HAPPY MALAYSIA DAY FROM LEADERONOMICS

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Leaders in Malaysia take time to reflect on who they are and whether they are making a positive difference in this world. Some take reflection seriously and make time to think about these questions. However, perhaps the majority of leaders either don’t have or don’t make time. Perhaps some believe that taking time out to reflect is unproductive or a low priority.

What is the value of reflection? Is it going to make you a better leader? The answer to that question, according to many practitioners and researchers, is a resounding yes!

Leaders in their fields, such as author J.K. Rowling, biographer Walter Issacson and psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung always made sure that they took time out from their busy schedules to engage in deep reflection, which heavily contributed to their success.

Even very busy leaders like the governor of California Jerry Brown and Ohio congressman Tim Ryan say that disciplined periods of silence are important for their success.

SO WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Reflection involves stepping out of the hustle and bustle of life so we can look back on it from a more restful place. We all engage in reflection from time to time, even though we may not recognise it or name it as such.

When we look back on significant experiences in our lives and wonder how they have affected us, this is a form of reflection. When we recall the influential people who have made an impact on our lives in profound ways, such as grand-parents, parents, teachers or friends, this is also reflection. It’s a natural human instinct.

As leaders, reflection needs to be a little more purposeful. Firstly, leaders reflect to get a better understanding of their past actions in order to create a better future.

The key questions for them might include: “What have I done that has worked well?” and “What will I do differently next time?”

Reflection involves stepping out of your daily routine to empower yourself and form deep relationships with others who may be asking the same questions. This means getting away from phones, computers and people who can interrupt your session.

The place could be in your office, a park or simply in your car, wherever you feel quietest and most at peace. Give yourself 10 minutes if you are a beginner. As this becomes a routine in your life, you can build your reflection time up to 30 minutes per session. Consider it like exercise: you should try and reflect several times a week, and you’ll get better the more practice you have.

When you are sitting comfortably in a quiet place, close your eyes and notice your breathing. Stay focused on your breathing. This might take a few attempts, but persevere and you will get better at it.

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SO, HOW DO YOU REFLECT?

Leaders should frequently ask these questions to ensure that they have the strongest possible motivation for their work. When you ask these questions, it should not matter how lofty or humble your work is, and also it does not matter if you get the “right” answers to these questions.

There are a few key steps to follow if you want to reap the benefits of reflection.

Firstly, find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed for a while. This means getting away from phones, computers and people who can interrupt your session.

The place could be in your office, a park or simply in your car, wherever you feel quietest and most at peace. Give yourself 10 minutes if you are a beginner.

As this becomes a routine in your life, you can build your reflection time up to 30 minutes per session. Consider it like exercise: you should try and reflect several times a week, and you’ll get better the more practice you have.

When you are sitting comfortably in a quiet place, close your eyes and notice your breathing. Stay focused on your breathing. This might take a few attempts, but persevere and you will get better at it.

After a few moments of breathing, move into a relaxed position. You can do this by progressively relaxing muscle groups starting at your feet and working all the way up to your head. Spend a few moments with each muscle group, relaxing them more and more as you breathe out. Start with your feet, then calf muscles, thigh muscles, stomach and chest muscles, back muscles, shoulders, followed by arms and fingers and finally neck and facial muscles.

When you are completely relaxed, turn your mind to the reflection questions. If you want to learn from your past experiences and would like to improve your leadership practice, then the questions you could be asking are:

- What have I done that has worked well?
- What will I do differently next time?
- If you want to reflect on your deeper leadership journey then your questions could be:
  - Is what I am doing consistent with my values?
  - What is the higher purpose for what I am doing?

These questions are only suggestions and you may wish to generate your own. It is also helpful to look at the issues from different perspectives.

Spend a few moments thinking about these questions. Then open your eyes and write down your thoughts in a notebook. If actions you need to take emerge from the reflection, then write them down as well. Record a date for each entry so you can track the outcomes of your reflections. From time to time look back over the notes to review your progress.

A CALL TO ACTION!

Start today! Plan your first reflection session. Reflection time is a small price to pay if wisdom is the reward.
What lies behind great results in a team? That’s a question that has popped into my mind a few times. Maybe it’s incentives, reach a target and we’ll give you this reward. Or perhaps it’s perks — as a thank you for your hard work, here’s a free gym membership for the year.

It could even be offering some free food — we know you work hard, and you get great results, so we’ll let you find the best ways to keep delivering those great results.

These factors (and many others) often come together to drive people to do amazing things. On reflection, I couldn’t help but feel that some of these factors can be somewhat superficial and, although they can certainly benefit business and team morale over the short term, superficial incentives can lose their flavour pretty quickly.

