it might not always turn out to be the best, but it is better to have started on something than do nothing at all. All it takes is just a little step of courage, and it gets us into motion. Once we’ve gotten into the flow, we will most likely want to continue.

BRINGING POSSIBILITIES INTO REALITY

Here’s a piece of advice. If you really want to do something, put yourself in a situation that would stir that desire in you. Your instincts will do the rest. The road ahead may not be easy, but it will be rewarding. Take courage!

I hope this article has given you ideas on how to get started. Like always, I’d love to know what new things you’ve started or are planning to start. You can reach me through editor@leaderonomics.com or @Leaderonomics on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.
CATCHING UP WITH MALAYSIA’S OLYMPIC HEROINE

M. VASUGI SPEAKS ABOUT HER OLYMPIC JOURNEY AND WHAT KEEPS HER GOING

By PRETHIBA Esvary
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N 1992, Malaysian badminton legends, Jalani and Razif Sidek brought home the first ever Olympic medal for Malaysia in the men’s doubles category. This was a glorious and historic moment for every Malaysian, as we had not seen a win this big since our participation in the Olympics in 1964. If you dialed it back a little and went back to 1988 when the Seoul Olympics took place, there was a young Malaysian woman named Vasugi Manuchamuthu, who set foot at the Olympics for the first time, and managed to secure a bronze medal for the sport of taekwondo.

WHAT HAPPENED?

However, taekwondo at the time was only a demonstration event. It only became a full medal sport 12 years later, at the Sydney Olympics. Hence, her win was not recognised and many did not know of her achievement.

WHERE IS SHE NOW?

After reaching the peak of her career, Vasugi wanted to impart the knowledge and experience she had gained from competing at the world arena to young budding fighters. As her way of giving back to the community, she manages and teaches taekwondo at the Viva Taekwondo Club in Bangsar, a premier club affiliated to Taekwondo Malaysia. The now 49-year-old mother of three has been actively involved in grooming young fighters. As her way of giving back, she manages and teaches taekwondo at the Viva Taekwondo Club in Bangsar, a premier club affiliated to Taekwondo Malaysia.

HER EARLY DAYS

When asked how she got into taekwondo, Vasugi said, “My father was involved in a sport known as silambam (a form of Indian martial art), and he wanted me too, to be involved in martial arts, so I registered myself for taekwondo classes held in school.”

Vasugi took part in her first competition at the age of 14 – a year after starting taekwondo – and went on to actively represent Malaysia till she was 23. She won her first medal, a silver, at the 1987 SEA Games in Jakarta. This marked the start of a growing career in the sport and she went on winning multiple competitions after that, such as the 1989 KL SEA Games, 1990 World Invitational Tournament in KL and 1991 Manila SEA Games. For her contribution to women’s taekwondo, she was awarded the Women’s Development Coach Award in 2003.

While she may not have gained the recognition she deserved, Vasugi’s fight to clinch success in taekwondo has not only moulded her into a better human being, but also taught her valuable life lessons that she continues to practice as a mother, trainer, wife, peer and daughter. Here are two key takeaways we can glean from her.

Lesson #1: You are the limiting factor to your success.

Coming from a poor background did not stop Vasugi from pursuing her dreams. Because her family could not afford it at the time, her coach, Yeap Swee Bee, bought Vasugi her first taekwondo uniform. “That really inspired me to be the fighter she thought I could be,” Vasugi told Leaderonomics.

But that was merely the beginning of a long and arduous journey. We all know that the path to success is not easy and it takes multiple failures and obstacles for us to reach the top, even in the corporate world.

Vasugi gave an instance of her brush with failure. In the finals of the 1987 SEA games competition, she lost to her Indonesian opponent. Instead of throwing in the towel, she used it as a source of motivation to train harder. Her determination, hard work and perseverance paid off when she defeated the same opponent two years later.

Embracing our failures is easier said than done, even in the workplace setting. However, without these slips or blunders, how will we learn and become better at what we do?

“Defeats are a stepping stone towards success,” Vasugi advises.

Lesson #2: Work hard and persevere, but do it with caution.

Vasugi conveyed that her source of motivation and inspiration till today is widely revered boxing champ, Muhammad Ali. “I love that he was never afraid of any beat, and always pushed to his maximum potential in the ring,” she said.

Working hard and pushing yourself to reach, or even go beyond, your limits is great, but at what cost?

We’ve all heard stories of athletes being forced to pull out of competitions at the eleventh hour, as they have yet to recover from physical injuries caused by intense training and mishaps. One small mistake during a training session, and you could be missing a golden opportunity to bag your first gold medal.

Vasugi shared that she while she was thrilled about qualifying for the 1988 Olympics, she was expected to perform and train harder than ever before. Due to the intensity of the training sessions, she suffered a knee injury merely two weeks before leaving for Seoul.

“Thankfully, it was a minor ligament strain and I was able to recover and compete in the Olympics,” she said.

For working professionals like us, it’s good to be ambitious and aim high by taking on big projects and trying to close ‘x’ number of deals a month for instance, but it won’t be worth all the effort if you’re burnt out in the end. So, stop and ask yourself if this is worth risking your health and sanity for.

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M. Vasugi receiving a rousing homecoming upon her return from the 1988 Olympic Games. Pic by S.S Kanesan / THE STAR

Vasugi’s. So, if you have one to tell, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com

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9AM – 6PM

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Vishen Lakhiani, founder of MindValley, the biggest online publishers in the world, will share insights on how he overcame significant constraints to succeed and grow. He will be joined by organisational culture expert Joseph Tan, entrepreneurial pioneers like Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis technology expert Prof Dr Ali Jafari, Anecdote International’s Mark Schenk, BFM radio station founder and CEO Malek Ali and SEEK Asia CEO Suresh Thiru.

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