There are 11 great leadership articles in this week’s pullout. Our website is loaded with an enormous back catalogue of articles, with 50 new online features being added every month! Head to www.leaderonomics.com for heaps of leadership insight, thought-provoking podcasts and a library of more than 4,000 great videos.

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The Pitfalls of Knowledge

By SAsHE kAnaPATHI
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L

ATE last year, I had the privilege of speaking to some information technology (IT) folks in Penang who were just starting their professional careers. In preparation, I had to look back at my own learning journey from when I first began my tech career.

My career progressed through many different industries and disciplines – from firmware programming to software development, automation engineering, project management and beyond. It turned out that what has really defined my success is the transferrable skills I had learnt, not the technical ones. It was this realisation that led to the conceptualisation of my talk to those young IT professionals. Essentially, reliance on technical knowledge can be a pitfall.

There are two major challenges within the IT industry as I see it, and I believe this applies to other industries as well. A catchy phrase to encapsulate these problems is “know-how vs know-what”, a phrase which I have recently incorporated into my own leadership language.

Challenge 1: When Others Think That “Know-What” Is “Know-How”

Ever had someone walk up to you and challenge your professional opinion based on an answer they Googled? As a former “IT guy”, this has happened to me countless times, whether at work or at home. I’m sure people in the medical profession can relate to this as well. I can’t imagine how often doctors get harassed by patients who claim to “know”, thanks to Google.

Stakeholders often regard their newfound knowledge to be the whole truth. However, most casual readers of technical knowledge fail to grasp the multi-variate nature of any concept. So often, our customers demand or dictate things based on technical literature they read online or what they hear from someone else.

Knowledge is often simplified for easy understanding or made for an interesting read. Little is considered about the practical application of said knowledge. Even less is said about effectively applying it in a specific situation. This omission could lead to frustration.

Conversely, it could lead to this: Q: Why are we doing it like that? A: Because that’s what the customer wants.

We all know that very often customers may not be what they need or even what they mean. We often find ourselves in situations where the focus on delivering the “what” overshadows the “how” and the “why”. This is a recipe for disaster.

Often, there are simpler ways of doing things; consider what the real needs are, the impact of the proposed solution, or the long-term vs short-term gain.

Challenge 2: When We Think That “Know-What” Is “Know-How”

Here’s another typical conversation:

Q: Why are we doing it like that? A: Because that’s the latest technology.

This must rank among the most frustrating of responses. There is no rationalisation of whether it makes sense to the end customer. Or whether that’s the most effective implementation. For example, the debate rages on about what’s the best programming language. The answer is that there is no “best”, it just depends on what you need it for and how you plan to use it.

Again, knowing how to apply what language trumps knowing any language at all. If you have stakeholders who do not understand this, then you can be left with misdirection, misalignment, and frustration.

Overcoming Pitfalls of Knowledge

When “know-what” overwhelms the “know-how”, we find ourselves in the pitfalls of knowledge.

We need to refrain from jumping to convenient or popular solutions based on knowledge we are comfortable with, and start looking at the problem statements holistically. The most familiar solution isn’t necessarily the best.

I do not argue against knowledge being power, but I assert that it is only potential power. By itself, knowledge is not sufficient until there is equal focus on how to apply it effectively.

So how do we overcome these pitfalls? How do we focus on the “know-how”?

It is by extending beyond the competencies required, e.g. collaboration (communication, influencing skills, teamwork) and critical thinking (analysis, design).

It requires a desire to get involved. The key is in wanting to know more about the business/stakeholders you are involved in, with, beyond the technical knowledge of doing your functional job.

My recommendation to the group of Penang IT professionals that day was to always raise your hand. To never say “no” to an opportunity – any opportunity.

How Are You Impacting The Business?

I reflected upon my own journey of being given various opportunities to participate in business projects that often had nothing to do with IT.

For example, joining a project team that was considering inventory levels on a supply chain project.

That knowledge wound up being a game changer when I was involved in investigations surrounding variance of materials, because I could seamlessly marry IT knowledge with business knowledge to make a bigger impact.

As Steve Jobs put it, “You can only connect the dots looking backward.” So, create as many dots as possible.

The concept is simple. Whether you will be growing in your career in a managerial or technical capacity, your value is only as good as the impact to the business.

That impact will never be fully realised if you stick to your functional know-how. You must be able to fuse it with the business know-how.

If you do so, you will become fluent in the language of the business you are in and successfully navigate the pitfalls of knowledge.
RELENTLESS FOCUS
THE LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE LIFE OF MARIE CURIE

Many leaders have great vision and insight and make great discoveries, but to follow-up by getting your hands dirty and making sure these insights translate to reality is something only the best leaders do.

The Nobel Prize committee initially intended to award only her husband and Antoine Henri Becquerel the most prestigious prize in science in 1903. However, one committee member, who was an advocate for female scientists, insisted that Curie be added to the nomination due to the work she had put in. They won.

She and her husband did not work in a state-of-the-art laboratory, but in an outhouse in such a poor state that a respected German chemist once described it as “a cross between a stable and a potato shed.”

