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SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM AMBANK’S FIRST STEPS TO GROWING SMES

By MATT NAYLOR
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A

S AmBank Group launched the first AmBank BizCONFERENCE in Penang recently, with the hundreds of small and medium enterprise (SME) leaders in attendance taking their first steps towards growing their businesses. With a carefully curated line-up of guest speakers and surprises aplenty, the nationwide series of conferences kicked off with a bang.

The first event in the long-running series of the AmBank BizCLUB, the conference took place throughout the afternoon of Sept 19 at Penang’s G Hotel Kelawai. Here are our important lessons from the event:

THE PATH TO SUCCESS

The event became the first in a series of five conferences nationwide, all of which will feature special guest speakers sharing their knowledge of stories of success and failure along the way.

Among the eclectic list of speakers was Penang’s own Goh Ai Ching, whose company Piktochart has become a global giant in the field of infographics and design. Despite frequent pressure to move her company to the concrete jungles of Kuala Lumpur or Singapore, Goh and her husband have remained steadfast in leading the charge for companies in Penang making their mark internationally.

Her path to such industry dominance has not been without its hiccups, and Goh shared her unique journey during an eye-opening talk with Leaderonomics chief executive officer (CEO) Roshan Thiran.

“I’d be lying if I said that I knew starting out how big Piktochart would grow to become,” she said.

“But we were able to combine having the right products and systems with having the right people in the right places in order to scale our business.”

Goh frequently cites her people as the keys to the success of her organisation, with harnessing their drive and creativity an essential factor.

Despite humble beginnings, Piktochart now employs more than 50 people from all over the world who have grown with the company.

Another of the list of speakers was IHS Markit Malaysia managing director Vimalawari K. Ramasamy.

She brought her infectious energy and relentless spirit to the stage as she shared how she had broken through the glass ceiling during her extraordinary career.

“During my time with Intel, I was an ambitious young female in a male-dominated industry,” she shared.

“There were plenty of times when I doubted myself and questioned whether a woman could be successful in the tech field, but overcoming that by gradually earning the respect of my peers and the lessons I learnt during that time are what have inspired me to grow IHS Markit.

“The key lesson here is never let self-doubt creep in and stop you from reaching your potential – it won’t be easy, but your personal and professional growth is really a matter of mental strength.”

GROWTH STARTS FROM WITHIN

A running theme throughout the event, during which five speakers took to the stage to impart their lessons, was that of how, in order to grow, companies must first build the right internal systems.

While many companies that fail believe this is due to external forces such as new competitors in the market or economic changes, the speakers discussed how the right management team can foresee and overcome any obstacle.

Leaderonomics’ Roshan Thiran unveiled his “Four Constraints” model of what his research has shown to be the leading reasons for companies failing to reach “world-class” levels.

These are culture, leadership, business model and process.

“If you have all four of the four constraints aligned, there is nothing holding you back,” said Roshan.

Finally, chief knowledge officer of Connecting The Dots Malaysia and storytelling in leadership expert Bharat Avlani discussed how leaders can engage others through the art of telling stories.

“Whether it is making themselves memorable to clients, delivering stand-out-worth worthy public speeches or using stories to motivate and influence employees, Bharat’s tried and tested storytelling techniques have been proven to deliver exceptional results for business leaders.”

“Stories are facts wrapped in context and told with emotion,” explained Bharat.

“Become a listener, recognise the great storytellers around you as they are your most valuable asset. Learn what they do and how they do it.”

Ultimately nobody wants to be hit with fact after fact after fact.

“If you can weave a story behind what you are trying to say, you will get noticeable results from those around you.”

MOVING FORWARD

The day’s four guest speakers gave the attendees much to ponder and digest as they continue their development journeys.

AmBank’s managing director of business banking Christopher Yap closed out the session with his key takeaways from the event and summarised the nuggets of wisdom offered by each of the speakers.

His highlight, he said, was to hear of how Goh had grown her company from Penang and how Piktochart was now building internationally.

“This speaks to the potential of the market here in Penang,” he said.

“Piktochart is proof that you don’t need to be based in Silicon Valley or one of the other hotspots to be a major global player.”

With that in mind, Yap took the occasion to introduce the AmBank BizRACE to the crowd.

Free to register and open to all CEOs and business leaders in Malaysia, the competition promises incredible prizes and development programmes to give companies the tools they need to grow their business to the next level.

This is only the beginning of the AmBank BizCLUB journey as upcoming conferences in Johor Baru on Oct 5, Kota Kinabalu on Oct 10 and Kuching on Oct 12, promise similar surprises and invaluable knowledge-sharing.

The conferences will then conclude on Nov 1 at the KL Convention Centre.

If the first such event in Penang is any indication for what is to come, the future is bright for SME development in Malaysia.

To sign up for future AmBank BizCONFERENCEs and to join the AmBank BizRACE, visit ambankbizclub.com/register.