I’ve long been obsessed by how people interact with others, how leaders get the best out of people, how colleagues work to pull in the same direction; how partners influence each other in the decision-making process, and so on. When you think about working together to achieve results, everything comes down to relationships, and everything rises and falls on their effectiveness, and the strength of their bonds.

I remember on one occasion talking to a young human resources (HR) professional who had an expression of delight plastered across his face.

He had just completed a substantial project, and this young man was busy telling me that he had the best boss ever. “Wow, that’s quite an accolade,” I replied.

“Take it he gave you some fantastic reward — a smart watch, a new laptop, or a few days’ extra leave?”

Without breaking his joyful demeanour, he said, “No, he came to see me and thanked me for having done a great job, and that he really appreciated my efforts. He knows I’m a big movie fan, and that the next big movie I wanted to go and see had just come out. It’s great to have your work noticed and appreciated like that.”

**TRUE APPRECIATION**

“The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

This encounter left a huge impression on me. Most leaders will know the value of appreciation, but to see its effect drives home the importance of offering praise whenever it’s due.

How often do we get caught up in expectations, though? How many times can we be guilty of taking the efforts of others for granted, so that even the miraculous starts to appear common to us after a while?

The joy on the face of that young professional wouldn’t have been there had his boss handed him a watch, or told him he had freed up a few days of leave. The expression of joy was there because his boss knew the wisdom behind sincere appreciation: his thank you was a gift greater than any other offering.

Sure, it backed it up with a tangible reward of movie tickets (a kind gesture that heightened the appreciation), but the most valuable thing he gave to his team member was a feeling of being truly valued and respected.

I’ve known some leaders (though thankfully few) who view such appreciation as “pampering” team members. It’s as though showing appreciation is some kind of weakness, or they understand that it’s something to be done every day without cause, and so loses its impact.

But let’s ask ourselves: who among us doesn’t like to feel valued, or to hear that we’ve done a good job? Sincere, effective appreciation is about giving someone recognition when it’s deserved.

While everyone will have their own idea of when such appreciation is deserved, there’s little doubt that when it’s done right, it has an enormous effect on the recipient, who in turn becomes even more engaged in their work, and doubles down on their commitment to the organisation and its goals.

**ENGAGEMENT AND RESULTS**

"Don’t forget, a person’s greatest emotional need is to feel appreciated." — H. Jackson Brown Jr.

Within some traditional views, it’s held that people “should be grateful that they have a job to begin with”, and that that should be enough to inspire engagement and produce results. But this is outdated thinking.

I was reflecting on my own leadership roles throughout the years, and it struck me that I’m just one person. (“Gee, Roshan, how long did that insight take?”) An obvious statement, maybe, but think about it.

While leaders work to engage, connect, inspire and direct others towards achieving goals and objectives, nothing would be achieved without those people who are working flat out to manifest those objectives.

Therefore, maybe it’s the leaders who should be grateful that they have good people to begin with. The most effective leaders are grateful for their people, and are happy to show it whenever the opportunity arises.

How simple it is to offer a sincere thank you to someone; and how great an effect those two simple words have on morale. Rather than just offering rewards from outside ourselves, there is so much power in offering a gesture of appreciation that comes from within ourselves.

Anyone can hand a gift to someone, but when there’s authenticity behind the sentiments we express to others, they can lift people higher than any external incentive. Why? Because most people come to work for a company and a mission that they believe in, and when their company (i.e. their leader) returns that same belief in its people, magical things can happen.

Goals can be exceeded, innovations can arise, and everyone can become so highly engaged that they will work to give all their in helping to take their organisation to the next level.

**THE NEED TO APPRECIATE**

“Those who have the ability to be grateful are the ones who have the ability to achieve greatness.” — Steve Maraboli

It is my view that showing a appreciation of others provides so many benefits to all concerned. Conversely, a lack of sincere appreciation can cause problems across the board. If leaders don’t appreciate their people, how can they expect their people to appreciate them? In an increasingly competitive world, skilled employees can find work anywhere. The deciding factor on whether a person stays or leaves a company is the environment — are they “just another cog in the wheel” or someone who truly adds value to the team?

If they are the former, perhaps the question of why they were hired in the first place needs to be asked. If they are someone who adds value but doesn’t know it, then a simpler question needs to be asked — why don’t they know it?

In most (if not all) of our interactions and relationships, we can start to take others for granted in fairly quick time and with worrying ease. As the saying goes, we get out whatever we put in, and this is arguably most apt when it comes to our professional relationships.