Yet, she and her husband never stopped the work even though conditions were intolerable. After they won the Nobel Prize, the University of Paris agreed to build them a proper lab. Sadly, Pierre would be killed in a tragic accident before he could ever set foot inside the new facility.

Curie sacrificed her life to bring help and science to all of us. Great leaders always tend to put the need of others above their own. The cause is much bigger to them than success and fame.

Many leaders lose their way as fame and fortune are obtained. Curie never once deviated from her mission regardless of the fame and adulation showered on her.

To be a great leader, you must likewise never let anything make you lose sight of your purpose.

Be clear about your purpose and mission and be positively focused on it day and night.

Curie herself is quoted as saying: “I was taught that the way of progress was neither swift nor easy.”

In other words, nothing worthwhile is easy to do. It takes significant effort and focus.

To succeed in life, we can all take a leaf of from Curie’s book and learn to focus and execute relentlessly.

Curie was also a giver who gave away every penny she had earned to charitable causes and further scientific research.

Journalist Shelley Emling added: “She cared nothing about fame and fortune which is why she never patented her work. She shared everything she knew. She shielded away from the press and the spotlight.”

Curie herself once said: “One never notices what has been done; one can only see what remains to be done.”

Great leaders celebrate success quickly but remain focused on what needs to be done. We can all learn so much from Curie and her life.

A true pioneer, the life of Marie Curie is a reminder to all leaders of the importance of being clearly focused on our mission.

More importantly, she was an inspiration to the women of her time, proving that women could be successful and make a difference without having to lose their femininity or sacrifice their roles as wives and mothers.

Marie Curie working in her lab at the university in Paris, 1925.

THE WORK MUST GO ON
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FAME CORRUPTS
Albert Einstein once said, “Marie Curie is, of all celebrated beings, the only one whom fame has not corrupted.”

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This article is available at www.leaderonomics.com. You can download the PDF version.

At times, we find ourselves stuck in helpless situations and get fixated with the idea that we do not have a choice. Leaderonomics’ leadership training programmes can help you be an effective leader who is also proactive and action-orientated. Our leadership courses are designed to help you take control of your life and use your strength of character to make the right decisions. E-mail training@leaderonomics.com to find out more.

Roshan Thiran is the founder & CEO of the Leaderonomics Group and is constantly amazed by the numerous leadership lessons he derives from historical figures. Growing up, Roshan constantly read biographies of great achievers like Marie Curie which left a great impression on him. He learnt so much and hopes his writing will inspire others that follow. Follow Roshan’s daily adventures and leadership tips on his LinkedIn, Twitter and also on Facebook pages at www.facebook.com/roshanthiran.

leaderonomics
I attended a leader's conference in Sydney last year where I had the pleasure of listening to a fantastic speaker—Matt Church, who spoke about thriving in the age of disruption.

My key takeaway from the keynote was that, what may work in business today, certainly will not be good enough for tomorrow. Old business models need to constantly evolve to keep up with disruption and change; and stagnant leadership styles just won’t cut it anymore.

Below are some of my ideas on what I believe will be the leadership styles of tomorrow.

**LEAD SMARTER PEOPLE**

Firstly, this new leadership style must be responsive to innovation and be accepting of the fact that many leaders will be directing others with more knowledge and creativity than themselves.

The hard part about leading smart people is that they don’t want to be led, and they want to be given the opportunity to try things until they are successful.

**HAVE AN INNOVATION GAME PLAN**

Great leaders will need to cultivate a clear vision to ensure innovation can happen and develop a game plan to provide a guiding path to fruition.

In reality, this means that leaders need to create an environment in which their people can thrive. We need to look beyond our own personal goals and create an environment where we can mentor these people to evolve. Imagine that one person who creates something with one single idea could ultimately bankroll an entire company for the next decade.

**ACKNOWLEDGE EVERYONE REGARDLESS OF POSITION**

In this disruptive era, there is no hierarchy. Everyone believes there should be instant access to the chief executive officer (CEO) to express their views or thoughts, and that they are just as valuable to the company as the leader.

Any leader who doesn’t acknowledge input or brushes it off, will find themselves on the outs very quickly. This new generation, full of wild and wonderful ideas, has an internal lie detector the likes of which we have never seen before.

Failure to acknowledge their ideas, or not give them the respect they deserve will soon see the leader as the most unpopular member of the team and ultimately, lead to a degrading team culture.

**LEADERS WHO DON’T NEED RECOGNITION**

You may have given a smart person their head start, but they won’t care or recognise you in any way.

This is an era wherein disruption occurs rapidly every day and, since staff believe they don’t need to be led, any new innovation was all their own doing regardless of how or who created the opportunities or provided direction.

Just remember there have been more patents filed in the last decade, than in the previous century—so why would they recognise your help?

**Questions you need to ask yourself:**

1. What activities do you need to undertake to fill those gaps?
2. Do you have access to the right knowledge and skills?
3. Do you need the support of a mentor to take you on this journey in the next stage of your career?
FLEXIBLE work hours aren’t a productivity-killing perk that start-up employers have to endure in order to attract the best talent. On the contrary, research has shown that employees in flexible-office environments are healthier, happier and more productive than their more constricted counterparts.

