Channeling Your Creative Mind

3 LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM STEVE WOZNIAK
6 FOUR WAYS TO ENHANCE CREATIVITY
9 THE IDEA OF ‘ORIGINALITY’ THAT HOLDS YOU BACK
Creative Thumbprint
Influencing factors to cultivate creativity

By CAROLYNE NJOGU
editor@leaderonomics.com

WHO are you? Why are you here? What would you like to create?
Or simply, how do you want to transcend this life through your creative powers?
Mahatma Gandhi challenged us to create the change we wish to see in the world. His point, while simple in thought, is quite complex in execution.

Needless to say, the wisdom he shared is just as potent as life itself.
To create, you must be persuaded you have what it takes. This unswerving belief is the genesis of creativity – from which abundance flows in the creative process. Evidently, how you see yourself informs and inspires your creative work.

According to Scott Barry Kaufman, a research expert on creativity, “Creativity pervades human life. It is the mark of individuality, the vehicle of self-expression, and the engine of progress in every human endeavour.”

Today, we would not be enjoying the benefits of past innovations from the Stone Age, Industrial Age, and all ages in between if humans before us didn’t envision the world we live in now.

So, what influences creativity? Here are a few that come to mind.

1. Presence

Presence is the influencing factor that gets your team or stakeholders on board. In simplistic terms, executive presence is the ‘wow factor’ on your ability to lead action.

In her book, Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges, social scientist Amy Cuddy argues that, “presence is a state of being attuned to and able to comfortably express our true thoughts, feelings, values and potential… confidently without arrogance.”

So, how you see yourself and give meaning to situations and circumstances around you determines how others perceive and follow you as their leader.

Your creative output is accentuated by your essence and uniqueness expressed through style, substance, and character.

For example, the late Dr Martin Luther King Jr’s spirit and presence continue to inspire change today. His vision for justice and equity for all still endures.

2. Passion

Passion is what drives you to do what you love to do. You do what you do because you derive an intrinsic thrill whenever you engage in your craft.

The late Steve Jobs’ passion to innovate was contagious and inspired many. His passion lived on, and his voice beckons, “Love what you do.”

Developing and honing your passion to expertise and mastery status takes time. Underscoring the reality is that passion is the fuel that ignites your flames.

This has to be coupled with grit. Dr Angela Lee Duckworth, a psychologist at University of Pennsylvania explains grit as the ability to endure in pursuit of purpose for a very long time.

Clearly, you need grit to push beyond limits and get out of your comfort zone, thereby realising your vision and living in purpose. Wouldn’t you want this?

3. Purpose

Purpose is the reason you do what you do.

In his TedTalk, Simon Sinek charges us to, “Start With Why” – because knowing why you do what you do will draw and pull together even the most unlikely stakeholders to champion your cause.

Remember the Ice Bucket Challenge in 2014? The campaign raised over USD200mil, and inspired thousands to be more creative in their fundraising efforts.

When you decide to live in purpose, resources and opportunities start to align with ease. It is as if the creative force, the Creator of all things in the universe conspires for your sake.

How well you nurture your agility and adapt in today’s evolving environments will determine if your creativity is at par with the prevailing market and society’s needs.

4. Values and beliefs

To realise your creative vision, you need to be clear on the set of values and beliefs to guide you or your organisation sustainably.

Knowing what you stand for is not only good for ethics, but it’s imperative in attracting the right talent pool and stakeholders.

Today’s workforce is quite diverse. Technology, globalisation, politics, economy, climate change, and the rise of human consciousness are shaping employees’ expectations.

A study by Harvard Business Review on self-certainty reveals that, “having a clear sense of self elucidates which type of career options best match one’s strengths and fulfill one’s values, thereby enabling people to be clearer and more confident about their career decisions.”

Overall, values and beliefs help you focus your passion towards your purpose and amplify your presence as distinguishing you and your organisation from the masses.

5. Background experiences

Memories, especially those formed in our childhood years, are extremely powerful. These experiences shape our worldview and evolve from there onwards.

Luminaries like Nelson Mandela, Thomas Edison, Gandhi, King, and Dr Wangari Muta Maathai (The Green Belt Movement founder and 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate) created change inspired by their early childhood memories.

Our childhood experiences can inspire or cripple our future, unless we choose to channel those experiences for good, and for the benefit of others.

For example, the new member of the royal family in England, the Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle, will need to define her life to live on her own terms following her childhood experiences as a biracial growing up in the United States.

She is reported as saying that she plans to use her new platform as a royal member to continue with her philanthropic work for a wider reach – with hopes to inspire change for those marginalised – a cause she is passionate about since childhood.

Like many change agents before her, Markle has learnt to embrace her uniqueness to confront the status quo.