As leaders, we have a duty to show our appreciation whenever it’s merited (which is more often than we think). If we don’t show our appreciation to those who deliver consistently good results (this also goes for people who show improvements), the reality is that, sooner or later, another leader will be happy to do so.

While everyone will have their own idea of when such appreciation is deserved, there’s little doubt that when it’s done right, it has an enormous effect on the recipient, who in turn becomes even more engaged in their work.

People are our most valuable asset. Yet, in many organisations, other factors push people management off the priority list leading to potential loss of talent as people feel undervalued or under appreciated or under utilised. It is tough to imbibe cultural awareness and organisational expertise across the board as training new people takes time and energy. Instead, learn to motivate and retain your talent and find out how you can strategically talent management with Leaderonomics’ Strategic Talent Management course. Contact training@leaderonomics.com for more details.

**THE SMALL GESTURES THAT GET BIG RESULTS**

How appreciating the little things affects performance
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

CHANGE YOUR APPROACH WITH THE TIMES, SAYS FUTURIST JOEL BARKER

By SANDY CLARKE
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Joel Barker. Pic courtesy of James Madison University

“We can choose to redefine the world and re-see it. We never see the entire thing, but we can do another slice of it, and as we change the slice, we change things.”

Discussing the process of paradigm shifts and how businesses can profit from spotting and making use of them, Barker says: “As soon as you’re aware of what it can do, it releases you, because you can look and say, ‘OK when I say that, it’s because of my paradigm – not because it [your business approach] is absolutely true’ and then you can say, ‘OK, is there another way to look at this?’

To help businesses look toward the future and establish a foundation conducive for success, Barker asserts that the success of his own work is to avoid being prescriptive in helping his clients. Rather, he leads them to realise their own way forward by pointing them in the right direction through adopting a certain way to approach obstacles and challenges.

He says: “If you understand the way the system works, you can choose to see the world anew. ‘It’s why human beings have such power.’

“If we look at most creatures, they’re genetically programmed into a very tight paradigm. They do it really well but, if you ask for a massive adaptation, you don’t see very many animals go, ‘Well, let’s do an iron age instead of a bronze age’.

“We don’t see that out there, but we have [the capacity] because of the phenomenal piece of equipment [the brain] we have up here.

“We can choose to redefine the world and re-see it. It tells you how complex the world is that we can keep re-framing it. We never see the entire thing, but we can do another slice of it and, as we change the slice, we change things.

“Think about Einstein re-seeing what Newton had seen. We still use Newton’s mathematics for a lot of things, but we also know that there’s stuff Einstein did better. His paradigm gave us a broader problem-solving capacity.”

The paradigm shifting futurist emphasises his admiration for the complexity of Malaysia, praising its courage to keep trying new ways to carry progress forward.

On the next steps Malaysia should take, Barker cuts a diplomatic figure: “I don’t know Malaysia well enough to comment.

“It’s a very complex country, and I’m impressed with the complexity; I’m also impressed by the willingness to keep trying new things. The thrust to say ‘we’re going to be an innovative country’ – there are a lot of countries who wouldn’t even dare to do that.

“I actually use the country as a model when I talk about the 2020 project – I can’t name you another country that has been so specific and so willing to put itself on the line; that’s so courageous and, as a tradition in the country, that’s very powerful.”

Talking about the importance of having a vision, Barker iterates the phrase, “if you don’t know where you’re going, anywhere’s alright to be.”

Values, he insists, are fine, but a principled leader without vision can find themselves going round in circles. “People in organisations with vision tend to be a lot more efficient in the use of their energy and their time. When you have a vision, you can also choose to change it. If you don’t have a vision, there is no choice to change.”

To see Joel Barker’s full interview on The Leaderonomics Show and pick up some tips on preparing for the future, head to bit.ly/JoelBarkerTLS

Sandy is intrigued by the work of futurists such as Joel Barker and impressed by their visionary ideas and how their work helps to create solutions that bring progress and prosperity to those in and served by the business world, technology and health industries. To connect with Sandy, e-mail editor@leaderonomics.com
‘INCULCATE IMPORTANT VALUES IN THE YOUNG ONES’

By PRETHIBA ESVARY
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A. “Uncle, I think you need to spend time educating people about how to use Touch ‘n Go… I think this watch is cool. But I think you need to educate them more.”

B. “Really oh? But I already do a lot of work in educating people.”

A. “Yeah, but I think you are not doing enough.”

T HE above is a conversation that took place between a 10-year-old boy and the chief executive officer of Touch ‘n Go, Syahrulnizam Samudin about the company’s Time Traveller Watch – a watch that functions like a Touch ‘n Go card.

