HARNESSING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

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Very school holiday season, Leaderonomics organises leadership camps for children and teens. In these camps, we sometimes run an activity where campers discuss and imagine their dream school.

They are assigned to different groups and given some time – and lots of markers – to draw out the blueprint of what the best school in the world would look like for them. Needless to say, it rarely resembles what reality has to offer.

Some people may think that these “dream” schools would contain only frivolous notions and fanciful wishes that contribute zilch towards an actual education. Yet, again and again, while we see some crazy, way out ideas (roller coasters to take you to class), and some delightful ones (stress relief rooms with cuddly animals), we also are reminded that youth care about learning.

They build giant, well-equipped science labs; they dream up dedicated buildings for arts and creative learning; they long for libraries filled with books and hidden corners for reading; they design gyms and parks for physical activity and quiet spaces for relaxing and unwinding. Youth desire to have the space and freedom to learn and to grow according to their interests and passions. Are they being given enough of these opportunities?

Recently, we concluded our annual LEAD Convention, organised by members of our Leaderonomics Clubs in schools. The convention saw about 160 teens from different schools coming together to share and showcase the Make-A-Difference (MAD) projects that they are running in their schools.

These young leaders have identified issues within their schools and have chosen to be part of the solution, brainstorming and figuring out how they can be the change they want to see in their world. Some of these projects include anti-bullying campaigns, solving issues with dirty toilets and organising career fairs for their school. These may not seem to be groundbreaking projects, but they certainly are ways for young people to learn ownership and responsibility.

The lead up to the convention was not a walk in the park. The youngsters were out of their comfort zones and they had to take the lead on their projects and in organising the event.

We had to manage the fine balance of allowing them to take ownership and accountability without us simply stepping in and taking over. And isn’t that what we as adults tend to do? We change in and start giving instructions, asserting control over things and making all the decisions.

How will our youth learn when they haven’t been allowed the opportunity to do so? Remember, young people are inclined towards positive self-growth and learning – their dream schools prove that.

We firmly believe that youth need to be empowered to explore, experience and take ownership of their circumstances. And all of these should be done in safe environments with ample support, such that the price of failure is reasonable and affordable.

Take the MAD Projects for example. If the students fail to complete their project, or if they run one that is not impactful, what is the cost of that “failure”? In the grand scheme of things, it is relatively low. It’s an affordable failure and one that we must be willing to allow our youth to pay, so that they learn the valuable lessons attached to the experience which can, in turn, become lifelong guiding signs into adulthood.

Here are some ways you can empower the young people around you:

### 1. Start young

Even toddlers can begin to learn to make simple decisions in everyday scenarios. For example, they can choose if they want to put on their right shoe first, or their left shoe, or they can also decide if they want one or two servings of vegetables.

The key is to involve them in the process of decision-making and reduce the need for just instructing or telling them what to do. Help them to think and make choices.

**Remember to offer reasonable choices.**

**Saying, “do you want to put on your shoes or else you stay at home” may not be reasonable especially if you actually need to go out and can’t safely leave your child at home.**

### 2. Build problem-solving skills

As adults, there are times when we need to understand that a youth’s problem is theirs and not ours. Our role is to facilitate and support them in working out solutions to the challenges they face.

It’s important to learn not to “rescue” them from the consequences of their choices, but to support them through it and help them with ideas on how to avoid making the same mistakes again.

In some of our programmes, group mates have sometimes found it difficult to get along with each other. We don’t change their partners in order to make our lives easier, but we do help them through the process of understanding how people are different and how we can learn to work with each other despite these differences.

Of course, there are extreme situations where significant adult intervention is necessary but again, the aftermath needs to be explained and processed by the youth along with the assumption of responsibility.

### 3. Support their interests

We may not always fully understand – or appreciate – what the younger generation find interesting, but we can likely find something positive about it.

A good starting point is to find positive character traits that encourage growth. Are they exceptionally passionate, committed or disciplined when it comes to what they like? Do they show patience, diligence, and responsibility? Highlight these positive traits and encourage them to also exercise these characteristics in other areas of their lives.

### 4. Encourage participation in extra-curricular activities

Being a part of clubs and societies enable youth to develop strong social competencies. They are also able to explore and make new discoveries about their strengths, interests and areas of development. It builds up their confidence and esteem, contributing to a more holistic self-identity.

It is our hope that the youth of today will have many experiences and support to be able to discover their potential and capabilities. These opportunities may not always happen by accident. As such, we need to be more intentional in cultivating and designing an environment that promotes growth, creativity and agency.

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**Youth and together with the team, enjoys designing and delivering engaging programmes for children and teens. She believes every youth can be empowered to be a leader and make a difference wherever they are. For more information, e-mail youth@leaderonomics.com**
**LESSONS ON HAPPINESS FROM ADAM SMITH**

By ROSHAN THIRAN
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“Never complain of that which is at all times in your power to rid yourself” — Adam Smith

**VER** the past few years, I have written about great leaders like Gandhi, Ben Franklin, Steve Jobs and otherss who have shown great leadership. Recently, I have been reading about others who may not have led a nation or an organisation, but from whom we can nevertheless learn great leadership lessons. Adam Smith, a Scottish philosopher and economist, the father of modern economics and the man who coined the term the “invisible hand of the market” is one of them.