To see the highlight videos from the Penang AmBank BizCONFERENCE and read more information about the event, visit ambankbizclub.com/sme-resources
LESSONS FROM A GENIUS
HOW LEONARDO DA VINCI DEVELOPED MY SPIRIT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

By ROSHAN THIRAN
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“IT had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.” — Leonardo da Vinci

A few years ago, my son and I were discussing geniuses. We decided to play a game where I would come up with my Top 10 list and he would do likewise. Almost all the names we wrote were different (as our definition of genius may have differed), but one name we both had was Leonardo da Vinci. The term “genius” was meant for one figure in history, it is most justifiably might well have been applied to the life and accomplishments of the famous Italian. When we think of da Vinci (1452-1519), most of us recall the painter whose timeless works include the Mona Lisa, The Last Supper, The Vitrubian Man, and Virgin of the Rocks. These works truly speak to the genius mind behind their creation, but the prolific Italian master was much more than a painter. A quality that permeated the soul of da Vinci was an incessant curiosity that compelled him to learn as much as possible about as many subjects as possible.

To this end, he is recognised as an architect, musician, mathematician, engineer, inventor, expert in anatomy, geologist, cartographer, and botanist, as well as a sculptor and painter of masterpieces.

The fascination of da Vinci is rooted in the realisation that, with curiosity, learning and passion, there is nothing that can’t be achieved if we choose to set our minds on something, and that the only limitations that hold us back are those that are self-created.

For me, da Vinci shows us that it is possible for someone to be good at many things. It takes a lot of hard work and effort, but if we keep learning and pushing ourselves, anything is possible. Born as an illegitimate son to a local lawyer near the Tuscan town of Vinci, he later became the apprentice of the prominent painter Andrea del Verrocchio in Florence, where he honed his craft as a painter and sculptor, and soon became a master in his own right. In his early 30s, he travelled to Milan to work for the ruling Sforza family as a sculptor, painter, engineer and architect. In 1499, the French invasion of Milan forced the family to flee and, after a few years passed, da Vinci returned to Florence where his most famous work, the Mona Lisa, was painted between 1503 and 1506.

Da Vinci returned to Milan in 1506 and stayed there for the next 15 years before spending a period of three years in Rome. In 1517, he was invited to live in France by King Francis I, and never returned to Italy. When we think of da Vinci (1452-1519), most of us recall the painter whose timeless works include the Mona Lisa, The Last Supper, The Vitrubian Man, and Virgin of the Rocks. These works truly speak to the genius mind behind their creation, but the prolific Italian master was much more than a painter. A quality that permeated the soul of da Vinci was an incessant curiosity that compelled him to learn as much as possible about as many subjects as possible.

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What made da Vinci so great that he has remained revered in the minds of many throughout the centuries? A fundamental quality to his genius was undoubtedly his thirst for knowledge. He received a basic education in reading, writing and mathematics, but soon developed an intense passion for the natural world and studied as much as he could while growing up in Tuscany.

The acquisition of knowledge and pushing the boundaries of his abilities led da Vinci to master a wide range of subjects including geology, anatomy, flight, and gravity. As an inventor, he conceptualised the bicycle, airplane, helicopter, and parachute centuries ahead of their time, which further testified to his brilliance.

Which begs the questions for each of us: Do we thirst for knowledge? Are we intensely curious? To become great and make a difference in the world, we must start with ourselves. We must equip ourselves with knowledge and wisdom so that we can impart those to the world.

And this starts with our hunger for growth and our determination to keep learning and discovering new insights. Ask yourself: Am I really hungry for growth?

LEARNING FORWARD

The Italian master was a true pioneer and innovator, and spent much of his time learning forward — rather than focusing on what had already gone before, da Vinci was driven to think about and solve problems that had yet to occur to anyone.

He was a real visionary who understood the importance of exponential thinking in those who sought to truly change the world and realise achievements that most would view as being impossible.

While some of us would describe ourselves as either being inclined more towards an artistic or a scientific bent, da Vinci was able to make use of both approaches and bring them together to inspire much of his work. For example, his paintings were underpinned by his in-depth study of anatomy and, at the same time, he could endow his subjects on the canvas with great soul and character.

To become great and make a difference in the world, we must start with ourselves. We must equip ourselves with knowledge and wisdom so that we can impart those to the world. And this starts with our hunger for growth and our determination to keep learning and discovering new insights. Ask yourself: Am I really hungry for growth?

Conversely, da Vinci’s science was expressed through drawings and diagrams, which he kept in notebooks that totalled around 13,000 pages of ideas. These gave a fascinating insight into the mind of the great Renaissance man who displayed a keen understanding of the world around him and how it worked.

Da Vinci’s lifelong love of learning is one that speaks to us all in our own pursuits of personal growth and development.

He sought to learn as much about the world around him as he could, and understood the nature of curiosity to be vital to the human desire to continually progress beyond its current levels of knowledge. As a remarkable and brilliant figure, the fascination of da Vinci is rooted in the realisation that, with curiosity, learning and passion, there is nothing that can’t be achieved if we choose to set our minds on something, and that the only limitations that hold us back are those that are self-created.

THE BIG QUESTION

Many of us aspire to “change the world” and leave a legacy. Yet, this will never happen if we are not competent nor have the deep insights on how to make a difference.

The way to kickstart our journey is to start with ourselves. We need to be learning leaders.

We need to always be looking for insights, opportunities to learn and be curious about the world around us. When we, like da Vinci, start to read, study and explore the world around us, we start to find problems to solve and opportunities to truly make this world a better place.

So, start with being hungry to learn. The rest will fall in place in due time.
THE CHANGING ROLE OF CEOs

HOW TO STAY AHEAD IN TODAY’S FAST-PACED CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

By PRETHIBA ESVARY
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BUSINESSES today are facing disruption due to unprecedented changes like market instability, rise of new technology, big data, changing consumer demands and more regulation. Leadership is thus the power that our lives are better lies with us.