During an interview with Leaderonomics recently, Syahrulnizam (or Nizam as he likes to be called) relays that he was astounded by the above exchange because when he was at that age, he didn’t have the maturity and capacity to think the way this boy did.

How is this possible? What makes the younger generations of today different from the older generations?

THEIR POTENTIAL TODAY IS A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

Nizam says that the younger generations of today have been nurtured by certain values and practices passed down from their parents’ and grandparents’ generations. That, combined with easier access to education and information on the Internet, have expanded their minds.

“That’s why the younger generations have come much further than any one of us older folks!” he says.

This statement will resonate with you if you have been following the 2050 Agenda, whereby 1.5 million young Malaysians around the country, having come of age, will play a crucial role in the lives of the future generations.

Youth from these sessions raised matters relating to children’s mental health, human trafficking, creating a civic-minded society, and having a holistic education system, to name a few. This shows how forward-thinking and informed they are about the environment around them.

HOW DO WE LEAD THEM TO THE RIGHT PATH?

It is safe to say that the Malaysian youth today are bright, innovative, creative and possess a high degree of general knowledge. However, in order to translate these abilities into actions so they can take Malaysia to greater heights, they need to be provided with the necessary support and guidance.

Nizam says crucial moments – or the challenging times one goes through in life – are imperative elements in shaping a person’s character, and influencing who they become in the future.

“Our national track cyclist Azizulhasni Awang gave me a signed painting that had the word ‘suffer’ on it, and every time I look at it reminds me of every experience I had to go through in order to gain new knowledge,” he says.

His advice is for parents, educators and mentors to share experiences of challenges they faced and how they overcame them. They should also give room for the younger generations to make mistakes and learn on their own, as these build resilience into them.

Another point Nizam emphasises is the need to inculcate important values in the young ones.

Calling himself “traditional-minded in some ways,” he says our budi baha (polite and caring nature), food and budi bahasa (a unique approach to language using ‘lah’ and a fusion of two or three languages) make us uniquely Malaysian, and that all these aspects help to foster a sense of pride and love for Malaysia.

He says: “I want them to see that a leader can be a follower, and equally a follower can be a leader.”

Adapt according to young talents

Young talents adapt a different way of thinking and come with a different set of needs as opposed to Gen X and Baby Boomers, such as the need for flexibility, freedom and empowerment.

Thus, Nizam shares that companies today need to be flexible enough to adapt their processes while still keeping in mind the company’s core values and beliefs, to help these talents ‘fly’.

CLOSE TO HIS HEART

Something that was evident during the interview with Nizam is his love for Malaysia. It is evident in the way he engages with them, to foster a sense of belonging and unity within the company’s walls.

Aside from the quarterly town hall sessions with all employees, he holds tech tank sessions every Friday afternoon with batches of 30 employees at a time.

He calls it a “therapy session” where the group discusses what works and what doesn’t.

“We may not necessarily arrive at solutions, but it gives them a platform to contribute ideas and to also see that I may not have all the answers,” he says.

On top of that, the company has its own sports coach who conducts different sessions daily.

The Unity Ride initiative — which was launched by Projek57 together with Touch ‘n Go on Aug 6 — is a nationwide cycling venture that consists of nine legs, with an aim to promote unity and bring out stories of how beautiful Malaysians are.

Based on Nizam’s experience in the first leg, which required cyclists to ride 75km from Dataran Merdeka to IOI City Mall, Putrajaya — he says: “The entire event was so symbolic of the fact that when a group of Malaysians put their mind to something, they can achieve an outcome.”

“It is through sports and social activities like these that you can create unity in an organisation.”

COMING TOGETHER TO DEVELOP THE NATION

In a recent article in The Star, Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said racial polarisation is still present among youngsters, especially in schools.

This, combined with all the political and economic issues plaguing the nation today, challenges the values and foundations that the young ones hold on to.

Projek57 co-founder Collin Swee shares an experience he had with students from Sekolah Menengah Sains Dungun, Terengganu, one of the pit stops of the Unity Ride initiative.

“When we did a unity workshop regarding race relations with them, they so clearly wanted to meet more people of different races (seeing as the school is 100% Malay). They wanted to embrace diversity. In fact, they were aware that Malaysia is more racially polarised today, which is not right, and they were giving ideas on how they would tackle racism.

“We tend to think that people from small places wouldn’t know or care about these things. But this experience gave me hope!”

This is why parents, teachers, government, companies and societies play a crucial role in the lives of the younger generations.

They need to remind the younger generations of the positive values their forefathers taught them and how these are vital for the country’s development.