As a result, she has already inspired women across the globe to believe in their own ‘Superpowers’.

As a result, women have a new paradigm and platform from which humanity is enriched and builds on today for a better tomorrow.

6. Adaptability

To thrive in today’s world and remain relevant in the future, you need to be more versatile than ever before.

How well you adapt amid life’s pressures will either present opportunities or threaten your success.

In her book Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfill Your Potential, Carol S. Dweck, a researcher and psychology professor at Stanford University notes that those who consciously seek to boost their learning and intelligence embody a growth mindset, while those who don’t engage in that mindset.

How well you nurture your agility and adapt in today’s evolving environments will determine if your creativity is at par with the prevailing market and society’s needs.

Therefore, it is critical that you embrace a growth mindset. As you grow, giving your contributions to humanity, however big or small, will be inevitable.

Tying it all together

Identity and creativity are inextricably linked. This linkage is the thumbprint of our uniqueness and self-expression manifested as the creative output.

The confluence of one’s presence, passion, purpose, values and beliefs, background experiences, and adaptability augments self – and brings forth novelties of ideas, thoughts, products, and services.

Conclusively, creativity is divine – human beings are uniquely designed to do a specific work that ought to fulfill them when they engage only in that assignment.
The Wizard Of Woz
5 key insights from this original geek

By ROSHAN THIRAN
roshan.thiran@leaderonomics.com

November 2017, I spoke at the 13th World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF 2017), held at the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching in Sarawak. Also speaking at the same forum was the co-founder of Apple Computers, Steve Wozniak. Nicknamed “Woz,” the original geek; he was not only Steve Job’s partner in establishing Apple, he was also the inventor of the Apple II computer (last human being to invent a full computer), which helped propel Apple to greatness.

Not only did he help shape the entire early computing industry, he is also a philanthropist and has given away a huge part of his fortune to others.

What joy, this other half of Apple! Wozniak is a true geek in every sense of the word. He never created or invented ‘stuff’ to become rich and famous. He simply wanted to ‘make cool stuff’ and that was what motivated him.

Much can be learnt from the simple joy obtained from a long day and night just to create ‘cool stuff.’

Many inventors and business leaders today work tirelessly so that they can become rich and famous.

They aspire to get some awesome product or service out the door and exit within three years, making billions in the process. Wozniak was a true engineer and geek – he just loved building.

As I listened to Wozniak, a realisation dawned on me – success is not about money or fame, but about doing the things you love to do.

Wozniak, who is estimated to be worth about USD100m, could have been richer had he wanted to. But his joy was in seeing products come alive. In fact, he gave away much of his fortune because it was the right thing to do.

I think that is the starting point of leadership – to be clear on what your mission or purpose is and to keep working tirelessly at it. Never let money or fame dilute your dream of achieving your true joy in life.

A key question for us to ask ourselves: Are you building cool stuff and are you doing it because of the joy it brings? Or are you building it for fame and fortune?

1. The ‘H’ Equation

Wozniak shared his ‘H’ equation – his happiness quotient. To him, money is not the key to happiness. It’s much more than that.

According to Wozniak, ‘being happy is better than being accomplished. And being happy means feeling good.’

To him, happiness is simple. His formula is:

\[
H = \frac{(S + F)}{(Happiness = Smiles - Frowns)}
\]

So, find ways to smile more and frown less. Another H equation he occasionally quotes is:

\[
H = \frac{(F + P)}{(Food = Friends & Fun)}
\]

Lessons
As entrepreneurs, many of us get stressed about many things including how to keep our organisations afloat and numerous operational challenges and issues.

Wozniak’s advice is to simply find more occasions to smile and negate the frowns. Food, friends and fun help with this regard.

As we grow our business, don’t forget to take time to eat well, spend time in fellowship with close friends and family, and always have fun in whatever you do.

Keep the smiles going to offset the frowns that are part and parcel of life as business entrepreneurs and leaders.

2. Finish what you start

One piece of advice Wozniak straddled was to ‘always finish what you start.’ Wozniak launched Apple having not finished college.

10 years later did he manage to go back to Berkley to finish his final year of college and graduate. It’s the same piece of advice he offers to entrepreneurs. Whenever you start something, big or small, keep working on it until it is finished.

If it doesn’t work, move on. But never leave it as an unfinished product.

Lessons
As I reflected on my own life, I realised that the key to my various successes were closing out on the final 10 per cent.

Many times, we take on projects and assignments and we get excited initially. We rush to finish 60 to 70 per cent, sometimes even up to 90 per cent. But the final 10 per cent is always the hardest.

Because it is the toughest, we focus on other easier ‘side’ projects that offer us the joy of progress. And again, we hit the 90 per cent mark and struggle.

