ELEVATING WOMEN LEADERS IN THE WORKPLACE

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OVERCOMING DOUBT
HOW TO GET RID OF SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS AS A WOMAN

By JUINN TAN
editor@leaderonomics.com

When I took up the task of writing this article, I thought it would be a piece of cake. I’ve always seen myself as someone who tries to defy the stereotypes that have been built around me, especially as a woman.

But, as I sat down and got started, I realised that all the methods I’ve picked up over the years to combat my very own self-limiting beliefs were not because I saw myself as a woman, but because I saw myself as simply someone who wants to be better every day. So, if you’re reading this and you’re not a woman, you may find this beneficial too.

NEVER EXPECT TO BE TREATED DIFFERENTLY

One of the earliest lessons my parents taught me was to go into any situation with zero expectations. It’s not a pessimistic view on life, but rather adopting an “always-ready” attitude towards everything you’re about to face.

Therefore, I believe that the first step to getting rid of your self-limiting beliefs is to stop expecting to receive any sort of special treatment, regardless of your gender.

I was brought up on the principle that your thoughts shape the world around you. So, if you go around thinking that you should be spoken to or treated differently just because of the cards you’ve been dealt, then boy, are you in for a lot of frustration and disappointment.

I never want friends, family or strangers to treat me like a “woman”. In fact, my elder siblings used to call me the “crybaby” of the family. What makes you weak is being overburdened by others or mentally, emotionally, or physically. Don’t let me wrong, it doesn’t get any less painful. You just learn to handle it better.

I’ve never been afraid to cry – crying doesn’t make you weak. In fact, my elder siblings used to call me the “crybaby” of the family. What makes you weak is being too afraid to get back into the ring and fight your way to the end.

Sometimes you’ll narrowly dodge a punch to the face, sometimes you’ll block it and escape with just a small bruise. Other times, you’ll get a chance to hit back.

My point is, you will never know what you can or can’t handle until you get knocked down at least once in your lifetime. And when you get up, gather all your senses and realise that you’re still standing, you need to charge on ahead.

At the risk of sounding like a Tumbir port, you need to seize every chance you get to grow into a stronger version of yourself, no matter how ugly it may be. I believe that this applies to every person, man or woman.

In fact, I don’t know when women started being referred to as the “weaker sex” because I personally know and admire plenty of women who are exactly the opposite. Which brings me to my next point:

GET KNOCKED DOWN OVER AND OVER AGAIN

I know risk-taking people who would barely stop to think twice before jumping into the unknown. I’m not one of those people. I take calculated risks and sometimes I may even get a bit too cautious.

But even being careful has ended up with me being hurt mentally, emotionally, and physically. Don’t get me wrong, it doesn’t get any less painful. You just learn to handle it better.

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SURROUND YOURSELF WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

I’m a firm believer that you are shaped by the people around you. Two years ago, I was stuck in a job that gave me no sense of pride in what I was doing every day.

Worse still, I wasn’t driven to do anything about it for a long time.

Then one day, I decided to reflect on my own feelings and I realised that I was surrounded by people who did not move me in any way. So, I gave myself until the end of 2015 to start looking for a new opportunity and by mid-2016, found myself in the company that I am in now - Supahands.

I remember coming home after my first week at Supahands and gushing to my now-husband about how exciting it was to be with like-minded people who were all passionate about what they were doing.

It was the first time I felt so driven to achieve something in my career and it was my new colleagues who made it happen. More specifically, I was in awe of my female colleagues, even those younger than myself.

I had never been around women who were so career-driven before and I wanted to learn more about them. I never used to bother taking the time to be with colleagues in my previous jobs, but for the people at Supahands, I was even swapping my precious time at the gym for a few more extra hours at work.

I no longer wake up every day dreading work, and this is a feeling that I never thought was possible. Suddenly I believed in the things that I could achieve as a person. So, I’d like to think that the team I have been blessed with here is proof that the right people can do incredible things for one’s confidence and motivation.

There’s a huge responsibility in writing an article that offers advice to others. You want to make sure that whatever you have to give is something that is beneficial to readers and helps them take a step in the right direction.

Therefore, at the age of 28, I am reluctant to call myself the best person to offer advice in any field. I know I’m young, but I have been through some very eye-opening experiences and what you’ve read in this article is just a small part of what I have slowly (and sometimes painfully) learnt so far as a child, daughter, friend, wife and manager.

I’m sure the lessons won’t stop coming and all it takes is just that extra push to reap all their benefits.

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“What I Learnt From Eleanor Roosevelt

By ROSHAN THIRAN
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“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”
—Eleanor Roosevelt

INCE its construction in 1792, many famous leaders have resided at The White House including Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson and many others. For every great President to have walked the hallowed halls is a great First Lady.

My wife asks me to remember every now and then that behind every great man is a great woman. The truth of this was never more apparent than in the marriage of Eleanor Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) was born in New York and her father, Elliott Roosevelt, was the brother of the 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. A shy girl growing up, Eleanor had a troubled childhood.

She was just eight years old when her mother died; her four-year-old brother died the following year; and her father died one year later. Orphaned just prior to the age of 10, Eleanor was sent to live with her maternal grandmother.

ELEANOR THE NON-VICTIM

Most of us would have felt totally devastated and victimised by the loss of our mother, brother and father. Instead of sulking and being depressed, she used her pain as an impetus to make this world a better place.