This is why businesses worldwide – from the smallest start-ups to corporations as large as Samsung – are beginning to reap the benefits of flexible work environments. This list is Fortune’s list of the 50 Best Workplaces for Flexibility.

In the past, recently named my company, Acceleration Partners, to the list. That’s why we are looking only to send virtual “water cooler” chats, where people set aside time on the calendar to chat about their weekends, recent books read, upcoming vacations and other personal matters. So, overall, when it comes to flexible work arrangements, don’t believe the detractors. Done right, flexible work environments greatly benefit both the company and the employee. Follow these rules to assure that increased flexibility for your own employees sets a foundation of increased productivity for your company.

We hold very firmly to our core beliefs. We:

- Set new goals to challenge, bond and propel all people to develop into leaders, irrespective of race, regional or social backgrounds in all fields of endeavour.
- Play an active role in helping the world’s leaders – of all ages, classes and ethnicities – to adapt and meet dynamic changes in our natural and synthetic environments and to help them grow and develop as leaders.
- Establish leadership - in all its forms – by considering the minds and hearts of leaders to create a just, free and caring society.
- Establish leadership development across all nations and ages.

Our vision is to seek to grow people into leaders, build affectionate communities, and transform the world, one leader at a time. This vision is anchored by the Golden Rule that we can only prosper if we protect the prosperity of those around us. As members of one vast community, we want to play our role as agents of transformation by creating, redeeming and sustaining life in all spheres of the global society.

At Leaderonomics, we are acutely aware that such goals and aims cannot be done alone. In reality, it is nothing but by good fortune, mutual encouragement and communal execution that we can carry the hope that one day we will see the fruition of what we envision. That’s why we are looking for the very best people out there to tackle the next exciting adventure in Leaderonomics’ story. People who have the flexibility to partner with the world, challenge the accepted status quo, drive change and yet have a heart of love.

Life at Leaderonomics is not for everyone. If you are accountable, synergistic, wanting to constantly grow and push yourself, are extremely agile, with a willingness to have courageous conversations and have the perseverance and belief to drive change, then you will find Leaderonomics a great home with a fun-loving family.

If you are looking for a warm and fuzzy place to work (although actually that does sound like us),

like this article? Follow us @Leaderonomics on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.

LEADERONOMICS is growing! As we begin the next phase of our journey, we’re looking for awesome people who have the same hunger as we do. At Leaderonomics, we make it our mission to grow each employee into leaders. More than just being an award-winning place to work and offering career growth opportunities for our people, we’re dedicated to ensure employees overseas too can continue their development journey as well.

In the last few months, we’ve sent Leaders to attend the European School of Management and Technology (ESMT) in Berlin, Germany; the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Switzerland and to visit the startup-bubble of Silicon Valley in the US.

We push our employees to learn to be adaptable and flexible. We have no job descriptions. Job descriptions are so 20th Century. Our roles constantly evolve and we are looking for like-minded people who want to grow not just once a year, but daily.

**Effect: Job flexibility**

**The Challenges of Flexibility**

Entrepreneurs and their employees typically face two major hurdles in achieving a truly flexible work environment: offering real flexibility even as they maintain simultaneous accountability. “Real accountability without losing flexibility: a company without a defined culture is healthier, happier and more productive than their more constricted counterparts.

**Strength-train’ your company culture**

A strong company culture keeps teams moving in the same direction despite the absence of rigid structure. But this has to be carefully thought out: a company without a defined culture and identity opens itself up to the risk of seeing culture cliques develop. And that inevitably leaves people out of important discussions and creates resentment and frustration among team members.

To establish and maintain our own culture, we originally defined our values and mission thoroughly, seeking input from our best performers. We then communicated these values, and now reward them on a regular basis.

To do that, we created a culture deck giving an overview of the company (remote or otherwise) to accept a constant reminder of who we are and how our processes and practices align with our core values.

**2 Be fanatical about feedback**

While you might be convinced that your cultural initiatives are working, how will you know if you never ask your employees? Our own response includes sending weekly surveys to gauge our team members’ feedback on their work lives. Instead, we conduct quarterly check-ins that measure employees on our core values, their top five responsibilities and their quarterly objectives.

**3 Focus on guidelines to avoid chaos and foster productivity**

Rather than act as a form of “red tape”, policies and guidelines can help ensure that everyone is afforded the same benefits and is held to the same standards. This is why we are looking for the very best people out there to tackle the next exciting adventure in Leaderonomics’ story. People who want to grow not just once a year, but daily.

**Like this article? Follow us @Leaderonomics on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.**
Disruptive technologies and their impact on the workplace.

by SANDY CLARKE

SOMA business leaders may not recognize the VUCA acronym—yet at least they have experienced and will continue to experience it for the foreseeable future. For those unfamiliar with the nifty mnemonic, VUCA stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

So, a good question to ask leaders is: "What is the VUCA world?" Is it simply a new way of looking at the business environment or are there new opportunities emerging? Depending on your view, you are likely to see opportunities as well as threats.