Bringing brilliant and innovative ideas is one thing, executing it, together as a nation, is how we can progress as a country.
TN50 AND THE FUTURE OF GOVERNMENT

KEEPING UP WITH THE FAST-PACED GLOBAL LANDSCAPE

Global Megatrends

Rapid global urbanisation

The Malaysian population is projected to be 65% urban by 2020, a growth of 15% in 20 years. Malaysia is already 70% urban and will become more so, with some projecting as high as 80% by 2050. This rapid shift is furthered by low urbanisation rates in poor and rural areas, with the economy anchored in the rural and tin-ban.

Today, Malaysia is already 70% urban and will become more so, with some projecting as high as 80% by 2050. This rapid shift is furthered by low urbanisation rates in poor and rural areas, with the economy anchored in the rural and tin-ban.

As the urban population and a ageing population increase, the Government will need to evolve to meet the changing needs of the growing community.

Another example of a megatrend is the changing demographics and economic structure upon which the Government and civil service are built.

No Ordinary Disruption

Urbanisation and an ageing population are happening at an unusually fast pace, making the world generally more uncertain. Authors from McKinsey's Global Institute argue that the world is in the middle of a dramatic transition, with the above trends pushing forward strength and ways we produce to offer a more dynamic change. They conclude on the urgent need to develop new approaches and be more agile to respond to this changing world.

But the question is, what are the likely changes we will see in the Government and civil service in Malaysia?

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HOW TO MAKE SOMEONE’S DAY
TODAY, COMMIT TO COMPLIMENTING FIVE PEOPLE, 10 PEOPLE – OR EVERYONE YOU MEET!

By Jeff Haden
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O one gets enough praise. Nobody gets enough recognition. The reason is simple: Very few of us praise and recognize people as often as we should.

I know I don’t. So in the spirit of challenging myself (like when I was foolish enough to attempt 5,000 push-ups in one day), I decided I would compliment everyone I ran into for an entire day – even just in passing, whether I knew them or not, whether it seemed socially appropriate or not and regardless of whether or not I could think of something (anything) on which I could compliment them.

While that might sound easier than doing 5,000 push-ups, for me it wasn’t. I’m fairly shy and don’t go out of my way to speak to people I don’t know. (You might even argue that I go out of my way not to speak to people I don’t know.)

And here’s how that little experiment went.

THE RULES

Challenges work best when you impose structure, helping you stay on track and reducing the temptation to lose resolve that you should change your goal midstream.

For this challenge, the structure was simple:

● If I made eye contact with someone, I had to compliment them in some way.
● To make sure I never chickened out, I had to actively try to make eye contact. I couldn’t intentionally look away.
● But I didn’t have to compliment people already having a conversation, or on the phone, or wearing headphones.
● And I couldn’t hide away all day. I had to go out into the world at least four times.

So, with that in mind...

MORNING

The first few were really easy. I was rolling the rubbish out to the street and saw my neighbour. She has a great collection of plants and flowers, so I said: “I’m always impressed by how beautiful your plants are. You have a real gift!”

Her face lit up. I don’t think I made her day, but I do think I helped get her day off to a good start.

Then I went for a quick walk on the beach. Since it’s autumn, many of the people I met were walking their dogs or throwing balls into the surf for them to retrieve.

“We have a beautiful dog,” I said to the first one. He smiled and I realised I had complimented his dog, not him. Although many dog owners don’t see a difference.

So, I followed up with, “She always seems so happy. You must really take good care of her.” He beamed and I realised I was right – complimenting a person’s dog (or child or car or whatever) is nice, but making the compliment personal makes a bigger impact.

So, that’s the deal. I told one man he had done an amazing job training his dog. I complimented a lady on what a great job she did grooming her dog. I felt pretty smug. Complimenting people was easier than I thought.


I didn’t want to be that guy, that older guy who goes around randomly complimenting young women and comes off creepy and, well, icky.

I started to walk slower. I was thinking curiously but had nothing.

Then, from about 20 feet away, she made eye contact and smiled, not a half smile, not an automatic “good morning” smile, but a big, genuine smile. I smiled back and said, “Thanks.”

For what?” she said.

“Lots of times when I’m walking people don’t even make eye contact. I’ve always thought that was kind of rude. You seeming so happy and saying ‘hi’ was really nice.”

She smiled even bigger and said, “How could I not be happy when I’m out here? Have a great day.”

I know, what I came up with was pretty lame. But I like to think she walked away feeling good about herself, if only for a moment or two, which was the whole point of the exercise.

And I felt pretty good about myself, too, at least until I later walked with, “Your daughter is really cute,” only to be told, “Thank you, but he’s a boy.”