Prethiba Esvary is a writer and assistant editor with Leaderonomics. She is passionate about impact and social justice. She believes that our lives are solely written by us, and thus the power to change for the better lies with us.

Wearer of multiple hats
Malaysia Digital Economy Corp vice-president of enterprise development Gopi Ganesalingam tells us that “the dynamics have changed in businesses”. “The CEO has got to have the hat of human resources, chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO) and such.”

Echoing this sentiment, veteran CEO Joel Trammell wrote that a leader may have to switch between roles depending on situations:

> Architect – to design the right business model for the company.
> Engineer – to put in place proper systems and processes.
> Coach – to place the right talents in the right roles/departments.
> Player – to contribute their expertise in particular projects.
> Player – to contribute their expertise in particular projects.
> Priest – to be a “sounding board” for employees.

The architect, engineer and coach are the most significant roles that CEOs need to take up to enable the company’s continued growth.

1. WEARER OF MULTIPLE HATS
Malaysia Institute of Human Resource Management president Arsenandian Jaganatha Naidu says: “Today, CEOs are responsible for and accountable to everything. If things don’t work out, it’s their fault.”

CEOs are tasked with looking at the strategy the company. They are the ones responsible for visioning and looking deep within their business to see what can be improved. Arsenandian added if there were any shortcomings in the organisation back then, managers were held accountable. Today, the CEO is responsible even if decisions were made collectively with others, or even if the mistake was made by someone else.

This statement can be supported by recent news where CEOs have been asked to step down for, say a company’s declining performance, such as Mark Fields from Ford or regulatory and culture issues such as Travis Kalanick from Uber.

Dealing with a bloated C-suite
With more challenges comes the need to have more expertise at the top to aid the CEO with strategy and decision-making. As a result, we are beginning to see a transformation of the C-suite in its size and composition.

Traditionally, the C-suite comprised of the CEO, CFO and COO. Research by Harvard Business Review revealed that the numbers have “doubled, rising from about five in the mid-1980s to almost 10 in the mid-2000s”.

Today, newer titles such as CMO (chief marketing officer), CTO (chief technology officer), CDO (chief data officer), CCO (chief customer officer) and CHRO (chief human resources officer) have entered the equation. The challenge arises when team members adopt a functional view of their roles, as opposed to a holistic one. To ensure effectiveness of the C-suite team, transformational leadership expert professor Chris Roebuck said it is imperative that “CEOs become a facilitator who leverages the expertise of all team members” and ensure that there is strong trust.

In a nutshell
As CEO coach and adviser Tommy Weir says: “The CEO’s role is simple to define, yet complex to execute.” During these times, CEOs need to don multiple hats at once in order to pull through and move ahead.

Leadership, culture, processes and business models must change, otherwise companies, and the CEOs who run them, risk being blown away by the storm in an ever more competitive marketplace.
THE MAN BUILDING THE FUTURE

MINDVALLEY’S VISHEN LAKHIAHI WANTS TO CREATE ‘THE WORLD’S GREATEST SCHOOL’

By MATT NAYLOR
matt.naylor@leaderonomics.com

They say that the best way to predict the future is to create it. The quote, sometimes attributed to former US President Abraham Lincoln and often to renowned French consul Peter Drucker, has become the motivator of many a business leader over the years.

For many, it’s a catchy tagline to put on a side of a mug, set against a beautiful background before posting on Instagram or use as an email sign-off. Few embody its inspiration message, however.

For Mindvalley founder and chief executive officer Vishen Lakhiani, it has become his life’s work — creating his own personal vision of the future.

CHANGING HUMAN HISTORY

Mindvalley has always been, at its core, a company happy to question the status quo and attempt to reimagine human history.

To do so is a bold vision and one that has been undertaken by many throughout history, with mixed results.

The greatest change agents of all time, however, have always had a vision for the reimagined world they were trying to create. Those that did not succeed may have failed due to their lack of understanding that.

“People say they want to change the world and believe that they can do it by creating a product,” says Vishen.

“Mindvalley is not a company selling a product or a service to make lots of money. Products come and products go. They live and they die. What I am doing is changing humanity and building a lifestyle that will equip people for the future.”

It is by changing lifestyles and, indeed, our very perception of the word “lifestyle” that Vishen and his equally-ambitious team are creating this whole new world.

In his 20s, Vishen moved to the United States and set about working his way up the corporate ladder. Without a solid work-life balance and feeling the stress in his sales position, he discovered the benefits of meditation and began his search for personal maximisation.

“During my time in the United States, I had worked a lot of different jobs and was rising fast in the sales world,” says Vishen.

“But I realised that there had to be more to life than this,” Nelson Mandela said: “If you want to change the world, changing education’, so I started to think — what is it that education isn’t giving people?

“The lightbulb went off that the growth I had achieved through meditation and mindfulness should be applied to everybody.”

THE NEW EDUCATION SYSTEM

Following on from the great South African leader’s words, Vishen is bringing education as the fundamental tool to build his future. Mindvalley’s ultimate goal is to create “the world’s greatest school”, wherein one billion students will be enrolled in a digital platform that transforms their lives.

Mindvalley Quests, which was launched as a website and mobile application last year, is Vishen’s biggest step yet to changing the world since he launched the company in 2003 during his time in the United States.