Smith remains one of the most important thinkers in addressing a question that is still as pressing today as it ever was: How can human values and the needs of business work together to create prosperous and civilised societies? When we think about capitalism, it’s often either thought of as a positive system or a negative one. Those who believe that capitalism is a negative force in the world might point to consumerism as the root of all evil that corrupts and enslaves the minds of many. For Smith, the reality was much less black-and-white. Corporations, he believed, don’t corrupt our world – they simply serve our appetites and supply whatever it is we demand. The answer to society’s problems does not lie in getting rid of capitalism, but instead in learning how to make better use of it.

Smith (1723–1790) was born in Kirkcudbright, an industrial town in Scotland. At the age of 14, he attended the University of Glasgow before going on to study at Oxford. In 1748, he taught at the University of Edinburgh, where he met and befriended the philosopher and economist David Hume.

In 1759, Smith published the first of his notable works, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a book which examines how we can lead a good life. In 1776, his best known work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (known as *The Wealth of Nations*) was published, and is considered a seminal work that shaped modern economic thinking. At the time, a nation’s economic wealth was determined by the amount of gold and silver it possessed, but Smith argued that the true wealth of a nation was measured in its production and commerce.

**Today,** we refer to this measurement as the gross domestic product.

**CAPITALISM IS GOOD?**

In the age of consumerism, Smith believed that capitalism was ultimately a force for good in the world. The creation of wealth and growth look after their weakest members through the provision of hospitals, welfare systems, and other means of support. But Smith also felt that capitalism fell somewhat short in its role of meeting demands and serving capabilities.

He believed that the ideal was to go beyond mere consumerism to serve higher needs such as education, self-knowledge, attractive environments, and helping to provide people with lives of meaningful purpose.

To help achieve such an enriching system, Smith called for consumers to be better educated in how their choices affect society. He hoped that we would learn to look beyond our base desires for goods and services that bring only fleeting satisfaction and learn to want better quality things.

Smith believed that problems don’t arise in society by people having choices, but that we don’t exercise our choices wisely. Societies could prosper and function on a more civilised level if capitalism could be used to raise the quality of consumer demand.

Though Smith was principally in favour of free markets and advocated a policy of restraint in regard to state intervention, a close reading of his work reveals that he believed it takes great leadership to ensure capitalism works.

Smith believed it was necessary for great leadership at all levels – to enforce contracts, protect patents, prevent unfair practices, prevent cartels, encourage innovation, and provide for public goods such as transportation, bridges, light-houses, public safety, security and global mobility. This requires honesty, upright and high integrity leadership. I believe it may be the same in our companies. Problems in organisations do not arise from having too many choices or from the systems we deploy. The issues are generally centred around bad leadership and lack of clarity. Fixing our core issues may not necessarily need a transformation of our outer core, it may just look to inside and fix ourselves.

**BEING HAPPY**

At the core of his work, Smith was driven by a desire to discover the best ways to make individuals and nations happier. His Wealth of Nations was really an extension of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and is still recognised today as the first and most important book written on political economy.

Ultimately Smith sought to guide himself and others in the pursuit of true satisfaction. While we might think that material gain and status is what leads to a fulfilled life, he disagreed. Fulfilment comes when we are able to perform good work in the world and know that we are admired and respected because of our actions. In Smith’s own words: “Man naturally desires not only to be loved, but to be lovely [worthy of being loved].”

Being good is not some empty ideal that holds us back from doing well and succeeding in life.

On the contrary, qualities such as giving, and other wholesome behaviours, are the very things that increase our chances of success, happiness and contentment.

Conversely, greedy pursuits for status, money and fame leave us in danger of feeling isolated and inadequate, feeling neither lovely nor loved.

Adam Smith
Some of Smith’s advice to us on being happier includes the following:

- Most of us are inherently self-motivated and think about ourselves but surprisingly, “we also care about other people’s happiness.” This means that deep down, we become happier when we care about others.
- We desire to be loved and to be worthy of love. This requires us to give and help others, which bring joy and happiness.
- Pursuing money for its own sake is much more likely to bring about sadness than happiness.
- “Self-delusion is the source of half the disorders of human life.” We need to guard against this at all times.
- Emotional intelligence is key to our happiness. When we successfully interact emotionally with others, we increase our levels of happiness. So, we need to enhance our emotional intelligence at all times.

**SMITH AND TRUST**

Smith is recognised as the father of modern economics and his most famous work has been described as the “bible of capitalism”. He didn’t just work to understand how economies and its systems functioned, but how they could play a role in best serving human values. To help achieve this and to cultivate civilised societies, there is one quality that acts as the foundation upon which all others are built: trust.

In his book, *How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life: An Unexpected Guide to Human Nature and Happiness*, Russ Roberts highlights the importance of trust in society, writing: “When you can trust the people you deal with — when you don’t have to fear that your trust will be exploited for someone else’s gain – life is lower and economic life is much easier. How does trust get created? By the myriad of small interactions we have with each other when we honour our word and pass up the chance for opportunism.”