Blanche Wiesen Cook, a biographer of Eleanor, wrote: “The tragedy of her childhood is really the impetus for her vision and for her life. Her ability to perceive need and to understand and empathise was the ability that was created in her childhood.

“She went around the country and the world wanting to make it better for people in want, in need, in trouble.”

How many of us, faced with obstacles and suffering, give up and suck it? A key lesson we can learn from Eleanor is to learn to pick ourselves up and use the pain and scars of our life as a stimulus to enable us to make a difference.

She chose to light a candle instead of cursing the darkness. We can do likewise.

CREATING MOVEMENTS

As a teenager, she was sent to a boarding school in England, which helped to alleviate her shyness and bring her out of her shell. On March 17, 1905, at the age of 20 she married a 22-year-old Harvard undergraduate and her fifth cousin-once-removed, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR).

When her husband became president in 1933, Eleanor radically transformed the role of First Lady from being one concerned with social matters to playing an active role in the White House administration.

FDR’s presidency coincided with The Great Depression, which began in 1929 and lasted approximately 10 years. His New Deal initiatives were focused towards economic recovery, and Eleanor became FDR’s eyes and ears as she travelled the country to check on government programmes and institutions.

She was a powerful advocate of social justice and civil rights, and she also encouraged her husband to appoint more women to federal positions. As First Lady, she held numerous female-only press conferences to give voice to the many women who had been banned from such events in the White House.

For 27 years, beginning 1935, she wrote a column six days a week called My Day, which was syndicated across 62 newspapers and engaged a readership of four million people. In total, she wrote 8,000 columns, authored 27 books, and delivered around 1,400 speeches during her time in public service. Eleanor revolutionised community building by creating movements.

According to Cook: “She is truly an amazing visionary who understood what we needed to do to build movements. She went door to door, block by block, community by community to build movements with her allies. She called it ‘trooping for democracy.’”

For Eleanor, it was not about.windowing the process, and the Russian delegates took to stonewalling the process of resolutions was the passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was established. Eleanor was elected as its chairman, after having been appointed a United Nations delegate by President Harry S. Truman a year earlier.

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Striking a Balance

Use your personality to shape your leadership style

By MATT NAYLOR
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Throughout history, there has been no shortage of different leadership styles exerted by memorable female leaders. From the fearless approaches of Boussia or Joan of Arc to the nurturing roles of Mother Teresa and Florence Nightingale, two largely contrasting stereotypes have been drawn. Some were tough female leaders, some more caring and relational, but each woman changed the course of history thanks to their ability to harness their personalities.

When trying to develop their own leadership styles, many people may be inclined to use their natural disposition as a baseline. And while this is usually the best recipe for success in coming off as genuine to those under your payroll, you may need to curtail certain elements of yourself to enhance your leadership capabilities.

Too Nurturing?

One of the most successful female leaders in Malaysia, Piktochart chief executive officer and co-founder Goh Ai Ching, is one such leader who, by her own admission, may have been too nice at certain points in her career.

Developing the company from humble beginnings in Penang with her then-partner, now-husband Andrea Zaggio, Ai Ching has grown Piktochart into one of the most popular infographic companies in the world and leads a team of more than 50 people.

The balance of Ai Ching’s nurturing nature and Andrea’s more goal-oriented mindset have led the company to unprecedented success. Finding the sweet spot of how best to harness her relational nature, however, has been one of Ai Ching’s biggest challenges.

Her list of stories from her time running the business are laden with examples of times when she, while firing an employee, has been known to cry more than the person being laid off!

“When I first set up my company, I knew that my natural relational personality would be an asset when leading a team,” she says.

“It definitely has its disadvantages as well though and there have been times when I was caught being too soft on the hiring and firing practices. I made a lot of mistakes but I have learnt to balance out my personality.

“Previously I was too nice, and it was very tough for me to let somebody go, or make a decision that might hurt somebody’s feelings.”

She developed a mindset of “speak the truth with love” – which means that she has since learnt to channel that nurturing nature into one that can, at times, be upfront with people about their failings. Except, that it comes from a place of wanting to help them develop.

That growth for her, has been met by her husband, who has learnt to embrace his people skills.

“Sometimes, when working with my husband I need to be his copywriter and filter out the things that he’s saying,” says Ai Ching.

“Before he sends an e-mail or something, I will need to read through it and say, ‘maybe you shouldn’t say things like this’. He tends to just deliver messages; he doesn’t tend to think about how he is trying to get them across and I think he is learning over time how to be a more relational person.”

“I don’t want to call my husband and me a yin and yang but it almost feels as if having a man and a woman leader in place is a recipe for success – they balance each other out very well to be honest.”

Too Goal-Focused?

A Malaysian female leader belonging more to Andrea’s mould of leadership than Ai Ching’s is Acestar founder and CEO Natalie Sit. The tech entrepreneur set up her company in Kuala Lumpur, coming from a sales role in which she was highly successful. Those skills, however, did not necessarily transfer well to the job of managing people.

“I thought that sales was the be-all and-end-all. I knew I could handle the sales and therefore thought that I could run a company,” says Natalie.

“In actual fact, it was totally different. I used to think that if you pay somebody a good salary, then they will work hard for you.”