AFTERNOON

Except for a few miscues, by this point I was rolling, I had learnt to quickly size people up and pick out something obvious to compliment: how they cared for their animals, how they landscaped their yard, even how they dressed.

“Yeah, I even managed to whip out a, ‘That is such a pretty sweater – I wish I had your fashion sense.’” (And to my surprise, she took it well.)

Then I went to the grocery store.

And let’s just say that no one in a grocery store expects you to walk by and compliment them – not even the people who work there.

And let’s just say that, “Wow, you picked the perfect melon,” isn’t the right way to go.

And neither is, “You look like you’re on a mission. You seem extremely well organised.”

And “I wish I was as good at choosing the right steaks as you are” falls pretty flat.

And I wanted to give up. In some set-ups, it seemed, compliments are not just unexpected but also unwanted.

But I decided to try one more time, but with a twist. I decided to ask for help, because asking for help is implicitly complimentary – if I ask you for help, that means you know something I don’t know, can do something I can’t do. Asking you for help is like saying, “I respect your knowledge/skill/experience.”

That’s what I did. I was in the seafood section and made eye contact with a 30-something woman. She didn’t smile or nod (gulp!) but I forged ahead.

“I’m terrible at picking the right piece of salmon,” I said. “Can I bother you for a second and ask you to help me?” And she did.

She actually seemed to enjoy it. And I got to say, “I really appreciate it. Thanks for helping me, and for being so nice.”

So while I did have a couple tough moments, especially when I was standing in the checkout line behind an extremely frazzled father with three borderline out of control kids – the last thing he seemed to want was a random compliment – I made it out of the grocery store and through the parking lot with my compliment streak intact.

But I do have to admit I was relieved to get back in the car.

EVENING

Dumb move number two – I went to the gym.

On one hand, it was easier: most people wear headphones when they work out, so that eliminated them from my challenge.

On the other hand, moving from bench to squat rack to machines to free weights meant at some point I ran into almost everyone who was at the gym. One guy was benching 325 pounds for reps. Easy compliment. A woman was doing a split and then laying all the way forward on the mat. Another easy compliment.

A guy jumped in and helped an apparent visitor who looks form on squatting, presumptuous, yes, but also kind, since the way the guy was bending his back forward for injury I ran into the Good Samaritan a few minutes later it was easy for me to say, “That was really nice of you to help him out.”

Then I found myself doing pull-downs near a guy doing seated rows. And I had nothing.

Then I noticed the tattoo on his fore- arm.

And I was, “I really like your tattoo,” I said.

He smiled, said thanks, and then spent the next five minutes talking all about it: where he got it, how he came up with the design, what it means to him.

I realised that sometimes the easiest thing to compliment is the thing that people seem to want you to notice or are obviously proud of: a tattoo, a piercing, an unusual hair colour, a Porsche, a tricked-out truck.

Almost everyone has something they do or say or wear that they feel represents who they are inside. All you have to do is look for it.

WHAT I LEARNED

I said it wasn’t easy. Complimenting every person I ran into got easier, but more slowly than I thought. Complimenting people you meet who are doing their jobs – shopkeepers, managers, front-desk people at the gym. Saying thanks and telling them they did something well is fairly easy. All you have to do is remember to do it.

Complimenting “random” people is harder but surprisingly rewarding. It was fun, for the most part. In fact, in most of them there was no relation-ship with you, professional or personal. Compliment them on the thing they would least expect.

Expected feels good. Unexpected makes an even bigger impact.

Complimenting people who try something different can also be hard. Do it anyway. Status quo is often status safe. Taking a risk, however small, is hard, especially if you’re insecure. Insecurity feeds off silence, so mention when you see someone trying something different.

Compliment the effort. Praise the risk.

Even if they try it doesn’t work, they will know you noticed, and everyone likes to be noticed. And they’ll know, regardless of how it turned out, that you respect them for trying.

Most of all, make the compliment personal. Compliment what the person did to achieve a certain outcome, not the outcome itself. And never be afraid to ask for help, because the act of asking is a compli- ment in itself, which then gives you the chance to praise someone for his or her knowledge and skill.

Give it a try. Commit to complimenting five people, 10 people, or nearly every one you meet.

It’s not easy, but I promise you’ll make the day brighter for at least a few people, and you’ll learn a little something about yourself, too.
CULTURES MAKE LEADERS

MALAYSIA, GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES DIFFER IN THEIR DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

By ADRIAN PANG
editor@leaderonomics.com

Leadership is still a peculiar discourse and a skill that never seems to get close to perfection. It is a phenomenon that undergoes paradigm transformations generation after generation.