Almost everything we know about today’s business world is being turned on its head. We are seeing a modernization of our environment. The pace of change is faster; the rate at which new technologies are being adopted is increasing. We are living in interesting times.

In this era of uncertainty, companies need to make some decisions. They will need to define their strategies, identify their priorities, and plan their actions. They will need to understand how the new technologies impact the business environment and what are the major disruptions.

In the midst of all the disruptions, how can organisations continue to craft a digital customer experience that will engage their brand and deliver measurable success?

WHAT IS DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY?

Simple put, it refers to the effect of digital technologies on a business’ current value proposition and market position.

Procter and Gamble’s Stewart Rogers, Professor in the book The Investors’ Dilemma, has clearly illustrated the difference between "disruptive technology" and "leading-edge technology"—the latter being emerging technology that provides companies with a competitive advantage.

Disruptive technology, on the other hand, is defined as an innovation that considerably alters the structure of an industry. It is the biggest force in business history with the potential to change the world.

Many companies like to believe that they are always busy innovating and developing the best products or services. For instance, files will be transported across the office via email, messages will be dictated and sent via reel-to-reel tape recorders; and oversized cameras will be used to capture meetings. But it is also true that disruptive technology would have changed all of that.

In the past, disruption at work was driven by the supplier or service provider, e.g. when technology had reached a certain point or at the request of the customer. This is no longer the case. It is a today’s customer and consumer behaviour that is determining the future of the business. Companies are no longer using disruptive technology and consumer behaviour is encouraging companies to change and adopt to a new world order.

This is why it is vital for organisations to understand and analyse the impact of disruptive technology on their business processes, and it is essential that companies continuously work to evolve and develop their business strategies to meet their changing consumer needs.

WHO IS DRIVING THIS DISRUPTION?

The digital disruption of work is driven by the supplier or service provider, external forces, and customers. According to a survey conducted by Deloitte and The National Association of State, 45% of banks view global tech companies as a high threat. The same study goes on to state that 42% of banks view start-ups as high threats. Interestingly, banks are not only losing their place in the industry (other banks at the primary competitor anymore)—they are beginning to fear tech companies and start-ups.

Another survey conducted by Accenture, which included 2,350 sales and customer officers in 19 countries, found that 65% believe new entrants are providing better products.

Companies that ignore new entrants risk being pushed to the side as the world becomes more digitised. Disruption at work is today driven by the customer’s needs and expectations, which involves a new level of watching and learning from the millennials who expect convenience, speed, and accuracy in everything they do. Why is it? Because they know how their counterparts are doing it.

Disruption is absolutely changing the way businesses operate. It is the biggest force in history with the potential to change the world.

Creating a digital customer experience

McKinsey & Company estimates that the digital touchpoint is increasing 220% year on year. Therefore, companies must be motivated to respond to digital disruption in order to retain their competitive edge.

But how can companies achieve this? Identify how digital technology can help you stay ahead of the curve by understanding your customer experience and build an engagement layer above a product or service offering, e.g. fast response time, social media engagement, responsive website, etc.

The era of the customer is now, and businesses need to think about how they can best utilise this to their advantage.

CONCLUSION

The time is now to tend to the customer experience. There is no time to waste, and there is no time to be complacent. Simply put, companies must understand that their customer experience is their sole business model.

Companies that operate in other industries should think about their business model and how it can be improved upon. If they are currently using a linear, "brick-and-mortar" model, they should consider moving to a more digital model.

To keep pace with the competition, companies need to ensure they understand how their business processes work and how they can be adapted to meet the demands of today’s consumers.

Companies need to understand that their customer experience is their sole business model. They can be achieved by moving away from the traditional business model and “outside-in” approach through digital transformation.

PEOPLE PRIORITY

The bottom line is that companies need to focus on transforming the digital experience of the customer. There are so many new developments in the areas of cloud computing, computers, mobile and Internet of Things (IoT). You can choose to combine the use of these multiple technologies.

Many organisations fail to identify if they are being disrupted at work because of the advent of new technologies or because the millennials, who account for 25% of the population, are demanding a new improved experience. The answer to this must market subsequent actions.

To fend off digital disruption, think of smooth customer experiences instead of just products.

Your strategy must be positioned at the centre of your customer needs (plainly to the left of the above image). You need to identify how digital technology can help you stay ahead of the curve by understanding your customer experience and build an engagement layer above a product or service offering, e.g. fast response time, social media engagement, responsive website, etc.

The era of the customer is now, and businesses need to think about how they can best utilise this to their advantage.

THRIVING IN A VUCA WORLD

New leadership management model and True North author Bill George calls on business leaders to step up to the plate and take modern leadership challenges head on as they navigate exponentially changing and competing markets. It’s a new world of business.

What made the difference? Both saw the world with a new lens; both understood the importance of a customer-centric digital technologies in improving their products or services.

The unstoppable wave of advancement that comes with technology is here to stay. It’s not going to be the survival of the fittest anymore, but rather the survival of those who are agile enough to stay flexible in the event of new technologies entering the market or market just like Kodak.

Almost 66% believe new entrants are providing better products. These and this point is that every business will need to transform themselves to stay ahead of the curve.