Speaking about the new platform, he says: “We are building a team of the world’s greatest teachers in these fields and combining them with the world’s best learning technology to build the future of humanity. The next level is to build a community, build a model of people that can connect and learn from one another. Learning happens best as a community.”

With courses in fitness, personal mastery, meditation (led by Vishen himself), transformational leadership, psychology and so many more, it is an ever-changing system designed to take a fresh approach to understanding the human spirit.

His ethos of products living and dying at a quick rate is evidenced in the rate at which Mindvalley constantly innovates its own offerings. Up to 70% of the products currently on offer did not even exist a year ago and Vishen expects that, 12 months from now, that statistic will remain true.

As Industry 4.0 sets in and the “rise of the robots” remains an imminent emergence for employees in certain sectors, it is estimated that around 45% of the current jobs available today will be digitised.

As automation and technology render that huge number of roles redundant, the focus will shift into human creativity. Harnessing that is central to Vishen’s mission.

“The big need that people are going to have to satisfy in the future is to invest in themselves and look at what makes them human,” he says.

“People are going to need the skills that make us human and the modern education system isn’t teaching those skills. Creativity, communication, public speech, writing, taking care of your health, how to be positive and passionate, leadership skills and then skills that you apply in your personal life will be the necessary tools for the future.”

Attracting a billion users and, ultimately, “changing the course of human history”, as Vishen puts it, is no small feat, but he fully believes that they have the frameworks in place to pull it off.

“By looking at where humanity needs to be in 10 years and merging community, technology and curriculum, we believe we can reach that goal,” he says.

“This world’s greatest school” has no campus; it’s global, the teachers and students are connected online.

That is not to say that Mindvalley does not have its own brick and mortar presence. In order to attract the best talent from across the globe, Vishen and his team set a very specific target — something they are getting closer to achieving every single year.

He says: “We set a goal, when we started in Malaysia that, by 2020, we want to be the No. 1 place in the world to work. The best company in the world is not going to be in New York or Silicon Valley or London; it’s going to be in Kuala Lumpur. We have won a lot of awards over the years, but there is still much work to be done.”

Those awards and the renown of the forward-thinking company and its jaw-dropping office space have earned Mindvalley praise from across the globe.

That recognition means that 99.5% of all its customers are outside of Malaysia, with 54% being in the United States and Vishen’s book. The Code of the Extraordinary Mind is currently in the Top 200 books in any category on Amazon Kindle.

That does not mean that Vishen is planning to move the company overseas, however. He will ensure that the “best company in the world” and the “world’s best school” are based out of Malaysia and continue to put Malaysian business on the global map.

FROM MALAYSIA TO THE WORLD

Though a fiercely proud Malaysian, Vishen’s globetrotting adventures have introduced him to the value of diversity and international methods. His time in the United States, while launching his career, also opened his eyes to some of the darker sides of humanity and discrimination.

“Because of what I experienced in the United States, I wanted to make sure that, for the rest of my life, I would tackle racism and stand for unity,” he says.

When it came time to develop his own company, therefore, Vishen sought to become as inclusive as possible. Within the more than 200 employees working in its five Kuala Lumpur offices, 45 different nationalities are being represented.

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Vishen Lakhiani will be speaking at the AmBank BizCONFERENCE on Nov 1 in Kuala Lumpur. To sign up for free, visit ambankbizclub.com.
SEVEN HABITS FOR SUCCESS
HOW TO THRIVE IN THE DIGITAL, DISRUPTIVE, COMPLEX AND UNCERTAIN AGE

By Peter Lam
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3 of 4

While today’s leaders have visibility, competence and care, thoughtful workshops, developments etc. e.g. a coaching, Fertis valuation, Google gift card and How Big Data has created new career opportunities for data managers, data architects, data analysts, etc. CEOs also need to be conscious and familiar with emerging trends to be more proactive in engaging younger stakeholders and collaborators. This requires a more holistic approach to leadership, more than ever before.

Every CEO is trying to gain competitive advantage over his/her rivals. It is commonly known that GE had about 60% of the market share for washing machines when Welch took it; it had only about 20,000 employees (however, the company's value had risen 400%-600% during that period). Nonetheless, amid all the hard-hitting cost-saving initiatives, Welch instigated US$3bn (a lot of money back then) into a state-of-the-art management training campus in Crotonville, New York. This decision was met with a lot of internal mop-sweeping and complaints but Welch stood by it, driven by his vision to build an army of leaders in GE. Welch drove it through, driven by his vision to build an army of leaders in GE. Welch drove it through, driven by his passion to develop a culture that works together, to see change as a function of empathy, moral and spiritual. To be fully engaged, we must be physically, emotionally connected, mentally focused and spiritually aligned with a purpose beyond an immediate line of sight, the true line of sight. Hence, leaders today need more than just IQ, EQ must also be considered.

Leaders who are able to skillfully transform traditional business models into digital models to create a reason for the customer to buy from them, rather than just provide sourcing data. Our role is to make the company iconic in this area, where millennials are leading the charge.

The digital CEO has to help and ensure his/her organization is innovative and improve themselves. What are the implications for CEOs today?