I believe trust is also one of the key deficits we have in many organisations, and possibly, in nations. In fact, on a daily basis, we have more than 20,000 interactions (words we speak, our body language, our facial expressions etc.) with people around us. These 20,000 moments define our leadership, influence and levels of trust in us. Smith seems to have figured this out almost 250 years ago.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

Reading Adam Smith’s work reinforces in me these three important necessities that the world needed almost 250 years ago, and which it still needs today in abundance: leadership, happiness and trust. Let us all work hard to be better leaders and followers, to be happier people and to trust our employers and leaders. To ensure Smith’s dream of a better world continues to endure.
WHAT MESSAGE ARE YOU SENDING?
TIPS FOR MAKING THE RIGHT FIRST IMPRESSION

By KRISTAL CLARE
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I was in the airline industry that I realised our clothes send signals about who we are. Cabin crew and pilots were expected to be prim, and impeccably groomed before and after every flight. Not a hair out of place, not a button missing, and each piece of clothing perfectly pressed — whenever we were in uniform. Having a uniform meant carrying ourselves well because we were the faces of the airline.

We, as humans, spend every minute of every day “reading” people and drawing conclusions; the unconscious mind is working all the time. The conclusions drawn will most likely set the pace for future interactions.

When the word “casual working environment” comes into play, it is important to remember that the workplace still needs to be regarded with respect and — even when adopting a more relaxed environment — the usual code of business etiquette should be observed.

How you carry yourself can be broken down into three parts: your appearance, your behaviour and the way you communicate. It is extremely important because it not only affects the way others treat you but how you treat “you”.

Appearance - “Dressing well is a form of good manners.” — Tom Ford

Before we start debating how superficial humans are, it is scientifically proven that: “We judge others within seconds of meeting them.” — Albert Mehrabian.

While we have been taught by at least one figure of authority in our life to never judge a book by its cover, how do we ensure that others treat us the same way? Marketing companies invest millions on packaging. How we dress is, essentially, our packaging.

When you feel fresh, smell great and wear something that makes you feel good and fits well, your body language will exude confidence. An important rule to remember is to dress with the Time, Occasion and Place in mind; to avoid being underdressed or overdressed.

Behaviour – Etiquette is simply making the other person feel comfortable. Imagine meeting someone for the first time; you put out your hand and receive a limp handshake or a hurried one without any eye contact. How would it make you feel? The excitement and curiosity immediately dwindles because they left a weak or poor impression on you.

These sorts of behaviours evoke a sense of disappointment and disrespect that is felt by the receiver. Our posture, eye contact and our smiles are what others pay attention to — unconsciously.

Walking into a room, with your head down and eyes to the floor communi-cates to others that you are not a confident person; or says, “I am uninterested” or simply, “do not talk to me.” Some of these behaviours are borne out of habit. Which is why we must take a step back and examine our body language from time to time.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY
The words we use can also have a profound effect on the people around us. However, communication includes our tone, message and our words, and these are not of equal importance.

Once emotions come into play, our tone of voice varies and projects the many truths — our frustration, delight, anxiety, or even anger. Saying the same words in a different tone could make a world of difference. Research shows that tone of voice accounts for 38% of the overall message. Only 7% of the overall message is made up of our actual choice of words. Words such as “just” automatically downplay an achievement no matter how big. While it is always wise to carefully choose our words, the part that plays the biggest role when communicating is our body language. It accounts for 55% of the overall message.

AUTHENTICITY IN A CLUTTERED WORLD
Ideally, carrying yourself well means communicating who you are with clarity. Here’s something to think about though. Carrying yourself well sometimes isn’t just about you; it is about evoking certain emotions when others interact with you.

The message begins with you and ends with the other person decoding who you are. It’s also taking the time to make others feel comfortable, welcoming, respected and important.

Appearance, behaviour and communication make up the image of who you are. In a cluttered, fast-paced business climate, always remember that the end goal is to make a positive and impactful impression with authenticity.

LEADERSHIP: NOT A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

In today’s volatile world, building effective teams has never been more important for leaders. Situational leaders possess fluidity in their approach to get the best out of their people and optimise team performance. In an exciting gamified session, our iLead simulation uses instant feedback and analytics to help your emerging leaders practice their situational agility.

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WHAT MAKES A LEADER?
BREAKING DOWN THE MYTHS AROUND WHAT LEADERSHIP IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

By KEVIN KRUSE
and TRAVIS BRADBERRY
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We’ll start with what leadership is not… Leadership has nothing to do with titles. Similar to the point above, just because you have a C-level title, doesn’t automatically make you a “leader.” We often stress the fact that you don’t need a title to lead. You can be a leader in your workplace, your neighbourhood or even your family, all without having a title.

Leadership has nothing to do with respect. Say the word “leader” and most people think of a dominating, take-charge, charismatic individual. People often think of icons from history like General Patton or President Lincoln. But leadership isn’t an adjective. We don’t need to be extroverted or charismatic to practice leadership. And those with charisma don’t automatically lead.

Leadership isn’t management. This is the big one. You have 15 people in your unit. You are the “boss.” You are a manager. Good management is needed. Managers need to plan, measure, monitor, coordinate, solve, hire, fire, and so many other things. Managers spend most of their time managing things. Leadership lead people.

So, again, what makes a leader? Let’s see how some of the most respected business thinkers of our time define leadership, and let’s consider what’s wrong with their definitions.

Peter Drucker: “The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers.” Really? This instance of tautology is so simplistic as to be dangerous. A new Army Captain is put in the command of 200 soldiers. He never leaves his room, or utters a word to the men and women in his unit. Perhaps routine orders are given through a subordinate. By default his troops have to “follow” orders. Is the Captain really a leader? Commander yes, leader no. Drucker is of course a brilliant thinker, but his definition is too simple.