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What can I do to thrive in a VUCA world?

We turn to one that’s more pertinent to a new world order—leadership. To achieve this, companies must foster a culture within the organisations, both external (from customers) and internal (from employees). Quite simply, businesses need to foster a culture within the organisation to engage with the market and to turn to one that’s more pertinent to a new world order—leadership.

Where can I find out more about...?
SECRET SUPERSTITIONS
ARE THEY HOLDING BACK YOUR CAREER?

By MARSHALL GOLDSMITH
and KELLY GOLDSMITH
editor@leaderonomics.com

WALKING under a ladder. Breaking a mirror: a black cat darting across your path. So what, right?

As a worldly business person, you probably scorn superstitions as silly beliefs of the primitive and uneducated. Deep down inside, you assure yourself, you’re above these antiquated notions.

Not so fast. To a certain degree, everyone is superstitious. And in many cases, the higher one climbs up the organisational totem pole, the more superstitious one becomes.

THE ROOT OF SUPERSTITIOUS BEHAVIOUR

Psychologically speaking, superstitious behaviour comes from the belief that non-functional activity followed by positive reinforcement is actually the cause of that positive reinforcement.

Years ago, American psychologist Burchis Frederic Skinner showed how hungry pigeons may repeat non-functional behaviour when their twitches and scratches are reinforced by small pellets of grain.

From our experience, hungry corporate leaders may also repeat non-functional behaviour when their behaviour is followed by large pellets of money and recognition.

Superstition is merely the confusion of correlation and causality. Any human (in fact, any animal) will tend to repeat behaviour that’s followed by positive reinforcement.

The more one achieves, the more positive reinforcement one gets.

One of the greatest mistakes of successful leaders is the assumption: “I believe this way, and I am successful. Therefore, I must be successful because I behave this way.”

BEWARE THE SUPERSTITIOUS TRAP

Almost everyone we meet in our work is successful because of doing a lot right, and almost everyone we meet is successful in spite of some behaviour that doesn’t make any sense.

One of our greatest challenges is helping leaders avoid the “superstitious trap.” This occurs when they confuse ‘because of’ and ‘in spite of’ behaviours.

THE STORY OF JIM

Consider Jim. He was a brilliant, dedicated executive who consistently made his numbers.

He wasn’t just smart; his creative ideas led to ground-breaking new procedures. Everyone agreed that he had been instrumental in helping turn around his organisation. He sincerely cared about the company, employees, customers and shareholders.

On top of all that, Jim had a loving wife. His two kids were enrolled in top colleges. He lived in a beautiful home in a great neighbourhood. Overall, life was very good for Jim.

Except for one thing. Jim was a remarkably poor listener. Even though his direct reports and co-workers respected him, they felt that he didn’t listen to them.

They were somewhat intimidated by his genius and creativity.

At times, they felt that, if Jim had made up his mind, it was useless to express another opinion.

His wife and kids loved him, but they also felt that he didn’t hear a word they said. If his dog could speak, it would have said the same thing.

We suggested to Jim that he was probably successful because of his talent, hard work, and some good luck.

And we also suggested that he was probably successful in spite of being an appallingly bad listener.

Jim acknowledged that other people thought he should become a better listener, but he wasn’t sure that he should change.

He had convinced himself that his poor listening actually helped him succeed. Like many high achievers, he wanted to defend his superstitious beliefs. He pointed out that some people present awful ideas and that he shouldn’t just pretend to listen to those stupid suggestions to make them happy. He proudly asserted that he didn’t suffer fools gladly.

When asked whether he really believed his co-workers and family members were fools, he grimaced and shamefacedly conceded that his comment was stupid.

These were people he respected. Upon further reflection, he concluded that perhaps he sometimes acted like a fool.

Jim then went into defensive reaction number two: fear of overcorrection. He expressed concern that he might start listening too much and that the company might not benefit from his creative ideas.

Perhaps he would become too unwilling to share his opinions. We pointed out that the danger that a 55-year-old man who had been seen as a bad listener for his entire life would overcorrect and become excessively interested in others’ opinions was extremely remote.

We assured him that he could remove this concern from his things-to-worry-about list.

Ultimately, he decided it was more productive to hear people out than waste time justifying his own dysfunctional behaviour.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Think about yourself. What are you doing because it helps you achieve results?

What are you doing because of some irrational superstitious belief that may have been affecting your life for years?

What’s on your “because-of” list? We have never met anyone who was so perfect that there was nothing on their “in-spite-of” list. What’s on yours?

DO PEOPLE FOLLOW YOU WHEN THEY HAVE A CHOICE NOT TO?

According to Jim Collins, that is the essence of true leadership. How then can your good managers become great leaders who create sustainable impact? Our exciting “Commander” simulation challenges leaders to develop the potent combination of business success and character that can shape a lasting legacy.
THE ERA OF DIGITALISATION

TIPS FOR JOB-HUNTING IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

By JONATHAN YABUT

YOUR story is not unusual, and you’re not alone as you read this. Millions of people out there have or have the same problem (yes, count me in, too).

You craft your resume and send it out to dozens of employers. Some reply and invite you for an interview.