She put her sales skills to work and people skills on the back burner, never understanding why her employees were not as engaged in their jobs as she was.

Following an extended leave in the early days of Acestar, Natalie returned to work to find that all three of her employers had resigned. She undertook a leadership course in London to better understand how to develop her people.

Her eyes were opened to the need to create an internal culture that would give her people pride in the work they were doing. She has since grown the company from those early days to a team of 64 highly motivated people, who work harmoniously in a well-established company culture.

“I learnt that if I take care of my people, they will take care of my clients,” she says.

“Nowadays, I will always invest my time into my people because they are my company’s greatest asset. In order to build a culture, you need something that people can identify with. That’s why we have company trips, to bring people together and to see each other as more than just colleagues.”

Those company trips have become the hallmark of life working as an ‘Acestarian’; the workforce went to Japan last year and the Maldives earlier this year. The spirit of teamwork has become the focal point of Natalie’s leadership journey and she always encourages her people to develop the “we” attitude when approaching their work.

“My style of leadership could best be described as ‘soft but powerful’ and very focused on team building,” she says.

“Every task a team member takes on, I ask ‘is this something you can do yourself or would it be easier if we pull together as a team on this?’”

Taking Leadership Internationally

Undertaking a leadership journey is not the only thing that these two successful female leaders have in common, as both have used the GAIN programme, launched by the Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) in order to take their company’s next steps.

As Piktochart builds its reputation as one of Penang’s biggest multi-nationals and Acestar builds solid connections overseas, MDEC have given them the platform they need to grow their companies.

“We have always had a good relationship with MDEC and the chance to be a part of GAIN was a golden opportunity to scale that we could not miss,” says Ai Ching.

“They have taken an interest in how best to help us, and identify where the gaps are in our company. It’s comforting to know that they are there to help us succeed.”

Natalie echoes similar sentiments as she speaks enthusiastically of her time in the programme.

“I grew my company to a certain level, but to take those next steps internationally, I needed some guidance,” admits Natalie.

“I was very lucky that I found GAIN and I knew how ambitious they were to grow Malaysian companies regionally. By myself, it would have been very difficult to have the kind of international access that I had and I owe them a lot for their knowledge transfer and development help.

“Our dream is to go global. If you want to grow out of Malaysia, GAIN is the perfect platform to do that.”

In line with a vision to develop Malaysia’s digital economy, the Global Acceleration and Innovation Network (GAIN) programme was inceptioned to catalyse the expansion of local technology SMEs that have the potential to become global players through market access, leadership and capability development, technology disruption and scale-up capital.

GAIN provides customised assistance based on each and every GAIN company’s needs and goals, whether it is elevating brand visibility, facilitating market access, upskilling capabilities, match-making for merger and/or acquisition or accessing funding eco-system.

Customising its programmes to each individual company, the programme’s benefits are wide-ranging and have already helped hundreds of Malaysian businesses achieve their financial and professional goals. For more information on the GAIN programme, visit www.mdec.com.my.
THE STORY OF TWO FEMALE LEADERS

NOOR FARILLA ABDULLAH, 41
Farilla set foot into Touch ‘n Go with an impressive résumé, having worked as a consultant overseeing complex projects in Accenture, and as a programme manager handling large-scale strategic projects and merger integrations at CIMB. When CIMB became the parent company to Touch ‘n Go, she was seconded to the acting head of finance in 2013. Two years later, she advanced to the role of chief operating officer (COO), overseeing the entire Touch ‘n Go operations, which runs with 450 employees. Farilla admits to “having toiled in her earlier years” before reaching this point in her career where she now has more flexibility, and a strong team working under her.

When she first came into the company, they were faced with issues that needed immediate attention and strategic solutions, and so there was a lot of work involved in having to overcome them. “I love challenges and there were many opportunities to transform and innovate,” she says with a glint of excitement in her eyes.

On top of managing operations, Farilla today oversees the development of new products and works closely with the government to reduce traffic congestion, as both serve as catalysts to growing the business. How does she do it?

1 Strive for effectiveness
“Yes, this is a male-dominated industry, but that doesn’t mean that, as a woman, you can’t be effective,” she emphasises. One of the key things she learnt throughout the course of her career is knowing how to be effective in any scenario. “We have to accept the fact that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Be it female or male, it doesn’t matter.” The question to ask, she says, is how do you harness the resources and infrastructure around you to become effective?

If a team’s strengths do not fit a specific scenario, look to other teams that have the right combination of strengths to bring out the desired results, she advises.

2 Logic vs emotion
Research suggests that finding a balance between logic and emotions is crucial when it comes to persuasion and influence.

Farilla says: “Most times, being effective is about being logical, but other times it’s more about being passionate and enthusiastic.”

As a leader, you need a bit of both when it comes to influencing your followers. She admits (with a laugh): “I’m still learning to balance both. I mean, I still come out of meetings not getting what I want.”

3 Nothing is permanent
Over the years, Farilla has learnt to accept the fact that, regardless of the phase of life she is in, nothing is ever permanent. Every hurdle, project and initiative will eventually come to an end. “There are times when you have to give more to your career and other times, to your family. It is within your power and control to manage such things,” the mother of two shares.

“I hoped and prayed that whatever happened in that period of his life wouldn’t affect him later on.”

The story above highlights the real struggles that working mothers everywhere face.