Warren Bennis: “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.” Every spring you have a vision for a garden, and with lots of work carrots and tomatoes become a reality. Are you a leader? No, you’re a gardener. Bennis’ definition seems to have forgotten “others”.

John Maxwell: “Leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less.” We like minimalism but this reduction is too much. A robber with a gun has “influence” over his victim. A manager has the power to fire team members which provides a lot of influence. But does this influence make a robber or a manager a leader? Maxwell’s definition omits the source of influence.

So what is leadership?
DEFINITION: Leadership is a process of social influence which maximizes the efforts of others toward the achievement of a greater good. Notice the key elements of this definition:
Leadership stems from social influence, not authority or power. Leadership requires others, and that implies that they do not need to be “direct reports.”
No mention of personality traits, attributes, or even a title; there are many styles, many paths to effective leadership. It includes a greater good, not influence with no intended outcome.
Leadership is a mindset in action. So don’t wait for the title. Leadership isn’t something that anyone can give you – you have to earn it and claim it for yourself.

By JEFF HADEN
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WHICH STEVE ARE YOU?

“Writing new techniques, advanced moves, sophisticated tactics. They love the process of playing soccer and will happily perform drills after drills.

Jobs: Techniques and moves are interesting, and drills are fun for a minute or two, but they come alive when they compete.

Here’s an example from the business world: You love nothing more than solving problems and developing new management and leadership tactics. You love the process; you’re a Wozniak. You like solving problems, but how is less important than why. You like developing ideas, you like working with others to turn those ideas into products, you like creating a business out of those ideas, and you like to compete. You love turning ideas into a business; you’re a Jobs.

Seem simplistic? It is, but it’s also reasonably accurate. That’s why, regardless of the type of business you want to start, the first step is to ask yourself: Am I happiest as a Wozniak or a Jobs? This definition includes “others” and empowerment is a good thing. But to what end? We’ve seen many empowered “others” in life, from rioting hooligans to Google workers who were so misaligned with the rest of the company they found themselves unemployed. Gates’ definition lacks goals and vision.

Steve Wozniak: Steve Jobs

Here’s a real-life example. My (then) next-door neighbor, John, was a computer science professor – and one of the two founders of Rosetta Stone. His brother-in-law Allen had the idea for a different way to learn languages. Allen and John started the company, Allen focusing on the business development side and John on the marketing and tech side. John was the Wozniak, Allen the Jobs. Later they brought in Allen’s brother Eugene to be a second Jobs (disproving the assumption that two Jobs cannot occupy the same space at the same time.) They clearly embraced and enjoyed their roles while building a successful company. (And no, I wasn’t smart enough to be an early investor but, then again, they didn’t ask me. And I didn’t have any money anyway.)

Every day, entrepreneurs start new businesses without considering whether they will be happiest as a Wozniak or a Jobs. Many also don’t take the time to consider whether

Steve Wozniak

their business – or their chosen career – will ever allow them to fill the role they most enjoy.

You may have no choice but to be a Wozniak and a Jobs as you get your business off the ground but make sure you create and follow a plan that will allow you to do more of what you love as your business grows.

Steve Jobs

If starting a certain type of business won’t let you do more of what you love, why start that business in the first place?

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**THE POWER OF READING**

*Why the secret to success may be in the pages in your hands*

By SANDY CLARKE

I someone asked you to name one trait that truly sets successful people apart, what would you say? Talent? Resources? A great network? Perhaps. But one of the most important is a passion for reading, a habit that has been long associated with success.

Paul C. Brunson reads over 50 books every year. According to Brunson, if we stick to online reading, we’re selling ourselves short by missing out on the crucial factor for learning that we find in books: context. “There are two major dividers of people who don’t read,” says Brunson. “There are people who simply don’t put a value on reading. These are people who may not have graduated from high school or college, and they just don’t see a correlation between reading and success.”

DENNIS BRUNSON

At the end of a long day, it’s all too easy to let our minds go on autopilot, focusing our energies on other tasks such as wading through digital noise.

ENCOURAGE, NOT SUPPRESS

The other group of people are professional, who understand that a value lies in reading, but as much as they might like to, they can’t.”

The “too busy to read” crowd is often those who work or attend graduate level courses, but are not necessarily in the top 1% of the population. According to Brunson, people who are not reading are simply putting themselves behind the curve.

**3 WHERE DO WE START?**

There is an urgent need to make sure that our children are learning to read, and then to instill in them a passion for reading.

**Diving deep into context**

With the caveat that explicit reading of books is an essential component of learning, that is no reason to forego online reading. “Where and how we learn is important,” says Brunson. “We’re bombarded by so many inputs each day, so it makes sense that our brains don’t prioritize context as much as we could if we were able to pore over the material without giving much thought to what we want to get out of it. As a result, we end up missing key concepts in our mind.”

The challenge for people who read the “top 10%” articles is that, while they come away with the tips, they don’t get the context. They don’t understand how to apply the tips, or why the tips are relevant. “The tips are surface-level, but the book is the real thing.”

Brunson says books are so confounding because “they require you to make the leap from reading between the lines, but the content is the context.” As a result, the little bits of context that are dropped in can make or break the connection.

“Don’t assume that if you’re not in the top 1% you’re not as smart as the people who are,” says Brunson. “It’s just that you need to learn how to read a book.”