The human resources guy who interviews you promises that he will call, but he doesn’t.

You follow up after a few days, and then weeks – still nothing. The rest don’t even know you exist. It feels like a date that went wrong, and you want to know why. Could it be something you missed in your resume? Something you said during the interview?

May this be divine intervention telling you to stay longer in your current job.

Perhaps it’s a sign that you should pursue a master’s degree? You simply want to keep.

But it’s been five months (well, almost six) and they say that it takes around that time to look for a new job, but you haven’t made a dent.

You’re starting to become desperate, but you know that you have standards to keep. You don’t want to settle. What could be wrong?

Here’s a checklist to help you examine if you’re doing the right (or likely the wrong) things in the job-hunting game.

1. YOU’RE LOOKING IN THE WRONG PLACES

I roll my eyes when I see people complain that it’s hard to get a job and say in the same breath that they don’t have a LinkedIn account.

Understand that many recruiters worldwide now fill in job vacancies through LinkedIn and are moving away from traditional employment sites. LinkedIn is the way to go for many reasons.

Statistically, you have a higher chance of getting noticed as recruiters receive real-time notifications for every application.

This is better than having your email drown in the recruiter’s inbox containing hundreds of email applications. Because every LinkedIn user’s professional background is summarised for easy access, candidates can be deliberated upon on the spot just like Tinder (minus the swiping).

Also, remember that Google search loves LinkedIn, which is one of the most search-friendly platforms in the social media universe.

Google your name and your LinkedIn profile appears on top of the search results more than your Facebook account or any website that mentions you.

This is a very handy trick when you want to be more visible to recruiters, and you want to put your best “professional” foot forward.

Also, have you submitted your resume to a headhunter yet?

If your resume is well-decorated, then companies can be less likely to neglect it. But you still need to apply for jobs with extra steps.

2. YOUR RESUME IS INSUFFICIENT

The first step to landing your dream job is to make your resume. It’s your golden ticket to getting an invitation for an interview.

But since most of us think that the universe revolves around our existence, we tend to forget that our resume is just one of hundreds of others waiting to be opened.

The recruiter obviously doesn’t have enough time for this. On average, it takes them six seconds to skim through and decide if you’re worth a chat. You’ll lose them if your resume isn’t feeding the facts.

Look at it this way: if you’re a bottle of ketchup sold in the supermarket alongside dozens of other condiments, you are expected to be bright red with a big sign that says “ketchup”.

This way, shoppers won’t second-guess or mistake you for mustard or mayonnaise.

The same condition applies to your resume. Ask yourself: does your resume possess the same undeniable clarity?

Does the first five inches of space in your resume immediately state that you are an engineering graduate specialising in mechanical design and with five years of experience in a Fortune 500 company?

Or, are you placing the burden on the recruiter to figure that out only after she has finished four pages of your resume (which she won’t read anyway)?

That one-line summary stating who you are must be the first thing the recruiter sees. Nail this, and you’ve won half the battle.

3. YOU’RE LIMITING YOUR JOB SEARCH

Logic tells us that your chances of getting hired are proportional to the number of jobs you apply for.

But you complain that there aren’t many jobs advertised online. Wrong.

There aren’t enough jobs because you think you can only apply for those you thought you should apply for. The strategy is to think out of the box and be open-minded to more opportunities.

For example, a fresh graduate of a tourism degree shouldn’t limit himself to hospitality-related ranks (for example, guest services officer, events planner).

Airlines and hotels may also be keen on hiring you for business positions since you already possess some knowledge of the industry.

The online search strategy is this: don’t just search by job keywords (for example, “engineer” or “designer”).

Search instead by company related to your industry and view all its positions offered.

You are likely eligible to apply for more jobs than you had initially thought.

Finished literature, journalism, or English studies? Don’t just stick to broadcast media as most do.

Try also advertising, copywriting, and social media marketing since language expertise is crucial in these fields.

This is search strategy tip number two: while the low-hanging fruit is to search for jobs within your industry, work smarter by searching through other related industries.

As a marketer myself, I can say that folks who have had careers in psychology, sociology, and statistics can easily shift to careers in business, marketing, and sales.

4. YOU’RE NOT MAXIMISING YOUR NETWORK

If there’s one thing I learnt as a marketer myself, I can say that folks who have had careers in psychology, sociology, and statistics can easily shift to careers in business, marketing, and sales.

Rather, she formerly reported to your current boss or was referred by one of your teammates. This is the power of network-based hiring.

Job-hunting shouldn’t be done alone in the dark. Yes, it does require a level of discretion, but you will still need a Robin or Chewbacca to co-pilot the journey.

Be humble enough to admit that you will need help, so utilise your network.

Scan your list of Facebook or LinkedIn contacts. Do you have former colleagues who recently got transferred to a new company? Ask them for job vacancies.

Have an opportunity to travel for an industry conference soon? Attend it and connect to every person during coffee breaks, lunches, and elevator rides.

Spread your business cards literally like butter on bread.

This is why networking is important even when you’re not looking for a job: the people you just met today may soon be useful for your career’s future.