One such change was cutting down the business unit's size of GE. It was commonly known that GE had about 60% of the market share for washing machines when Welch took it; it had only about 20,000 employees (however, the company's value had risen 400%-600% during that period). Nonetheless, amid all the hard-hitting cost-saving initiatives, Welch instigated US$3bn (a lot of money back then) into a state-of-the-art management training campus in Crotonville, New York. This decision was met with a lot of internal mop-sweeping and complaints but Welch stood by it, driven by his vision to build an army of leaders in GE. Welch drove it through, driven by his vision to build an army of leaders in GE. Welch drove it through, driven by his passion to develop a culture that works together, to see change as a function of empathy, moral and spiritual. To be fully engaged, we must be physically, emotionally connected, mentally focused and spiritually aligned with a purpose beyond an immediate line of sight, the true line of sight.

As the saying goes, “A 1% improvement a week is a trillion a year”. The result was the introduction of Vision 2020, marketing manager to head that unit. The digital CEO has to help and ensure his/her organization is innovative and improve themselves. What are the implications for CEOs today?

There are seven habits that may help you to get the most out of your day. The first is to plan your day. This is the most important thing you need to do凡是我們需要做的。The second is to focus on things that need to be updated, modified, our current systems impeding execution. The CEO needs to understand how these processes need to be updated, modified, and executed. Third is to be focused on the most pressing, the most critical actions. Fourth is to focus on the most important, the most critical actions. Fifth is to focus on the most important, on the most critical actions. Sixth is to focus on the most important, on the most critical actions. Seventh is to focus on the most important, on the most critical actions. So, to get to the most out of your day, put in for 20,000 employees (however, the company's value had risen 400%-600% during that period). Nonetheless, amid all the hard-hitting cost-saving initiatives, Welch instigated US$3bn (a lot of money back then) into a state-of-the-art management training campus in Crotonville, New York. This decision was met with a lot of internal mop-sweeping and complaints but Welch stood by it, driven by his vision to build an army of leaders in GE. Welch drove it through, driven by his passion to develop a culture that works together, to see change as a function of empathy, moral and spiritual. To be fully engaged, we must be physically, emotionally connected, mentally focused and spiritually aligned with a purpose beyond an immediate line of sight, the true line of sight. Hence, leaders today need more than just IQ, EQ must also be considered.

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There are seven habits that may help you to get the most out of your day. The first is to plan your day. This is the most important thing you need to do凡是我們需要做的。The second is to focus on things that need to be updated, modified, and executed. Third is to be focused on the most pressing, the most critical actions. Fourth is to focus on the most important, the most critical actions. Fifth is to focus on the most important, on the most critical actions. Sixth is to focus on the most important, on the most critical actions. Seventh is to focus on the most important, on the most critical actions. So, to get to the most out of your day, put in for 20,000 employees (however, the company's value had risen 400%-600% during that period). Nonetheless, amid all the hard-hitting cost-saving initiatives, Welch instigated US$3bn (a lot of money back then) into a state-of-the-art management training campus in Crotonville, New York. This decision was met with a lot of internal mop-sweeping and complaints but Welch stood by it, driven by his passion to develop a culture that works together, to see change as a function of empathy, moral and spiritual. To be fully engaged, we must be physically, emotionally connected, mentally focused and spiritually aligned with a purpose beyond an immediate line of sight, the true line of sight. Hence, leaders today need more than just IQ, EQ must also be considered.

Leaders who are able to skillfully transform traditional business models into digital models to create a reason for the customer to buy from them, rather than just provide sourcing data. Our role is to make the company iconic in this area, where millennials are leading the charge.

The digital CEO has to help and ensure his/her organization is innovative and improve themselves. What are the implications for CEOs today?
LISTENING IS NOT ENOUGH
IDENTIFYING OTHER PEOPLE’S PERSONAL GOALS AND ALIGNING THEM WITH YOURS

By NADIA RADHUAN
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WHEN I was studying genetics in Universiti Malaya, the hardest course I undertook was immunology. I was struggling in class. Whenever I entered the lecture hall, the professor would start re-arranging our seats for some reason, would do a bit of pop quiz and then start teaching.

I would write down some of what she said, do my revision and, ultimately, still not be able to answer her exam questions. They never seemed to ask anything that she had actually taught us and I almost flunked the semester. I wasn’t listening to my professor.

Coming out of university and into the first year of my career, I encountered one of the hardest clients I have ever worked with. We would have meetings quite frequently, she called me daily to give me an earful and, when I sent over the proposal, it was absolutely not what she wanted.

Of course, she wasn’t happy with it. I wasn’t listening to my client. It took me a while to realise that not only do I have poor listening skills, but I had issues understanding the message that the person was trying to convey.

My professor didn’t want me to memorise all the antigen’s names, she wanted us to understand the fundamentals of immunology — how everything in our body relates to each other and why we need to know these things.

Similarly, my client didn’t want the off-the-shelf programme I had created for her; she wanted a new and different off-the-shelf programme I had created for her colleagues.

That’s how I learnt that everyone has a different agenda behind what they say. “Hidden” agendas are the private goals that everyone has in driving towards their objectives.

This does not necessarily need to be a bad thing — my professor had a well-meaning agenda, unfortunately she and I just weren’t aligned on how to get there.

THE HIDDEN AGENDA

In The Hidden Agenda by Kevin Allen, he mentioned that: “You can’t convince, persuade or even handwink people, instead you compel them to follow you by making a profound connection with the things which are of real importance to them.”

In his book, he explored the true meaning of “agenda”. It can either be wants, needs or values:

• WANTS are what they hope to achieve or possess, that rely heavily on how others view them.