The culture of today has indeed progressed from days gone by, as women now have a vast array of career options to choose from and are taking up leadership positions.

According to a 2017 Hays report, while men still hold 80% of top jobs and a large proportion of line manager roles in Asia, Malaysia recorded the highest percentage of female leaders at 24%.

The Malaysian government and private corporations are indeed moving to include more women in leadership positions as can be seen with the efforts undertaken by the 30% club in Malaysia to have more female directors on company boards. However, some industries remain male-driven, such as the transportation industry.

How then does a woman make her mark in this industry and dismantle the stigma of what has conventionally been deemed a “man’s job”?

Leaderonomics spoke to two women leaders from Touch ‘n Go to understand their leadership journeys in this industry.

ASMA HANIM AHMAD MARIKAN, 38
Asma has been working at Touch ‘n Go for just over a year and heads the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) project. This project – which is driven by the Malaysian Highway Authority (MHA) and requires close collaboration with highway concession companies – is focused on finding innovative solutions to improve the driver’s experience.

With 15 years of IT and project management experience under her belt, it comes as no surprise that the leaders at Touch ‘n Go entrusted her with a project as strategic as this. Asma shares that it takes a lot to gain the respect of the people you’re working with, especially when you’re a young leader and that too, in a mature and male-dominated field like the highway and tolling industry.

On top of that, the mother of two admits that juggling family and work is a whole other ball game. She says: “It’s not an easy task. Kids are very honest. They ask, ‘Mummy, why do you come back so late?’ It’s quite heart-breaking at times.”

Challenges of being a Gen X leader
“You have to prove yourself through your knowledge, what you say and how you say it,” Asma tells us.

She says, having a leadership title doesn’t automatically make you one. You must prove yourself first before you can earn the respect of others. As for juggling work and family, Asma emphasises the importance of having a good support system. “It’s not as easy for women to let go of their family responsibilities during the times when their career demands it. You must have that support. I am lucky to have that with my family.”

The attraction factor
Being an IT professional, Asma finds fintech to be an incredibly exciting area. So, the fact that Touch ‘n Go operates in this space and rides on innovation attracted Asma to join the company.

Apart from that, she has faith and admiration for the company’s leaders and their vision, as not just anyone is able to take their company in this direction. She adds: “You have to give more to your family and later on, it won’t affect him later on.”

A steep learning curve
The project that Asma is leading is not unlike a typical project. It is a national project that requires dealing with various external stakeholders such as government agencies and several corporate entities. Internally, she has to juggle in individuals from other departments to buy into her ideas and plans.

This is not an easy feat, she says, as employees may question what’s in it for them if the project does not have a direct impact on them or the team. “So, it’s about convincing, educating as well as communicating with them in the right way. These are new skills that I had to develop.”

Good mentors
“You have to have good mentors to succeed,” Asma advises.

But before finding a mentor, it’s important to assess your own strengths and weaknesses. She says you shouldn’t limit yourself to having one mentor as different individuals possess strengths in different areas.

The key is to observe them and see how an individual can guide you.

IN A NUTSHELL
A working mother typically has to juggle a lot more compared to men. However, this does not mean they can’t “sit at a table” as Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook said in a TED Talk video in 2010. Mentorship, flexibility and training are all crucial elements to enable women to become leaders. But if you don’t work hard to find that balance between work and family, and you don’t take the opportunities presented to you (and you don’t try), you may just miss that promotion.

As these ladies have demonstrated, anything is possible.

Did you know that women make up 55% of the workforce in Touch ‘n Go? To find out more about Touch ‘n Go, visit www.touchngo.com.my
GM

ANY organisations agree to embrace employees who bring diverse values, differences and social values. The world of business is not just an exciting place to do business but an interesting place to win. Today's labour market will eventually run out.

While most human resources (HR) leaders generally want to promote diversity as their core corporate agenda, many acknowledge the challenges of its implementation. Despite their best intentions, corporate humanism, the lack of awareness and knowledge sometimes prevent them from pushing the agenda through.

Diversity does not have to be difficult. Companies can energise their organisation for each and every individual. Diversity can become a differentiator for an employer—what offers positive visibility and long-term sustainability to the organisation that chooses to adapt and affirm authenticity.

There are four ways for how you can kick-start the journey to make diversity an actuality in your organisation:

1. THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

There is no right or wrong way to approach diversity. Think of a world where people can work together and appreciate their differences. It is how you approach diversity that makes it a reality.

Information is key to achieving diversity. Intensive training sessions to understand different backgrounds and how stereotypes work, they will rationalise their own decision-making and communication more carefully.

2. EDUCATE EMPLOYEES ABOUT HOW STEREOTYPES WORK

As we are not always aware of our personal biases, we can overcome the gap between what we say and what we do. By being aware of our stereotypes, we can identify our own decision-making and communication more carefully. We will help break the tendency to use stereotypes as a shortcut.

3. BUILDING AN ONGOING BUSINESS CASE FOR GENDER DIVERSITY

Success behoves that corporate leaders and IR leaders need to build a business case for gender diversity by looking at facts, figures, and success stories to show sponsors and detractors that a company can truly benefit by.