From the charismatic leadership of Alexander the Great, to traditional leadership of the monarchs to modern-day bureaucratic and contemporary leadership, the quest to creep even an inch closer to perfection never seems to be within reach.

So much for the effort that this discourse has been objectified into an empirical study known simply as the science of leadership, something that Leaderonomics has embraced and embedded deeply into the fabric of our organisation.

While most researches have settled on the consensus that good leadership falls within the range of the “effective leadership” spectrum, an extended spectrum with the “perfect leadership” dimension is a near-Utopian idea.

For its constant transformation has shown and reaffirmed the idea that leadership is not something that can be generalized. Effective leadership is still the ultimate lesson, achievement or milestone for an aspiring individual because it is something that one can grasp. Therefore, I have come to terms that there is no such thing as a bona-fide perfect leader.

But what constitutes effective leadership? A separate conversation altogether, it remains complex and ambiguous as the comprehensive aspect of “effective leadership” also comes with a catch – it comes in different shapes and sizes. This “shape-shifting” rhetoric is known simply as culture.

As a millennial studying sociology with a knack for observing cultures and a passion for travelling, I have observed and experienced leadership in different countries that brought me closer to understanding how culture transcends all the “Dos and Don’ts” of becoming an effective leader.

My experiences with leadership in different cultures make leaders

ships is often challenging. The classic way is for a leader in the Malaysian culture to optimize opportunities to get to know employees more personally – in line with the classification of Malaysia as a high context culture.

In addition, Malaysians also value the subtle things that go into the personal realm to make relationships tick, which explains the irreplaceable yumorah or mamak sessions after work, tea or cigarette breaks during working hours.

These are one of my favourite elements of the working culture back home as I get to have meals, play sports and forge good friendships (note the specificity) with top figures of companies for which I have worked. Furthermore, there are often mutual interests to know more about each other, of personal stories and interests.

These opportunities to build mutual relationships between leaders and their employees have enabled me to approach them for advice and lessons more directly. They also ensure that such interactions and relationship-building are genuine and for the long term.

I have always heard stories of how my bosses are still in close contact with their former mentors or bosses for occasional advice and even catch up with former apprentices to celebrate and share their achievements and successes together despite taking different career paths.

Finally, flexibility and adaptability are also important part of fostering relationships between employer and employees, be they sick leave, flexible working hours or occasional delays or lapse in performances.

As a young professional, I am always going to face difficulties in completing tasks. The aforementioned “leeway” element provides spaces to breathe and learn as supervisors often know how and when to change their approaches and strategies.

Ultimately, diversity is the driving force behind these approaches as it cultivates the way leaders play out in Malaysia. In a nutshell, effective leadership in Malaysia is the ability to connect with employees while simultaneously ensuring they are working towards common goals.

GERMANY: ORDER AND QUALITY

On the other end of the spectrum, Germans’ take on leadership is almost a complete opposite of its Malaysian counterpart. When we think of Germany, we often associate it with quality – think German cars, machineries, cosmetic, pharmaceuticals etc.

This constant sustenance of quality stems from their culture and values that were developed over that period. The bulk of leadership and working cultures today are especially results of the post-war wirtschaftswunder (economic miracle).

But in a broader historical and sociological context, the Germans have always worked passionately, productively and maintaining efficiency even before its economic miracle years.

Moreover, the trend of their working culture, order is perhaps the essential component. In fact, the culture of order transcends the working world.

Rules and laws are the stability of the German society and the Germans take them very seriously. Citing from the renowned expat, “Germans are often described by non-Germans as having the following attributes: sensible, reserved, punctual, precise, cold, target-oriented, arrogant, sure of themselves, obedient, disciplined, goal-oriented, authoritarian, stiff, unfelting, direct, bureaucratic, professional, correct, self-assured, petty, highly orderly, strong, humourless, prioritized, reliable, perfectionist, organized.”

My experiences living and working in Germany affirmed most of these stereotypes in ways that they preserve the reality of varying degrees, order is the predominant super-set within which most of these stereotypes fall.

In essence, German leadership is pragmatic, bureaucratic and rigid. It is all about professionalism and hard work to ensure the quality of the end-product and activities that are for best for business. Leadership credentials are built on experiences and technical knowledge of these processes, and nothing else. Personal traits usually have minimal effects on job promotion or hiring.

There is usually a direct correlation between a leadership position and extra emphasis on the depth of skills, knowledge and experiences. In short, a good leader is usually a highly-skilled, experienced and technically sound professional, sometimes nothing more.