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

There is little doubt that reading for self-improvement makes a profound impact on a person’s capacity to succeed. Business mogul and multi-billionaire Warren Buffett reads between 50 and 100 pages a day. Bill Gates reads through 50 books per year. In fact, anyone who simply wants to learn more can benefit from reading a little bit each day.

**Are you a multipotentialite?**

Multipotentialites are people who want to do it all at once. They may be interested in many different ideas and are eager to excel at all of them. Following that, when they discover a new interest, they want to pursue it immediately. However, when they begin to see the limitations of their time, they may start to feel overwhelmed and frustrated. This is why it’s important to set realistic goals and to prioritize your time.

The best way to achieve this is to create a reading list, which can be a great tool for managing your time. To create a reading list, simply write down all of the books you want to read, and then prioritize them based on their level of difficulty and importance. This will help you to stay on track and to achieve your reading goals.

Though this can be a daunting task, the benefits are immense. Not only will you improve your reading speed and comprehension, but you will also be better equipped to handle the challenges that you may encounter in your work and personal life. In short, reading is a powerful tool for personal and professional growth.

*The image of the book shows the title “Are You a Multipotentialite?” by Emily Lippman. The book discusses the concept of multipotentiality, which refers to people who have multiple areas of expertise and are eager to pursue many different interests.*

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Sandy Clarke is a freelance writer and the UK’s leading expert on reading. Her book “The Power of Reading” is available in both print and digital formats.

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ADULT LESSONS FROM A CHILDREN’S BOOK

How leaders would do well to remember their youthful exuberance

At the SPARK camps, with such a diverse group of youths coming together, it was a delightful surprise to witness how effortlessly it was for them to bond. With a fusion of East and West Malaysian youths, each one of them developed a bond through the seven days that they still cherish to this day.

“Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”

Going back to the story of the boa constrictor and elephant, the main idea that the author was trying to deliver was that youth view the world differently from adults. They possess a unique view and always seem to have the ability to seek out the best of situations.

An experience I recall vividly was when one of the SPARK project groups visited a retirement home. Ordinarily, it would have been expected for them to simply clean the home or repair whatever needed fixing. Instead, an injection of youth and creativity ignited ideas from the group as they decided to have a Christmas party for the residents.

They felt that the impact of making the retirees feel young again made more of a difference than sweeping floors or wiping a few windows. True enough, the smiles on the faces of the residents proved to be an experience that could not be replicated by merely a fresh coat of paint on their walls.

“All grown-ups were once children, but only few of them remember it.”

A lesson in humility this one. We often think that, as mentors, we are the ones who are supposed to teach young people new things. Quite frankly, that could not be further from the truth.

While we can do our best to guide them, especially when it comes to things like planning and budgeting for their projects, it is they who remind us to be human. While we are all busy chasing our dreams, we often neglect the little things that make life worth living like playing pranks or having fun. The lesson here is that, if we are open to learn from anyone, we might just be in for a surprise.

“Boa constrictor digesting an elephant. The drawing was not of a hat, but that of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. This must seem irrelevant for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”

Some time ago, a boa constrictor and elephant were swimming in a pond. The boa constrictor was feeding on the elephant. A children’s book published in 1943 by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince, where the boa constrictor and elephant are swimming in a pond.

The boa constrictor was feeding on the elephant. The drawing was not of a hat, but that of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. The boa constrictor was feeding on the elephant.

Leadership camps namely, SPARK. The camp aims to be the spark that ignites a youth’s leadership potential. The SPARK camps, with such a diverse group of youths coming together, was a delightful surprise to witness how effortlessly it was for them to bond. With a fusion of East and West Malaysian youths, each one of them developed a bond through the seven days that they still cherish to this day.

“How leaders would do well to remember their youthful exuberance”

By ZACHARY LAU
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L’ET’S look at a story from French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s book, The Little Prince, where he recalls time when, as a child, he aspired to be an artist. He puts his talents to the test by presenting his masterpiece to grown-ups and asking if the drawing frightened them. See image 2.

To which, the adults were baffled. Why would a picture of a hat frighten them? Exasperated, he had to redraw his original image and explained that the drawing was not of a hat, but that of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. See image 2.

That may seem irrelevant for the time being, but we’ll get back to it in a moment.

“Ignite Your Potential!” has been the tagline for one of our more special leadership camps namely, SPARK. The camp aims to be the spark that ignites a youth’s leadership potential.

Supported by the ECM Libra Foundation in collaboration with Leaderonomics and AirAsia every year, it will be held at the prestigious Epsom College in Malaysia from the Dec 17 to Dec 23 and the best part is, it is free of charge!

What is particularly special about this experience is the people that are involved. Of the 80 participants getting flown in from all over Malaysia, 80% of them will be coming from underprivileged homes or organisations.

This huge diversity provides everyone with a unique chance to interact with people. With EPSOM College in Malaysia being the “home” throughout the seven days, each participant will get a chance to not only explore their leadership potential but also to make a difference in the community.

Although it is essentially a leadership camp where participants will experience learning skills including self-discovery, public speaking and breaking out of their comfort zones, it breaks from the mould of a normal camp by providing its participants a chance to experience in real-time how to organise and carry out a project which makes a difference in the community.

Once their projects are run, participants will get to experience what it is like to present their projects to a panel of industry leaders.