4. CREATE A CORPORATE CULTURE THAT CELEBRATES GENDER DIVERSITY

Start conservations about diversity in a beautiful light. Celebrate stories of diversity and showcase milestones to help co-workers understand how companies work. Start out strong in the work, in the work, out strong in the work. Apply to all kinds of roles. For those interested in changing careers, encourage role models that you can emulate.

If the diversity agenda is approached with non-seriousness and the business case is not made crystal clear, then the company will fail. There is nothing more disheartening than to see a company's diversity efforts fail. The company also needs to ensure that there is a gender diversity and inclusion. Companies should offer a broad range of different options. Even in situations where gender diversity is not explicitly mentioned, it is still important to consider the suitability of a candidate for a particular job.

Remember, as a senior executive, you have the power to make decisions on your organisation’s diversity and inclusion agenda. You can choose to champion the cause. Throughout the process, companies shall continually emphasise how championing diversity helps them meet their ultimate goal of being the right person (regardless of gender).

The greatest change for most women: If you haven’t done it in time or connected with a serious partner yet, chances are you will do it in this decade. And, you may also have your children by then.

This tends to be the decade where most people make a serious decision to buy a house or mortgage there so some pressures to get things in order. If you are starting to want to spend time enjoying life. You have drawn the great work in your twenties, and you may feel the needs to slow down a bit more. Your advice is to begin to think about the career path you want to make and business. As you are now almost at your peak, but this is your time to make your career efforts to become a reality. And, you need to work on your career to clearly state that you want to be a leader and HR leaders need to build a real business case for gender diversity. Although you may not be sure of what you want to do in the future, but you may want to focus on your career in the next five years. So, it is now time to put boundaries in place to help you gain more balance.

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WHERE are we going? Are we even getting anywhere? Where are we now? Where can we be? What can we do to get to where we want to be?

These are questions senior leaders often have to ask themselves when it comes to executing the vision of an organisation.

As the end of the year approaches, it’s that time again where we reflect, discuss what could have gone better, what went well over the last 12 months and plan ahead for what’s to come.

However, making these discussions happens within the leadership team of a company can be a hassle as we are bogged down with everyday tasks.

On top of that, these annual discussions can end up being temporary ‘firework’ solutions without long-term results.

As Joseph Tan, expert on culture and chief executive officer (CEO) of Leaderonomics Good Monday puts it: “Matters of strategic importance are usually debated and discussed within the confines of senior leadership – usually held in an island resort over three days and two nights.

What normally happens is a predictable sequence of events:

- Plenty of flip-charts and slogans are created.
- There might even be a “battle-cry” or catchy phrase invented.
- The process of merchandising then takes place – badges, posters, campaigns, etc.
- Everybody gets excited. . .for a while.
- Gradually, the old ways start creeping back in.
- Time to plan for another retreat!

Strategic retreats fail for the simple reason that leaders are disengaged from their employees throughout the year. So, what is talked about and discussed during the strategic sessions are favourite “hobby horses” and “pet ideas” with no grounding in grass-roots reality.

Everyone leaves the wonderful retreats feeling good, but not feeling the ground.

We know these times of reflecting and discussing are crucial to an organisation’s growth. But it’s important to know the struggles, stresses and challenges before coming up with ways to move forward.

How do we ensure that we get the most out of our retreats to drive us towards a better year ahead?

By TAMARA JAYNE

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PLANNING A STRATEGIC RETREAT?

IT’S THAT TIME OF THE YEAR AGAIN. HOW CAN WE MAKE IT BETTER THAN BEFORE?

Look through an outsider’s pair of eyes

The challenge of organising these sort of retreats is that we often get caught up making decisions from within the team without an outsider’s perspective or an expert’s point of view. Sessions may end up being long-winded with scattered opinions and temporary solutions because of constraints such as: the business model and strategy, processes and organisational structure, leadership, and culture.

Being in an office setting can also be a distraction rather than a good environment to reflect. Getting away from additional “noise” (such as weekly duties and everyday tasks) will help people temporarily switch off and focus on what’s to come.

SESSIONS DON’T NEED TO BE DRY AND BRAIN WRACKING

“On top of running this company, you want us to plan a retreat that is fun?” We hear you. We do not always have the luxury of planning these annual retreats let alone, a retreat that is fun and engaging for your team.

One of the famous situations Leaderonomics puts into play is a board game simulation where participants are separated in groups. They then need to plan a “hike up to Mountain Everest” with limited resources and multiple unknown obstacles along the way – this requires lots of strategic thinking and decision making.

As teams strive to win, observations will be made by the facilitators on how each team member interacts, the strengths and weaknesses of the team and the competitiveness – which are added into the debrief discussions to create greater self-awareness. The sessions are fun and exciting as participants compete and conceptualise.

It is important to see how an engaged team will benefit the company as a whole in the long run as opposed to a team that dreads annual retreats and look for ways to avoid it.

LONG TERM, SHORT TERM AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

In spite of it all, we know that we need more than just thoughtful thinking and idealistic plans. Practical steps are needed and ways to know where exactly to start.

Leaderonomics uses a Diagnosis, Design and Deliver method. By firstly diagnosing what a company’s needs are, they are then able to customise strategies and look into ways to improve the business performance (whether it is through its people, culture, or business models).

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Strategies are useless if there is no execution point. And executing is not enough when the right steps are not taken to produce solutions that can help grow your organisation to its fullest potential.