• NEEDS are what is essential to them, which can be furthered explored in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

• VALUES are about their belief systems and what is important to them as a person, many of which will affect their decision-making process.

Though the book focuses heavily on how to form a deep relationship with a customer to win business deals ahead of your competitors, the fundamental perspective on human interaction is very strong — bond with your credo.

It is something that can only be developed through a lot of practice and understanding yourself first, conversing with others and brushing up on your active listening skills — observing and responding appropriately.

BUILDING YOUR CREDIO

A credo is a set of beliefs that drives thoughts and behaviours and is, in essence, a reflection of your personal values. A personal credo is one which is created by the individual, and not just one accepted by others.

A lot of successful icons use their credo as part of their personal brand — what values they uphold and what they bring to lives of others.

Do you have your own credo? How does a credo form within someone?

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To build up your own credo, there are a few reflections and exercises that you can do on your own. Regina Kieran, a teacher in Brooklyn, New York used this technique to teach her young students:

Start by listing down five specific things that you believe in, start with “I believe...” then construct five things you do not believe in and, finally, three things you wish you believed in. From there, construct a poem that starts, “I believe...” Revise the poem by completing each line with why you believe that.

Everything you have written will then form your credo.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Give full attention to others when conversing with them. The art of listening can be perceived as a gift to the other person — acknowledge and validate them. Understand further “what is in it for them” by asking follow-up questions.

Paraphrase their words and ask open-ended questions on their opinions as this will usually reveal their agendas. You may also use a ladderising exercise by asking “why?” a few times. At the same time, step back and observe how relaxed or tense they are when conversing with you — body language tells you more about a person than their choice of words. It could be their facial expression, eye movements or hand gestures.

Steer your conversations based on their mood, their excitement and keenness on certain topics. Form a close bond with them so that they trust you enough to reveal their “hidden” agendas.

The bottom line in understanding others is the importance of listening. Put aside your own agenda and what you want from the person we are talking to.

Listen carefully to how they form their thoughts, who they care about, what issues they worry about and what their priorities are in life. By understanding their underlying agenda, you’ll know how to best invest your time in whomever you choose to bond with.

Strong communication skills are important attributes any leaders should possess. Learn the art of compelling communication, effortlessly engage clients and colleagues and develop strong influencing skills with authority through Leaderonomics’ communication courses. Contact training@leaderonomics.com for more details.

Nadia is head of engagement at Leaderonomics. She enjoys connecting with new people and discovered the meaning of life once, but forgot to write it down.

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YOUR VALUES ARE KEY TO YOUR LEADERSHIP

"Leaders driven by their core values inspire loyalty and commitment in their followers because they help them to find purpose and meaning in what they do, and they bring out the best in the people who work alongside them."

KRAEMER JR’S FOUR PRINCIPLES OF VALUE-BASED LEADERSHIP

1 Self-reflection

Leaders should reflect regularly and develop a keen sense of self-awareness. If leaders don’t know themselves, they will be unable to guide themselves and, as a result, will fail to meaningfully lead others.

2 Balance

Situations can have numerous perspectives and it’s the job of any values-based leader to consider all points of view with an open mind to ensure that any subsequent decisions are fair and informed.

3 True self-confidence

Leaders who champion values above all else should accept themselves as they are, and at the same time recognise their strengths and weaknesses with a view to continual improvement. Self-confident leaders know that there will always be more gifted, successful, and accomplished people than themselves out there and they accept this reality.

4 Genuine humility

The old adage “never forget where you came from” rings true in the mind of values-based leaders. Genuine humility helps to maintain a sense of perspective – especially in periods of success – and helps to ensure that everyone, no matter their status, is treated with courtesy and respect.

DON’T BE AFRAID TO PUT YOUR FEET ON THE DESK

By DAN ROCKWELL
editor@leaderonomics.com

FORMAL conversations promote guarded fakery and artificial relationships. Team members put on their professional faces.

Recently, a team member explained to the business owner the secret to his success. The message was, "Hey, we’re having a real conversation."

Of course, there were other factors that promoted connection, not the least of which is this leader doesn’t like the term boss.

Along with putting his feet on the desk, this leader consistently provides opportunities for team members to engage in self-reflection. Additionally, he listens to answers. In other words, putting your feet on the desk – by itself – won’t ignite relatedness or promote engagement.

It takes time and intention for leaders to overcome the gap that power and position naturally create. The leader with his feet on the desk is also:

1. Authentic.
2. Vulnerable.
3. Open.
4. Curious.
5. Transparent.

OVERCOMING DISTANCE:
Recurring conversations create an environment where people flourish through connection. They:

• Prioritise relatedness.
• Promote fulfilment.
• Elevate engagement.
• Strengthen alignment.

Recurring conversations enable teams to harmoniously row in the same direction. Note: coaching is an essential ingredient in this organisation. The leader I’m describing has been coached and, more importantly, continues to hone his coaching skills.

By SANDY CLARKE
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Organisational values.“

Indeed, according to Harry M. Jansen Kraemer Jr, values-based leadership is the only true style of leadership that separates the great from the rest. Kraemer is a management professor and author of From Values to Action: The Four Principles of Values-Based Leadership – believes people become effective leaders when they are rooted in “who they are and what matters most” to them. This, he says, better equips leaders to deal with any situation that might arise.

Most of us are drawn to values-based leaders. These are people who have clear principles, they are honest and congruent in their deeds, they truly inspire those around them, and they feel a greater sense of gratitude towards others than they expect to receive in return.