ON A FINAL NOTE

If you’re the type who prefers to let destiny have its way and believes that you’ll get the job if it’s “meant to be”, then you probably don’t deserve the job worth fighting for.

Every piece of success requires hard work, so do your part.

Be ubiquitously visible online, be strategic in your search, and most importantly (but often forgotten), be brave and relentless to ask around.

Don’t be ashamed.

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The Importance of Mental Preparation

By Sandy Clarke
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Let’s try a thought experiment. Whether it’s delivering a presentation, giving a speech, or making a sales pitch, call to your mind whatever makes you want to be anywhere else except where you are.

Recall how the moment of dread makes you feel. Your breathing becomes shallow, tension begins to build in your chest, your throat and shoulders begin to tighten. Your body brace itself for a fight-or-flight response.

As the stress hormone cortisol flops your system, a million thoughts flood your mind telling you how badly that big presentation is going to go – they all tell you that you’re no good, that you’re going to fail in front of so many people. Every part of your being wants you to run.

As someone who used to have a fear of public speaking, in a career in media was perhaps not the wisest choice for a devout introvert.

Any time I would speak in front of a group of people, the anxiety would swell up inside me. Why? Because I was afraid of failing, of coming across as a bumbling fool and being stuck with mental repeats of a horrible experience for the foreseeable future.

In an effort to counter this, I would prepare like crazy for whatever I was to deliver, right up until moments to go before it was time to perform.

Although I would manage to get through most presentations, talks or interviews without incident, the anxiety refused to disappear, even if it did behave for the duration.

Having a strong interest in how the mind behaves, I was fascinated by the question of why the anxiety existed in the first place.

Even when I got through difficult situations and had stacks of evidence that the world wouldn’t collapse if I made mistakes, I would still feel nervous.

But why?

The problem might not be with the event itself but rather how we prepare for that big presentation, sales pitch, or whatever has us on edge.

We’ve all had intense anxious moments just before taking on a challenge and, while we’re preparing the job to be done, there’s no reason why we should accept the anxiety.

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: is my preparation helping me perform at my best, or is it the cause of my anxiety?

If you’re anything like how I used to feel, you might feel that it’s best to overdo the preparation rather than leave yourself short.

However, when we prepare too much, there’s every chance that we’re inducing the anxiety we feel.

To add to the problem, we don’t recognise that we’re the catalyst for those intense feelings.

Therefore, we mentally associate the anxiety with the perceived difficulty of the challenge, which only makes things worse.

The remedy will feel counter-intuitive at first, but it is effective.

For those familiar with The Mozart Effect, past research suggested that listening to Mozart’s music promoted short-term improvement in the performance of mental tasks.

But subsequent studies discovered that there is nothing particularly special about listening to classical music.

Those who performed best in the original experiments happened to like Mozart’s music the most, and the later research found that simply engaging in any activity we enjoy can help to boost our mental capacities and sense of well-being.

It even worked on participants who enjoyed audio recordings of horror novels.

So, instead of going over those slides for the 50th time a few hours before the big presentation, create for yourself a mental routine that takes your focus away from those slides and directs it towards boosting your sense of confidence and well-being.

Let’s have a look at some of the things you can do to help you ace the performance when the time comes to shine.

1. Listen to your favourite music
   Whether it’s Mozart or Justin Bieber, take some time to listen to a few songs that make you feel good inside.
   Let the music lift you up into a state of happiness and positivity. Don’t try to get your mind whatever makes you want to be anywhere else except where you are.

2. Remember your own greatest hits
   Bring to mind some previous moments where you truly smashed your performance out of the park in times when you really delivered.
   Relive how you felt during those moments: confident, self-assured, in control – you’ve been a big hit before, and this is just another success you’ll soon be chalking up.

3. Remind yourself why you’re doing this
   If you’re pitching a new product or service to a client, then it’s all about their needs and how they can benefit.
   When you take time to remind yourself of the ‘why’ behind what you’re doing, you take the focus away from any thoughts that you’re the one being evaluated.

Ultimately, isn’t it about you – it’s about what you’re giving to others.

By focusing on other people, you shift your attention away from yourself.

4. Ask yourself, “Where’s the tiger?”
   When the body is in fight-or-flight mode, the mind can’t tell the difference between an upcoming presentation and being chased by a tiger; it simply knows there’s something to get away from and fast.
   Often, the best defence against feeling nervous is to acknowledge in your mind what you’re feeling and gently confront it.

   “OK, I’m feeling anxious right now, but that’s alright. It’s normal, there’s a lot of people here. But I’m safe, nothing is actually going to harm me – where’s the tiger?”

   “This is just a feeling, nothing more. Besides, I’ve done this before, there’s nothing to worry about.”

5. Just before going on, take deep breaths
   Take a deep breath in, hold it for a slow count of four, and then release the out-breath slowly.
   Repeat this three or four times. It will help to calm any remaining nerves and take the edge off just before you go on to nail your next success.

The art of a successful presentation is to deliver technical information precisely and persuasively. Leaderonomics offers the Impactful Presentation Skills programme which aims to help participants internalise the beliefs, attitudes and mentalities of a master presenter. Contact training@leaderonomics.com for more details.