Leaderonomics plans a fun and simulated environment conducive for having these yearly discussions. With a pool of experts and people with years of experience from various industries, they are able to guide and advise companies on steps they can take to achieve their desired results.

Instead of long and dry discussions, real-life simulations are designed to engage the team and help with the strategising and planning. Leaderonomics Strategic Retreats are designed to meet your company where it’s at and to be the fuel to drive it to where it wants to be.

RETREAT, TO MOVE FORWARD

Planning for next year?

Give your team the space they need to get refreshed and focused for the year ahead. Find out more about our strategic retreats at http://bit.ly/StratRetreat

Call Dinesh at +60 12-985 6835 to start planning now!
N my years of taking on marathons and wheelchair ‘runs’, there have been many literal ups and downs. Aside from the distance, one of the biggest challenges I would face in a marathon was the hills. The steepest slope that is usually negligible for a normal runner would immediately become noticeable when you’re on wheels, be it a bicycle or a wheelchair. Being in a wheelchair however, means that I would need to power through the hills purely on endurance and strength. Through these experiences, I’ve drawn some lessons that I’m still applying in my everyday life.

**BE PREPARED FOR THE HILLS**

Organisers of marathons and runs usually choose routes that are as flat as can be to make it easier for the runners, but when you’re doing a full marathon of 42.195km, hills are pretty much unavoidable. Very similarly to life, the uphill battles are a guarantee, especially if we are living a life that is worth running for. I’ve seen many runners who train on treadmills caught off guard when faced with hills in a marathon. That’s because they’ve been training for the distance but not the inclination and, when they see that hill for the first time, they’re neither physically nor mentally ready for the challenge.

I, too, used to think that the distance was all that I had to worry about until I went for my first 10km “run”. Ever since then, I knew that I need to put in the training to prepare for the hills. I believe that in order to excel in life, we need to be prepared for challenges in life, and preferably prepare well. A very well-known saying widely attributed to Abraham Lincoln says, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four hours sharpening my axe.”

**GOING SLOW IS FINE AS LONG AS WE KEEP ON PUSHING**

One of the toughest hills I encountered was when I was doing my Standard Chartered KL Marathon. I was feeling rather prepared for the marathon since I had been training for it for a few months. It went quite smoothly and my pacing was consistent throughout the whole run. However, at roughly the 36-kilometre mark, there was a stretch of steep hill. With slightly over 6km more to go, the hill was very discouraging as it felt like the biggest challenge came only after I’ve depleted most of my energy. Things got worse when I suddenly felt slight cramps in my arms, back and shoulders. It was at that point that I thought to myself, “Hey, maybe you should stop. You wouldn’t want a major cramp, do you? Why are you trying so hard? You’ve already achieved more than most people.”

The nagging voice at the back of my head telling me to quit because the hill was hard was almost too real. However, I was reminded that no matter how slow I go, I’ll make it through if I keep on pushing. Moving slowly forward was better than staying in one spot.

**LOOK FORWARD TO THE HORIZON**

I believe that we should live life looking forward to something all the time. Having something to look forward to gives us a sense of purpose and hope. Every hill I’ve encountered in all my marathons have one thing in common – they all end. Whenever there is an uphill road, it will eventually go down. The pain of going through the uphill road may sometimes stop us from looking forward towards an outcome and instead looking down at the challenge in front of us.

When I was pushing through the final 6km of my marathon and I faced a steep hill, the first thing I did was to visualise the moment when I would overcome the hill and enjoy a ride down the hill. With that motivation I kept on pushing one step at a time and, despite cramps, I was able to persevere, simply because there was something to look forward to. When we face challenges in life, always remember to look forward to a goal that you would like to achieve and visualise it as done!

**WHEN THINGS GET EASIER, GO FASTER**

One thing that I have noticed over the years is that people usually turn it down a notch in terms of effort when things get easier. In fact, it seems like every time I have a breakthrough over a big challenge, I immediately “reward” myself by saying “It’s okay to take it easy now. You’ve gone through a lot after all. Just take this chance to relax and slow down.” Although I truly believe in the power of celebrating success and rewarding yourself, I also believe that the most successful people find ways to celebrate their own successes and still push themselves more when things get easier.

I have met people who lose momentum when things get easier and when they didn’t need to struggle because with their celebration of success came complacency. Every time I overcome a hill in a marathon, I take that opportunity to celebrate and rest by allowing momentum and gravity to drive me forward downhill. While I do turn it down a notch to allow myself to relax, I always keep in mind to put in consistent pushes to drive me forward even faster. In fact, the pushes I put in during the downhill parts of the marathon are usually the ones that help me cut my completion time shorter most significantly.

So the next time we overcome a big challenge and find that things get easier, realise that it is an opportunity for us to progress even further with the same effort or less. Recognising the need to rest and reward ourselves for our achievement should also be contributing back to our motivation to move forward stronger.

Taking on the hills in life can sometimes be challenging. However a wonderful mentor of mine once told me, “Find out the ‘why’ in what you do because the stronger your ‘why’ is, the more likely you are to succeed.”
GOING BEYOND ORDINARY
HOW TO HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES AND YOUR CHILDREN TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

By ANNE THAM
editor@leaderonomics.com

E VERY time I ask an audience of adults or students “who consid-
ers themselves ordinary”, a lot of hands shoot up. A majority, in
fact. More shockingly, it is very successful adults and strong students
who have got their hands up as well.