Leaders driven by their core values inspire loyalty and commitment in their followers because they help them to find purpose and meaning in what they do, and they bring out the best in the people who work alongside them.

But sometimes, value-leadership can fall short of expectations, whether short-comings are perceived or genuine. In their paper, When values backfire: Leadership, attribution, and disenchantment in a values-driven organisation, Sandra E. Cha and Amy C. Edmondson explore why values-based leaders, despite their intentions, can end up being judged negatively as having failed in their role or mission within an organisation.

Charismatic leaders will often create high expectations of their leadership, as their followers gain a sense of empowerment and potential when buying into their intentions, can end up being judged negatively as having failed in their role or mission within an organisation.

It takes time and intention for leaders to regain and maintain trust. Leaders don’t always get it right, and perhaps wise to consider that leadership rings true in the mind of values-based leaders.

Well-considered explanations for his actions.

In conclusion, Cha and Edmondson submit that the challenge for leaders lies in reaping the benefits of strong organisational values, while avoiding the pitfalls of perceived hypocrisy. The single most important quality in facing this challenge is transparency through open communication.

While it’s true that employees can be quick to make self-interested judgments without consideration for the leader [e.g. “Why have I been given this task? Don’t they know how much I have to do already?”], leaders do themselves no favours by failing to address concerns which, valid or otherwise, remain very real in the mind of the employee.

As Cha and Edmondson imply, employees are experts in making snap judgments; however, these judgments can surely fester only for as long as effective communication is lacking from the leader in addressing concerns and explaining why certain decisions have been taken.

Kraemer Jr suggests that there is a “widespread lack of confidence in leadership,” and that it’s the job of leaders to regain and maintain trust. Indeed, some leaders may be guilty of incongruence, cutting corners, and other shortcomings that might lead to hypocrisy attribution, but there is likely many more who simply neglect to explain exactly what they’re doing and why.

On the part of the employee, it is perhaps wise to consider that leadership is a complex matter and, like all humans, leaders don’t always get it right, and sometimes need time to figure out the right course of action and support in implementing that action.

To believe leaders know it all and should execute their role perfectly and without fuss is not only naive on the part of the employee, but serves inadvertently to place the same standards on those who make such a judgment. Only through open communication can both sides come to understand the position of the other, which may initially be quite the challenge to undertake, but inevitably it will prove to the betterment of the well-being of all concerned, as well as the overall performance of the organisation.

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HR DISRUPTION
FOUR WAYS TO BECOME MORE PROGRESSIVE AND IMPACTFUL

By ED BALDWIN
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I once ran into a fellow human resources (HR) professional; someone who is part of the movement to disrupt the traditional HR landscape and help the function become more progressive and impactful. He asked me a very simple question:

“How do we elevate the role of HR in business today?”

A powerful question indeed, so I started noodling on it. It’s a question I’ve been answering through my actions and experience as an HR leader for the past 25 years.

I’m probably like most HR professionals. When I got into it, I wanted to show the world the positive impact that great HR practices can have on a business, any business.

I wanted to improve the work environment where people spend half their lives. I still do.

There are audacious goals that I feel are still worthy of achieving, working alongside the rest of my colleagues with similar aspirations and personal missions.

EVOLUTION OF HR
HR has changed and evolved tremendously since I got my degree in labour relations 25 years ago.

It still isn’t where it needs to be in terms of having the influence and impact it should have.

There is still a world of opportunity for HR teams to deliver so much more positive impact to the businesses they support.

We are constrained by many things, not the least of which is what we believe is within our remit and what isn’t.

So here’s a starter list of what I feel we can do as HR leaders to raise and elevate the role of HR in the business landscape today.

1. DON’T BE CONSTRAINED BY YOUR PAST

   Just because it wasn’t our issue to deal with in the past doesn’t mean we shouldn’t tackle it now. HR used to be personnel. We did paperwork and administration. We were not the least bit engaged in the decisions of the business. We were relegated to lots of forms and processes.

   That’s a much different world than the one in which we work today. We are now largely accountable for employee experience, employee development, culture and engagement and ensuring we have access to the talent that drives the business.

2. ELEVATE YOUR THINKING

   This is such a cliché, but it’s so important and so few actually do it. Your business is unique and different. Industry competitors aren’t even alike, so there isn’t any blueprint from another company that you can learn from or should follow. Instead, lead.

   Get to know what your business does and more importantly, how and why it does it.

   Figure out what your executives value, what your managers value, and what your employees value and what each wants from his or her job and time with the company. Then build and execute plans to provide it.

3. DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELF AND YOUR COMPANY

   This is one of my biggest professional pet peeves besides hearing “I’m a people person”.

   Just because a particular HR strategy worked for a renowned organisation previously, it doesn’t mean it will work in your current business.

   See, every organisation is different. Each carves its own way and charts its own path based on what works for it.

   So while we can learn from what these innovative cultures and HR shops are doing, it doesn’t mean we should just blindly follow.

   Gain insight and guidance on how they are pushing the envelope and innovating, then challenge your own team to do the same, differently.

4. MEASURE AND PROMOTE YOUR SUCCESS

   So many HR teams are doing great things that are invisible to the company and to the C-suite. We have to promote what we do and we can’t do that in a false, rah rah sort of way.

   If you’ve made a difference for your business (better attraction and selection, increased productivity, reduced turnover, higher employee satisfaction, reduced cost) then show it.