Finishing that final 10 per cent is the key to success and achievement.

It is tough to do, but always finishing what you started holds the key to many of our successes.

Otherwise, we will be saddled with many projects but no success to show for them.

3. Focus on what you love and do it

Wozniak loved being an engineer. To him, he didn’t want to be a chief executive officer (CEO), rich or to be in the forefront. He just wanted to build stuff.

Many times, we see highly talented technical employees and assume they want to be promoted into bigger roles and managerial positions.

If someone loves what they do and thrive in it, work hard to figure out how to make them keep doing what they love and are good at.

According to Wozniak, engineers are the heartbeat of every company. Yet, he is practical enough to know that you also need thinkers, builders, marketers and makers.

While engineers think in binary and work similarly, the rest of the world doesn’t.

So, it is key for each function and piece of the organisation to learn to talk to each other so that everyone has clarity on what each contributes.

Lessons
As an entrepreneur, you need to always have an engineer or a builder in your founding team. Work hard to help everyone communicate with each other (and not in binary!).

That’s the hardest part of leadership – enabling clarity for the organisation.

Wozniak goes on to add that the best way to enable people to remain in their roles (where they thrive), yet to grow and learn, is for the CEO to constantly have “side projects for their employees.”

These side projects enable employees to keep being in their own job where they thrive in, but also get the exposure needed to keep growing and learning.

As we grow our business, don’t forget to take time to eat well, spend time in fellowship with close friends and family, and always have fun in whatever you do.

4. Be disruptive

One piece of advice Wozniak advocates for all business leaders is to hire someone as the chief disruptive officer but to have this person report into the board (and not the CEO).

This person’s role is to figure out how to disrupt the current products and services with non-traditional ones and to keep the board posted on the disruption.

This is to ensure that the board can constantly challenge the CEO and senior managements’ perspective and provide an alternate view of where to focus on for the future.

To Wozniak, technology is unpredictable. No one can predict the disruption ahead. Apple II was a huge disruption.

Yet, the Apple of today is rather predictable. Any boy or girl today can design products and services with non-traditional ideas, and you like to compete. You’re a job. Want to know how to disrupt a job? Check out this related article on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/JHWozJobs

Lessons
For disruption to happen, sometimes you need the tools to be available and affordable. Today, it is as easy as such, entrepreneurs and leaders need to always remember that as they disrupted and succeeded in the past, someone else is looking to disrupt and succeed with new offers offering today.

So, there is a need to be vigilant and disrupt oneself first.

5. The power of simplicity

Wozniak became a designer because he loved making things cool. A key part of his success was to design stuff with very few parts and at the lowest cost.

He feels that many people today have forgotten the power of simplicity. Simplicity beats complicated things, hands down. The best products are simple and effective. Wozniak advocates entrepreneurs to relook their offerings to ensure they are simple and easy.

Additionally, the best products were designed for one person.

Lessons
While many companies try to design products and services for markets, the most disruptive products were designed for one person.

Elon Musk designed the Tesla to be a big car because he had a big family. Jobs made the-iPhone for himself. Ratan Tata designed the TataNano for a poor family he encountered.

Products that work for you generally tend to work for others.

Final thoughts
Wozniak continued with numerous pieces of advice to leaders and entrepreneurs, he warned everyone to be aware of the upcoming disruption.

Blockchain, virtual reality and augmented reality would be useful applications in the near future.

Learn it. Get to know the future today.

To him, the key to being a successful entrepreneur is to always be aware of your surroundings and knowing what things are cooking around you.

So, keep disrupting yourself! Keep redefining yourself.

Always finish what you start and never forget to keep growing and learning. Always remember to frown less, smile more and be happy!

You like solving problems, but how is this less important than why? Why are you a Wozniak? You like developing ideas, you like working with others to turn those ideas into products, you like creating a business out of those ideas, and you like to compete. You’re a job. Want to know how to disrupt a job? Check out this related article on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/JHWozJobs

Is the geek getting you down? Could this be the revenge of the geeks as they begin to take on the world and shape our future? Well, you’ll be the judge. Get into the world of geeks for a while more on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/nerdleaders

The Leaderonomics Show)

For more articles like this, you can also check his Leadership Nuggets show. Follow Roshan’s daily adventures and leadership insights on Leaderonomics Twitter and on Facebook.
React Vs Response
How much do you value your people’s efforts?