What made them think they are ordi-

nary? Who told them they’re average?

Every time a student doesn’t get into a

A class or is not in pole position in class,

they accept that that is their lot in life.

Similarly, each time a young adult fails to

get acceptance into a university or does not get into a ‘top’ university, they beat

themselves into thinking they are not
good enough.

Throughout my life as a teacher, one

of the things that I have learnt is that

few people are just “average”. In fact, by

having just a few small things in place,

anything can be taken from “average” to

“extraordinary”.

A very good example would be an ex-

student of mine. When he first joined us, he was the conventional definition of

“average”, perhaps even less than that.

He was not good in his studies, could

barely speak English, was rebellious and

found it hard connecting with his peers.

However, that was not his be-all-and-

end-all. Through his time with our school, we elevated his strengths and worked

with him on his areas of weaknesses. Today, he has businesses in Australia, China and

Malaysia, at the age of 22.

There are so many amazing stories of individuals rising from the ashes of mediocrity and achieving great success, impacting lives, disrupting the world.

So how does one become the tipping point that impacts another to reach their full potential?

STOP ENCOURAGING MEDIOCRITY

As simple as it is, most people often overlook the importance of being encour-

aging, point out what they do right.

“What if I don’t point out what he did

wrong? How will he ever learn?”

They certainly won’t grow if all they are told are their faults. And herein lies the conundrum.

The point is to build the person up to

be confident in what he/she is doing. That encouragement can come through focusing on what they’re good at and what they’re doing right.

For example, in most conventional education systems, parents and teachers tend to fixate on a child’s weaknesses, criticising and pushing the child to

improve on that particular skill (or lack thereof in this case).

Well-meaning as that is, any strengths and passions the child has are
tossed to the side to make sure that they

overcome their weaknesses. Over and

over again, I hear parents tell their kid to

stop reading story books and say: ‘You’re
good in English already, you should be

focusing on your terrible maths instead.’

These parents stop focusing on their

kids strengths to pull up their weak-

nesses. In the end, they end up average in
everything. Stop encouraging mediocrity!

‘But, you mean, don’t give him tuition

for maths?’ asks that same parent. What

I’m saying is continue taking his English
as far as possible. At the same time, get

him help in maths. "What if I don’t point out what he did wrong? How will he ever learn?”

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FIST BUMPS AND HIGH FIVES

Always, always, celebrate their wins. Even the small ones that are just as important as the big wins. As Michael Kerr, international business speaker and the author of The Humor Advantage, said in an article on his website, “small wins can have a disproportionate amount of power and influence beyond the achieve-
ment they represent”.

Of course, when I say celebrate, I don’t mean throw a full-blown party for the smallest achievement. A simple gesture of acknowledgement like a high five and saying ‘great job’ will do the trick. These go a long way in setting the people around you up to embrace successes and being extraordinary.

In this sense, adults are the same peo-
ple who once were children that came out from the same conventional systems and grew up believing average was all they could offer.

Helping people go from average to extraordinary happens in our organisa-

tion all the time. You wouldn’t believe how simple and similar it is when dealing with children.

THAT “FEEL GOOD” FEELING

Like educators and parents, supervisors and bosses are also responsible for pro-

viding a supportive environment for their people to grow and flourish in. Again, words of encouragement and empathy are a key component.

You can do simple things like telling them “well done” or “thank you” when it is merited. Letting them know that they have done a terrific job or taking them out for a meal after hours have been shown to be highly effective motivators.

Oftentimes, when friends complain about their jobs, it is invariably about being unappreciated by superior and colleagues. The work culture is “it’s your job”!

I see those same adults do that to

their own children. I have asked my high-

achieving students what their parents’ reaction was when they scored 80%+ on a test. Very often, the reply was, ‘My mum (or dad) said the test must be easy’!

I was horrified for the children who do not do so well. And trust me, those tests were not easy.

Always give credit and appreciation where it is due. We are human beings and, as such, we are social creatures and could do with appreciation here and there. Most people thrive on support and encouragement.

What I’ve seen help people to embrace being extraordinary is when they’re happy with what they’re doing first and foremost. The support system provided by their supervisors and peers is a big part of sustaining a happy, productive workplace.

A company that employs that sup-
port system would be NetApp. It runs an internal program called “Catch Someone Doing Something Right”. That works on a simple, powerful concept – any employee who sees another doing extraordinary things simply has to reach out to the vice chairman, who calls that employee to thank them.

Sounds neat, right? Just imagine how motivated and productive their employ-

ees feel at the end of the day!

BE CRITICAL... WITH LOVE

Does positive reinforcement mean we ignore the things that our peers and peo-

ple don’t get right? Absolutely not.

We all slip up at some points and deal-

ing directly with issues has its place in

paving the way towards being extraor-
dinary. How does one grow without also working on their blind spots and refining their strengths?

As leaders, it is our job to elevate peo-

ple to greatness. Part of the job involves practicing the art of giving constructive criticism.

To read the rest of Anne’s article and her advice on how to give constructive criticism, visit bit.ly/ordinarytoextraordinary

Anne will be speaking at the AmBank CEO Chat series, happening from 8 November onwards. To sign up for these free leadership sessions with CEOs, and to find out more, go to ambankbizclub.com and get a chance to meet Anne personally.