The whole idea is to provide these youths with an experience that mirrors real-life situations where people from all different walks of life will have to come together to work towards a common goal.

When a youth is given an accepting and conducive learning environment, they can often spring a surprise or two. While a lot has been said about what participants can learn throughout this experience, something often overlooked is how we, as adults, can learn from them as well.

Let’s take a look at some of my favourite quotes from The Little Prince and what we can glean from its pages:

Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.

Going back to the story of the boa constrictor and elephant, the main idea that the author was trying to deliver was that youth view the world differently from adults. They possess a unique view and always seem to have the ability to seek out the best of situations.

An experience I recall vividly was when one of the SPARK project groups visited a retirement home. Ordinarily, it would have been expected for them to simply clean the home or repair whatever needed fixing. Instead, an injection of

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THE POWER OF REALISTIC OPTIMISM

FINDING THAT RIGHT BALANCE FOR OPTIMUM LEADERSHIP

When leaders have their vision and objectives properly grounded with a sense of reality, it helps to fuel the motivation and loyalty from the team. Realistic optimism does not mean to settle for less ambitious goals; rather, it is a good trait that balances strong passion in driving teams to achieve exceptional results.

5 STEPS TO EXERCISE REALISTIC OPTIMISM IN OUR LIVES

1. Evaluate the challenges ahead and plan actionable steps to overcome these challenges. The key is to be positive, which means to really believe that things will turn out fine, now that you have considered all the mitigation steps to take in minimising risks.

2. Expect the unexpected and know that you have the inner tools to deal with these unforeseen challenges.

3. Don’t get too attached to unpleasant events. Dr Martin Seligman, in his book Learned Optimism, suggests that you do something enjoyable to distract yourself from a situation and get yourself into a better state of mind. When you are more collected, you can then revisit the unresolved situation. In doing so, you are more likely to think of better and more creative solutions.

4. Contribute towards making a lasting impact in someone else’s life. When you help someone, the flow of positive energy is tremendous. As they say, happiness is contagious. When you make others happy the state of happiness indirectly affects you too. Everything seems better and achievable.

6. Work with what is working well for them.

DEFINING REALISTIC OPTIMISM

People who are realistically optimistic believe that when they make things happen, they will succeed. They hardly doubt upon themselves when it comes to believing in – and working towards – success.

To reach that end, they absolutely know that they have to put details into their plan, weigh all the necessary resources, stay focused throughout the journey, and consider different options – all of these executed in excellence.

Realistic optimists recognise the need to think mindfully. When they are well prepared and organised, they are aware of the risks and plans for mitigation. Such a state stimulates their level of confidence, which then leads to an increased optimistic outlook on the success rate. Being realistic and optimistic at the same time helps people to stay calm and collected even in times of crisis.

Sophia Chou, an organisational psychology researcher at the National Taiwan University, said that realistic optimists often get the best of both worlds – they use their realism to perform well at work, but at the same time are not bogged down by unhappiness. She added that realistic optimists tend to choose accuracy over self-enhancement, while the unrealistic optimists tend to choose self-enhancement.

Based on research, it is also interesting to find that the realistic optimists usually get better grades than their less grounded peers – probably because they didn’t delude themselves into thinking they would do well without studying or working hard.

HOW IS LEADERSHIP INFLUENCED BY REALISTIC OPTIMISM?

Realistic optimism is regarded as one of the key traits in an ideal chief executive officer. Leaders who advocate realistic optimism carry themselves without self-delusion and irrationality. These leaders pursue ambitious goals and having the ability to inspire a team to succeed is something that sets leaders apart. Having the ability to step back and deal with reality during the tumultuous journey is held to even higher esteem.

People who are realistically optimistic have considered all the mitigation measures they would do well without studying or working hard.

People who are realistically optimistic tend to be more adventurous in difficult situations, be used to solve difficult situations, visit bit.ly/stayrealisticoptimistic

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SPECTRUM: PESSIMISM

Pessimism usually reflects a state of mind in which one anticipates undesirable outcomes or, believes that the difficulties in life always outweigh the good. In fact, almost everything is a no-go for a pessimist.

While pessimists usually blame themselves for any shortfalls in life, they also hardly give credit to their own achievements. For example, a pessimist may reject any ideas proposed in a team and prefer to stick to the current ways of doing things, which might not always be the most effective way. A pessimist would despise change by the end of the day, the leader has their backs.

Setting ambitious goals and having the ability to inspire a team to succeed is something that sets leaders apart. Having the ability to step back and deal with reality during the tumultuous journey is held to even higher esteem.

When leaders have their vision and objectives properly grounded with a sense of reality, it helps to fuel the motivation and loyalty from the team. Realistic optimism does not mean to settle for less ambitious goals; rather, it is a good trait that balances strong passion in driving teams to achieve exceptional results.

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To read the remainder of Awatif’s story and how learn about how humour can be used to solve difficult situations, visit bit.ly/stayrealisticoptimistic

AWATIF GHAPAR

By AWATIF GHAPAR

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WHILE optimism is highly encouraged and always appreciated, it is also important for one to maintain a realistic mind in order to keep the positive vibe running and, to achieve our goals. Most of us understand optimism and pessimism very well. We also know that being optimistic is always perceived to be better compared to being pessimistic. Optimism brings joy and good feelings. Helen Keller once said: “Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.” No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit.”