“Awareness is the greatest agent for change.”
   – Eckhart Tolle

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WHY PEOPLE RESIST CHANGE

By CHERYL CRAN
editor@leaderonomics.com

HEN most people hear the word ‘change’ they either say ‘yeah, yeah, change is the new norm... blah, blah, blah...’ or they roll their eyes at the rhetoric they are about to hear about ‘how we all need to change’. That’s because many leaders have been talking about change in the context of what people need to do more of (work) and how they need to step up (work harder) and that change requires effort (not so inspiring).

Truly what needs to change is for leaders to recognise that encouraging others to want to change is not about throwing new technologies or new systems changes or spouting rhetoric. What needs to change is the understanding that human beings are psychological beings and, in order to make meaningful change, leaders need to meet people at the human-to-human level.

The three reasons people resist change and how to inspire them to want to are:

1. The immediate reaction to any change is defense or push back – it’s the fight or flight response. Immediate thoughts might be: “You want me to do what?”,” Why are we changing this?”,” I don’t want to do this”, etc. To inspire the desire to change, leaders need to address the defense reactions with every single person involved in the change. Addressing change means sitting down and talking about the change, addressing any fears or concerns and having an open and truthful dialogue about how the change will impact current working situations and future working scenarios.

2. Once a change has been initiated, the next reason people resist is the WIIFM (what’s in it for me) response. Every single person is asking themselves: “How is this going to affect me and my job?”,” Do I have the skills to do this?”,” and “What if I fail?” This is the stage where people will challenge the validity of the change, question the process or even subconsciously sabotage the change initiative.

3. The third reason people resist change is because it challenges his or her identity. Identity is built on people’s repeated successes (and failures). Someone may be highly connected to their identity of being a leader or their identity of working for a company for a long time.

Change always challenges how a person sees himself or herself. Failing to recognise the need to support people’s identity can slow down or even halt a major change initiative. To inspire at this level you want to have clear structure, project management, support tools, measurement of progress and visible flow charts to help people see where he or she fits, who is going to do what, how he or she can learn and grow and how he or she can enhance his or her identity. At this stage you want to inspire individuals to stretch their perception of his or her capabilities with your full support.

Change is ongoing and isn’t going away – (I know that sounds like rhetoric) and, as leaders integrate the human approach to change, organisations will see faster adaptation to change, more agile work teams and greater innovation.

Cheryl Cran is a Future of Work and Change Leadership expert, the author of "The Art of Change Leadership" and the founder of Evolutionary Leadership Training. To connect with Cheryl, e-mail to editor@leaderonomics.com

"Sometimes you just have to jump in a mud puddle because it’s there. Never get so old that you forget about having fun." — Tom Giaquinto

Founder and executive chairman of Brickfields Asia College (BAC), Raja Singham inspires a spirit of philanthropy through his charitable efforts. Watch this inspiring video of Raja being interviewed by Leaderonomics founder & CEO, Roshan Thiran as he shares his journey of success and failures in the business of education and start-ups: bit.ly/passionnotmoney

QUOTES

Online Exclusive

We are on the brink of probably the most economically disruptive time in history, from the Internet of Things (IoT) to the Internet of Everything (IoE). But what’s happening to our focus during all this uncertainty? Read on at bit.ly/keepingfocused

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HOW TO BE RESILIENT

By DAN ROCKWELL
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Throwing in the towel feels like relief when hope turns to disappointment. Sometimes the voice in your head says: “It’s not worth it.” But, meaningful achievement includes disappointment. Hard-fought battles taste sweet but include frustrations, setbacks, and disenchantment.

- People disappoint. Good people leave. Bad people stay.
- Results disappoint. You pour in more than you get out.
- Circumstances disappoint. You expected advantage but received discomfort.
- You disappoint. Failure isn’t intentional, but it happens. The cruelest disappointment is disappointment with yourself.
- Winston Churchill said: “If you’re going through hell, keep going.”

How to Keep Going When Hope Turns to Disappointment:
Reflection: Successful leaders reflect on disagreeable realities. Buried disappointments swell like boils until they can’t be ignored.

7 questions for reflection: Nagging disappointment shouts: “It’s not working.”
1. What are you doing that doesn’t serve you/others well? Remember that obvious answers aren’t always the right ones.
2. What do you want to stop doing? Disappointment is motivation to stop doing things that aren’t working. There comes a point when stopping something feels like relief.
3. What do you want others to stop doing?
4. What personal values need fuller expression? Darkness and lethargy move in when you move away from personal values.
5. What unmet expectations might you have for others? For yourself?
6. How accurate is the accusatory voice in your head? Or inaccurate?
7. Hold your disappointment in your mind. Now ask yourself four questions:
- What are you doing that makes you proud?
- What are you doing that makes you disappointed in yourself?
- What are you doing that drains you?
- What are you doing that energises you?

Tip: Record your disappointments on paper. Read them every day for a few days. What do you notice?

Dan Rockwell is a coach, speaker and is freakishly interested in leadership. He is the author of a world-renowned, socially shared leadership blog, Leadership Freak. To engage with him, email editor@leaderonomics.com

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