—

Anne Tham is the founder and CEO of ACE EdVenture, an organisation that makes exam-based education fun and engaging for stu-

dents. She’s at the helm of an award-

winning line-up: Sri Emas International School, Dwi Emas International School, a chemistry role-

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Are you Malaysia’s hidden gem?
The AmBank BizRACE is giving away over RM1 million worth of prizes as they search for Malaysia’s Best SME. Join this once-in-a-lifetime experience and grow your SME today!
WHEN it comes to productivity, we all face the same challenge—there are only 24 hours in a day. Since even the best ideas are worthless until they’re executed, how efficiently you use your time is as important as anything else in business.

I’ve become fascinated by productivity secrets because some people seem to have double the time, and there’s no better way to reach your goals than by finding ways to do more with the precious time you’ve been given.

It feels incredible when you leave the office after an ultra-productive day. It’s a workplace high that’s hard to beat. In my experience you don’t need to work longer or push yourself harder—you just need to work smarter.

“Time is what we want most, but what we use worst.” — William Penn

I’ve learned to rely on productivity hacks that make me far more efficient. I try to squeeze every drop out of every hour without expending any extra effort. And my favorite hack also happens to be the easiest one to implement. It’s so easy and useful you can begin using it now.

1. NEVER TOUCH THINGS TWICE

That’s it. Never put anything in a holding pattern, because touching things twice is a huge time-waster. Don’t save an email or a phone call to deal with later. As soon as something gets your attention you should act on it, delegate it, or delete it.

2. EAT FROGS

To pull this off you’re going to have to eat some frogs. “Eating a frog” refers to doing the least appetizing, most dreaded item on your to-do list first. If you let your frogs sit, you waste your day dreading them. If you eat them right away, then you’re freed to focus on the things that hinder real forward momentum.

3. FIGHT THE TYRANNY OF THE URGENT

You’ll also need to master the tyranny of the urgent, which refers to the tendency of little things that have to be done right now to get in the way of what really matters. This creates a huge productivity problem because urgent actions often have little impact.

You’ll need to get good at spotting when putting out fires is getting in the way of your performance, and you’ll need to delegate or defer the things that hinder real forward momentum.

4. SAY NO

“No” is a powerful word that you’re going to have to wield. Saying “no” to a new commitment honours your existing commitments and gives you the opportunity to successfully and efficiently fulfill them.

5. CHECK E-MAIL ON A SCHEDULE

If you aren’t going to touch things twice, you can’t allow e-mail to be a constant interruption. You should check e-mail on a schedule, taking advantage of features that prioritize messages by sender. Set alerts for your most important vendors and best customers, and save the rest until the scheduled time.

6. AVOID MULTITASKING

To make my system work, you’re also going to have to avoid multitasking. It’s a real productivity killer. It reduces your efficiency and performance because your brain can only focus on one thing at a time.

When you try to do two things at once, your brain lacks the capacity to perform both tasks successfully. Never touching things twice means only touching one thing at a time.

“"No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens.” — Michelle Obama

Online Exclusive

Are women holding each other back?

Many regularly assume other women have a hidden agenda, cannot be trusted or often say they prefer the friendship of men because it’s less “drama”. In most realms, women seem to implicitly view other women as competition. How often are women holding other women back, putting them down and marginalising them? Because I know I’m not the only one. Read on at bit.ly/womenholdingback

SIX EASY PRODUCTIVITY TRICKS

The eldest among the Zuckerberg siblings, Randi is passionate about the intersection of technology and our modern lives and about topics related to tech, women, mothers and parenting. Leaderonomics CEO Roshan Thiran caught up with her to learn more about her leadership and entrepreneurial journey. Watch the video here: bit.ly/LDRTsrandi
12 THINGS TO DO WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE QUITTING

BY DAN ROCKWELL
editor@leaderonomics.com

SOMETIMES you feel like quitting. It might be after a big win or before a huge challenge. Maybe progress is slow or the goal is out of sight. Quitting is most tempting when pushing through matters most. Success is taking one more step, again. Here are 12 things to do when you feel like quitting:

1. Think of someone who didn’t quit. My dad was the toughest man I ever knew. The grit in me lived in him first and in his father before him.

2. Believe in your ability to learn, grow, and adapt.

3. Reflect on behaviours that aren’t serving you well. Quit what isn’t working. Focus on what is.

4. Repeat behaviours that give you energy.

5. Keep big goals in the back of your mind and next imperfect steps in the front of your mind.

6. Think weeks not days, months not weeks, years not months.

7. Think a little about how far you’ve come and a lot about what’s next.

8. Focus more on process and less on result.

9. Remember the quitters you have known.

10. Concentrate on something you can change.

11. Take a break. Have some fun.

12. Realise that your purpose has many expressions.

“All the adversity I’ve had in my life, all my troubles and obstacles, have strengthened me. You may not realise it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you,” said Walt Disney.

You matter. Your grit strengthens others. You matter more than you think. When you quit, it makes others feel like quitting.


What do you do when you feel like quitting?

Dan Rockwell is a coach, speaker and is freakishly interested in leadership. He is an author of a world-renowned most socially shared leadership blog, Leadership Freak. To get in touch with Dan, write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com

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