Besides being more resilient and courageous, being optimistic is always closely associated with ease in coping with stress, and this is a significant factor in one’s quest to experience a whole-life.

Optimism opens doors of opportunities and discovery, often driven by a strong sense of curiosity and faith in actions that help to unearth the answers. Yes, optimism can be a bit of a Hollywood type, especially if it is over-emphasised. In fact, many motivational speakers and self-improvement books stress on this one simple message: believe that success will come easily to you, and it will. The problem in this argument is that it is often not that simple.

In fact, many motivational speakers and self-improvement books stress on this one simple message: believe that success will come easily to you, and it will. The problem in this argument is that it is often not that simple.
Fulfillment. Purpose. Those are the buzz words of what Millennials are looking for in every aspect of their lives. As much as job happiness at the workplace is important, the external factors of engagement that contribute to employee satisfaction such as having a cool office and lucrative employee benefits are superficial and temporary.

With the wave of start-up entrepreneurs and the move towards more social-driven organisations in recent years, purpose has moved to the forefront of employees’ minds. While the foregoing mentioned employee benefits are nice to have, studies have shown that half of the current workforce would take a 15% pay cut to join a “purposeful” organisation. Money has become less of a motivator today as we find that more individuals are leaving their stable high paying jobs to pursue passions or work aligned with their life purpose.

Being a purpose-driven generation, it is not surprising to hear of Millennials choosing careers that give them a strong sense of meaning and contribution to the world. However, it is not just Millennials that opt for career paths in which purpose precedes pay. It is no longer surprising to find older adults who feel a compelling need to contribute and give back to society. They are at a stage in their lives that is driven by their sense of significance to make a difference and leave a legacy. Beyond just making an income and achieving career success, finding purpose in work becomes a higher priority.

Fulfillment through Purpose

Fulfillment is often associated with “doing what you love” which the late co-founder of Apple, Steve Jobs advocated in his speech: “You’ve got to find what you love. . . . Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle.” But is it worth it all? Is finding our purpose or calling at work overrated?

Being connected to the mission and purpose of a company is not a basic need (i.e. a comfortable salary, good benefits, conducive working environment) but the search for meaning emerges when those basic needs are met. The employees start seeking something to believe in that is aligned to their values which make them feel a sense of importance through their contribution towards a higher purpose. This, according to Gallup, addresses the human emotional need where the search for meaning benefits our psychological and physical health. An employee is not motivated without knowing how their job fits in the grand scheme of things as reflected in the eighth engagement item (Q8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important) of Gallup’s Q12 Employee Engagement Survey.

Purpose-driven organisations stay core to their mission by always keeping the “why” in mind. They keep their company’s purpose at the centre by communicating a message of how they are able to add value and enhance the lives of others.

When I was searching for my first job, there was a tension and conflict between pursuing the ideal career path of “doing what I love” versus finding a stable job which I deemed to have better career prospects. The first few years of my career, I thought that having a well-paying job with good learning opportunities and promising career progression was enough to keep me satisfied. That was until the opportunity to be involved with non-profits and social initiatives came along, making me feel that my work mattered and I could make an impact. That sense of fulfillment was refreshing and inspiring which led to higher levels of job satisfaction. I started asking myself, “There has got to be more than just taking home a pay check and making profits for the company.” And that was just the beginning of a paradigm shift that changed my work approach, to see beyond just doing a job and finding purpose in how my work can contribute to benefit someone or wider society.

Start with “Why”

Having a deep sense of purpose helps chart and set the course of our lives, that also applies to our work. It is innate in us to want to dedicate ourselves to an endeavour greater than ourselves which contributes to our need for significance and meaning.

As much as individual success is important, we are more committed if we feel that our work is contributing towards a higher quest. We seek to belong to a tribe that is part of a larger cause with the same goals; knowing our company is able to share our values, represent and stand for what we believe in keeps us loyal.

A social organisation that I recently worked with believes that the majority of employees are attracted to the company due to the cause that the company drives and the mission that they stand for. As much as the overall engagement levels of the company are low, what keeps the employees going is how connected they feel with the mission and purpose where their job presents the opportunity to see the impact that they are making on a daily basis.

In contrast, the internal support function of the company is the most disenfranchised as the low scores on the Q8 engagement item, where they feel disconnected from the rest of the organisation. This is because their daily operations do not allow them to see how their work contributes to the overall company’s vision and mission.

In line with Simon Sinek’s “Start with Why”, very few people know why they do what they do which creates the foundation behind the cause, purpose, belief and why the organisation exists.

Sinek highlights this as paramount where, in order to be successful, we need to work from the inside out. Inspired and successful organisations think and communicate following on Sinek’s Golden Circle starting from “Why” before moving on to the “How” and “What”. Knowing and communicating “the why behind the what” in everything we do, not only creates higher motivation and engagement in your employees but also buy-in from your customers.

Take, for example, Apple. They could have chosen to be simply any other computer company churning out quality products. Instead, they sell the idea of innovation, challenging the status quo, thinking differently in the way they bring their products to market.

Purpose-driven organisations stay core to their mission by always keeping the “why” in mind. They keep their company’s purpose at the centre by communicating a message of how they are able to add value and enhance the lives of others.

Finding Purpose at Work

It is not difficult to see how altruistic healthcare professionals and educators would see how their work as important and we have seen that they find their job meaningful with high scores in this engagement item.