   Show it to the C-suite through metrics they actually care about. And, here’s a hint and nugget of advice on what metrics most for-profit company executives really care about — those that help the bottom line.

   Altruistic metrics are nice, but translate them into a more profitable and financially-sound operation and you’re well on your way to elevating the importance of HR in your business.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS
These are four areas I have personally focused on in my past experience to elevate the HR function and transform the HR teams I’ve led:

- from a back office administrative function into an influential and impactful core part of the business.

- It doesn’t happen overnight. But with the right people, approach and commitment, it can be achieved.

   How would you answer this question?
HOW TO DESIGN AN ENGAGING PRESENTATION

THINK ACTION, NOT DISTRACTION
A presentation is delivered by a speaker with a goal of shifting the thinking of their audience – influencing them to act. So the structure of your content, the order of your ideas, must support what you are saying and help the audience understand. Your slides shouldn’t be a visual distraction with lots of confusing content or animations. They are not an autocue for the speaker. If you have lots of supporting background information and data, then share this with your audience as a PDF before or after the presentation – don’t cram it into your slides.

A clear and easy-to-read layout means an engaged audience. It’s best to have more slides with less on them, than a couple of slides choc-a-bloc with words and pictures.

HALF EMPTY OR FULL?
You can use white space (negative space) to draw your audience’s eyes to important information. Keeping margins and blocks of white space around text makes it much easier to read. White space does not actually make a slide white! It refers more to the area of design that is empty or not filled with text or images. Give thought to every element of the presentation to make sure each is contributing to the overall objective. Highlight the most important bits of information on each slide and remove everything else. Then think about how you can best visually represent this. Is it a large word, simple icon or a diagram?

CONSISTENT CHARACTERS
Creating an overall theme or style in your presentation is really important, otherwise it’s like watching a movie where the actors keep changing characters – incredibly confusing, not to mention distracting! You want your slides to look like a professionally laid-out magazine, and that means developing a cohesive style across your presentation – using a family of colours, font and images that all work together.
Consider how these elements all work together:
• Colour.
• Typography.
• Layout.
Ask yourself whether your images and colours support your overall message.

OPPONENTS ATTRACT
As with colours, choosing fonts that are too similar (no contrast) serves no purpose. Remember, your eyes need to focus on the important information first and if everything is the same that is hard. Selecting your font is only one piece of the puzzle.
Then you need to make it work on the slide – either combined with a visual element so they both support each other or as a standalone feature.
If all else fails, Duarte, the world’s leading presentation company, has a golden rule of presentations to which you should always adhere: Don’t deliver a presentation you wouldn’t want to sit through yourself!

By EMMA BANNISTER
editor@leaderonomics.com

“My goal was never to just create a company. A lot of people misinterpret that, as if I don’t care about revenue or profit or any of those things. But what not being just a company means to me is not being just that – building something that actually makes a really big change in the world.” — Mark Zuckerberg

DURING a special episode of The Leaderonomics Show, co-hosts Roshan Thiran and Audrey Tong caught up with Sridharan Nair, managing partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers Malaysia, to hear his unique personal journey that led him to where he is today. To watch the video, visit bit.ly/tlssripwpc.
LISTEN to most teachers – and, indeed, most parents – and it’s easy to assume that getting good grades in school is a requirement for professional success later in life. Um, nope.

Tom Corley, an accountant and financial planner, surveyed a number of high net-worth individuals, most of whom are self-made millionaires. He found that most of the people surveyed did not earn high GPAs in school. In fact, only 21% of the self-made millionaires were “A” students. Forty-one per cent reported they were “B” students, and 29% were “C” students.

That’s right – more “successful” people were C students than were A students. And if you’re wondering if family background played a part, 59% of the self-made millionaires came from middle-class households and 41% came from poor households – proving that where you start does not dictate where you finish.

As Corley writes: “Success in life does not come easy. It is fraught with pitfalls, obstacles, failure, and mistakes. Success requires persistence, mental toughness and emotional toughness in overcoming these pitfalls. Its pursuit pushes you to the edge emotionally and physically. You must grow a thick skin and become accustomed to struggle if you hope to succeed.

Individuals who struggle academically may be more accustomed to dealing with struggle and making it a daily habit to overcome pitfalls.”

In short, they become mentally tough, which creates a foundation for long-term success. For example, successful people are great at delaying gratification. They are great at withstanding temptation and overcoming fear in order to do what they need to do. (Of course, that doesn’t mean they aren’t scared – it just means that they’re brave. Big difference.)

Successful people don’t just prioritise. They consistently keep doing what they have decided is important. All those qualities require mental strength and toughness, so it’s no coincidence those are some of the qualities of successful people.

So, if you didn’t get great grades in school, that’s OK. See the past as training; it doesn’t define you. Think about what you didn’t do well, about mistakes you made, but only in terms of how you will make sure that next time, you know what to do to make sure things turn out the way you want.

And never forget that “school” is really never over. Successful people are lifelong learners. As Corley also writes: “It is now clear that one’s IQ can change over his or her lifetime. It’s not fixed. Just because you were a ‘C’ student at age 17 with an IQ of 100 doesn’t necessarily mean you will stay that way. You can increase your IQ throughout your life, even into your 80s. Self-made millionaires do certain things every day that improve their brains and continuously increase their intelligence during their lifetimes.” And you can too.

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