Moreover, direct communication that is most often goal-oriented is highly valued by Germans. While communication is a tool for Germans rarely beat around the bush and their directness is often stone-cold, stern and uncompromising.

I have had several profound experiences with such directness, having my opinions ridiculed and critically heard in settings that would normally be embarrassing in my own and in many other cultures. However, the tendency for Germans to not intrude personal lives with their work makes such ordeals strictly professional to maintain productivity and quality.

My German professor notes that an intense and hostile meeting would normally be followed up with a cheerful social outing immediately; the hostilities are only restricted to works and business.

Therefore, this reinforces the idea that German leadership is often practised in a defined professional setting and it doesn’t spill over to personal spaces.

To conclude, effective leadership in German society is the success of pragmatism while maintaining order and discipline among employees to sustain productivity and quality.

This is not the end of the article. To read about Adrian’s experiences in the United States and what he learnt about their leadership techniques, head to bit.ly/leaderonomicsaroundworld
**MAY THE FORCE NOT BE WITH YOU**

**HAVING EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS YOU THINK**

1. **Basic Needs**
   - Employees need to have a clear understanding of what success in their role looks like. They need to be equipped with all the right resources.

2. **Support Needs**
   - Employees need to know that management provides the opportunity for them to do what they do best every day.
   - Also, what they do is recognised and appreciated.

3. **Teamwork Needs**
   - Employees need to feel they are part of a team. They need to trust the people they work with, and know that others trust them and value them.

4. **Growth Needs**
   - Employees need to be challenged to learn something new and find better ways to do their job.

(The four area of needs highlighted above are taken from Gallup’s well-researched Q 12 engagement survey)

Hence, the influencing leader should be in the habit of sensing the engagement needs of the troops first before he gets all fired up to address them. Your task is to connect with the hearts and minds before you can motivate the hands and feet. It is the worker before the work, the performer before the performance, the conversation before the communication, the relationship before the results.

**IT IS NOT ABOUT YOU**

Having executive presence is a funny thing — the more you focus on yourself, the less of a presence you have.

However, when you submit your personality, your passion and sometimes even your own ambition to a greater purpose, a greater cause, a greater perspective, then the presence will follow your passion.

Sure, there is the need to build up the proper communication skills, the right grooming disposition and the negotiation prowess but nothing really influences another fellow human being who is authentic and able to relate to me where I am instead of constantly forcing me in a direction against my will.

At the end of the day, having executive presence looks like this — your presence inspires others to execute with a strong sense of personal ownership. You cannot accomplish this by force but only by having an authentic influence.

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**By JOSEPH TAN**

Joseph Tan is CEO of Leaderonomics

**Good Monday. His passion is to work with performance-focused leaders to capture the hearts and minds of their employees through a strengths-based and accountability-driven approach.** Much of what is shared in the article above comes from his experience in working with clients to transform their organisation culture. If you would like to enhance the culture of your company email joseph.tan@leaderonomics.com for more details.

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The ‘BIAS’ THAT CAN KEEP US HOPEFUL

Instead, the most powerful emotions I felt were those from my happiest memories – my whole family glued to the TV to watch the game; how that nail-biting final was the only topic of conversation for everyone at school. Optimism was in full swing.

Coming in a distant second were the more hurtful experiences which, having overcome them, I recall now with a mild sense of achievement. In fact, in hindsight some of them have wound up seeming quite funny.

Now, some would say that we choose our lenses from where we stand. And in this case, it is the rose-tinted one that many of us use to sieve through autobiographical memory, leaving out the not-so-rise ones. This act of selective retrospection is a coping mechanism, designed to help people pull through challenging times, and there is a term for this.

Psychologists call it the “Fading Affect Bias” (FAB), a psychological phenomenon in which the feel-good emotions associated with pleasant experiences fade more slowly with time, compared to those associated with negative memories.

In other words, people are more likely to be able to access uplifting memories. This leaves us with nostalgia, which can serve as a powerful tool for reassurance when one’s faith – or confidence – is shaken.

In a 2009 research summary by W. Richard Walker and John J. Skowronski, they speculate that “one function of the FAB may be to induce individuals to be positive and action-oriented so that they may better face and master life challenges.”

That was exactly how I felt. To me, the imagery and song from the video were little triggers of good childhood memories that have – over the years – become more significant as I wade through the heavy responsibilities of parenthood.

It was a reminder that allowed me to return to a place of hope, and restore a belief – however brief – that our ideals will trump our challenges.

As a nation, we strive to build a culture based upon integrity, civic-mindedness, compassion, and a grand appreciation of our unique differences. But these ideals can come across as just that – a state of perfection that we are likely to be able to access uplifting moments.

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