What is interesting is when we find employees who rate highly in this engagement score, regardless of industry – in finance, manufacturing or retail, for example. This indicates that the company does not have to be a non-profit or social organisation to create an environment that fosters this feeling.

It is not uncommon to assume that workers in “dirty work” occupations or jobs that are stigmatised as messy, unpleasant or unskilled would be disengaged. The surprising find in a study done by sociologists is that the workers in these industries are able to transcend their trivial job roles and bad working conditions to find their jobs meaningful and rewarding.

To read more about the people who know how to find meaning and how organisations can nurture them best, read the rest of Amanda’s story online at bit.ly/purposedrivenwork

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HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM MILLENNIALS

By KAREN GATELY
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R EFLECT for a moment on how often you observe leaders struggling to understand, let alone engage and leverage the talents of the youngest members of the workforce. Many of the leaders I work with find the Millennial generation particularly frustrating to manage and are perplexed by how to get the best from them. While each person in a team is unique, certain beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are common among people of each generation. Like any other generation before them, Millennials hold expectations and behave in ways unique to them. While it’s important to look well beyond stereotypes, understanding these unique characteristics is essential.

To get the best from Millennials begin by understanding these six common characteristics. Millennials tend to:

1. Ask why. Driven to understand why decisions are made or beliefs are held, millennials ask a lot of questions. What you are thinking and why, influence the decisions they make to buy-in and sign up for a journey. Once on board, Millennials crave information and need to be kept abreast of progress or change.

2. Want to make a meaningful contribution. Having an impact on the world through their work is particularly important to this generation. Millennials want to know they are making a worthwhile difference and are therefore more likely to choose to work for an organisation that does something they believe is important.

3. Value freedom and autonomy. Typically independent-minded, Millennials need to be empowered in order to thrive. Allow freedom to make decisions and autonomy to determine the best way of going about their work, and Millennials are more likely to be engaged. Establishing clear boundaries within which they are free to operate is critical to achieving balance between providing the freedom they want and supervision or coaching they need.

4. Be optimistic. Positivity is among the most enduring characteristics of the Millennial generation. Having grown up in times of dramatic change and advancement, Millennials live with the philosophy that practically anything can happen in life. They live for the moment and believe you should enjoy life while you can.

5. Want change. Millennials are more open to change than any generation that has come before. Not only are they comfortable with change, they expect and typically want it. It’s common for Millennials to become restless and move on quickly if new opportunities fail to present. Born in the era of technology, they need constant stimulation and love to share their ideas about how things can be done differently.

6. Expect respect and appreciation. Feedback and acknowledgement both play key roles in keeping Millennials engaged and productive. Less materialistic than other generations, they typically respond well to being thanked with a pat on the back, and a “step up” opportunity. Bring an attitude of give and take to your relationship with Millennials and they are more likely to do the same in turn.

Managing Millennials is a challenge that demands an open mind, respectful, committed and engaging approach from leaders. Capturing both the hearts and minds of Millennials is essential to leveraging the depth of potential they bring.

Karen Gately, a founder of HR Consultancy Ryan Gately, is a leadership and people-management specialist. Karen works with leaders and HR teams to drive business results through the talent and energy of people. She is the author of The People Manager’s Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people (Wiley) and The Corporate Dojo: Driving Extraordinary Results Through Spirited People. To connect with her, e-mail editor@leaderonomics.com
THERE is a chasm between what business leaders expect from recent graduates, and what these new hires have to offer. In a survey of 450 business leaders and 450 employees new to the workforce based in India, the United States, and China, a massive 76% of business leaders reported that entry-level workers and recent grads are not ready for their jobs. In most cases, these hires are intelligent, ambitious, and technically savvy; they have proven their ability to accomplish the work. They’re committed and passionate about rising through the ranks. So what are these new professionals missing?

Simple – they’re lacking soft skills. These are the traits and behaviours that characterise our relationships with others. Specifically, these new grads are not ascribing enough value to emotional intelligence (EI) in the workplace.

We know that these qualities are necessary for strong motivation, sustained focus, and productive collaboration. As organisational structures evolve and globalisation speeds up, these soft skills are going to be more crucial than ever before. Now, here’s the rub. Most new graduates and hires don’t realise how much leaders value these skills.

**The Facts**
- 69% believe that people skills get in the way of doing their jobs well.
- 70% believe that their technical skills are more valuable than their people skills.

While business leaders and HR directors report the opposite:
- 90% believe that employees with strong people skills deliver a better commercial impact.
- 85% see technical skills as the basic necessity for new hires, while soft skills are what sets them apart.
- 91% believe that employees with refined people skills advance faster.

When organisations conduct inquiries into the skills that make certain employees stars, they generally find that EI-based competencies matter more than those based on technical and reasoning skills. It’s evident that a strong intellect and relevant experience are basic capacities – what someone needs to land a job. But they’re not what makes that person soar. For example, Claudio Fernández-Aráoz, a global hiring expert, did a study of top-level leaders who were dismissed from their jobs. He concluded that the majority were hired for their intelligence and hard experience, but, ultimately, ended up being fired for their lack of EI. These qualities manifest themselves in various ways.

To read the remainder of Daniel’s article and to find out exactly what soft skills you need to get ahead in the workplace, type the following link into the address bar of your web browser: http://bit.ly/buildsoftskills