When we are in a conversation with another person, what are most of us generally doing while someone is talking? If we were honest, we would have to admit that we are usually thinking of how we will respond. There are very few of us who are fully engaged and deeply listening to the other person’s message. The Chinese character for listen, ‘ting’, captures this spirit of listening. Check this out: bit.ly/listening

It’s human nature to be impulsive and react instead of act. And when it becomes a habit, it can become destructive. Here are some strategies to help you stay in control: bit.ly/LDRselfcontrolsecrets

Scenario 1
Amy works for ABC Manufacturing company. One day, she makes what her boss believes is a mistake. Her manager, John, gets angry and yells at Amy in front of her peers. When she tries to explain, he cuts her off, calls her stupid and says, “Now I can’t trust you to do anything right.” He turns to the rest of the team in the conference room and says, “See, this is what happens when you act like an idiot!” Then he storms out.

Results
Amy is embarrassed and feels terrible. She didn’t mean to do anything wrong; she thought she had come up with a creative way to accomplish what her boss had asked of her. Amy loses confidence in her skills and begins questioning her work abilities. She feels uncomfortable around her boss, worried about how he’ll react. Amy’s co-workers are also impacted. They begin going to John to find out exactly how he wants things done, because they worry about his reaction if they don’t meet his expectations. Productivity decreases, innovation decreases, morale and employee engagement decrease, and micromanagement increases.

Scenario 2
Amy works for ABC Manufacturing company. One day, she makes what her boss believes is a mistake. Instead of getting angry during the staff meeting, John pauses and then says, “Amy, help me understand what you did.” Amy explains that when she attempted to complete the work John had assigned her, she realised there were redundancies in the information technology (IT) system. He also praises the two IT experts for jumping in and making the quick changes. “It’s these types of daily innovations that will ultimately benefit our customers. I really appreciate everyone’s teamwork. Nice job!”

Results
Amy is grateful for the recognition her boss gave her in front of her peers. She begins trying even harder to find areas for improvement. Amy’s co-workers see how much their boss values innovation and teamwork; they too, begin looking for ways to improve workflows. Productivity increases, innovation increases, morale and employee engagement also increase.

Bringing it together
Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, said: “Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In those choices lie our growth and our happiness.”

Every day, you will be challenged with how to respond when situations arise. Before responding with a knee-jerk reaction, pause. Think about the options you have in how you could respond and consider the impact those reactions could cause... because how you react will be an outward demonstration of your inner character.

By LISA QUAST
editor@leaderonomics.com

AVE you ever reacted in a certain way and then later regretted it? It might have been with a co-worker, someone who works for you, your boss or even your significant other or children. This is a tale of two workplace situations.

Scenario 1
Amy works for ABC Manufacturing company. One day, she makes what her boss believes is a mistake. Her manager, John, gets angry and yells at Amy in front of her peers. When she tries to explain, he cuts her off, calls her stupid and says, “Now I can’t trust you to do anything right.”

He turns to the rest of the team in the conference room and says, “See, this is what happens when you act like an idiot!” Then he storms out.

Results
Amy is embarrassed and feels terrible. She didn’t mean to do anything wrong; she thought she had come up with a creative way to accomplish what her boss had asked of her. Amy loses confidence in her skills and begins questioning her work abilities. She feels uncomfortable around her boss, worried about how he’ll react. Amy’s co-workers are also impacted. They begin going to John to find out exactly how he wants things done, because they worry about his reaction if they don’t meet his expectations. Productivity decreases, innovation decreases, morale and employee engagement decrease, and micromanagement increases.

Scenario 2
Amy works for ABC Manufacturing company. One day, she makes what her boss believes is a mistake. Instead of getting angry during the staff meeting, John pauses and then says, “Amy, help me understand what you did.”

Amy explains that when she attempted to complete the work John had assigned her, she realised there were redundancies in the information technology (IT) system. “A few of the screens now look slightly different, but removing the redundant information areas should save several hours of work each week.”

John thanks Amy for her quick identification of the redundancies and her proactivity in streamlining the IT system. He also praises the two IT experts for jumping in and making the quick changes. “It’s these types of daily innovations that will ultimately benefit our customers. I really appreciate everyone’s teamwork. Nice job!”

Results
Amy is grateful for the recognition her boss gave her in front of her peers. She begins trying even harder to find areas for improvement. Amy’s co-workers see how much their boss values innovation and teamwork; they too, begin looking for ways to improve workflows. Productivity increases, innovation increases, morale and employee engagement also increase.

By LISA QUAST
editor@leaderonomics.com

It’s human nature to be impulsive and react instead of act. And when it becomes a habit, it can become destructive. Here are some strategies to help you stay in control: bit.ly/LDRselfcontrolsecrets

---

Lisa is a consultant in marketing, strategic planning and talent development. She is also a career coach and writer. Do you have a story to share about a time you reacted badly? Tell us at editor@leaderonomics.com.
By MICHAEL MCQUEEN

I n June 2015, the retiring chief executive officer of Cisco Systems John Thomas Chambers startled much of the business world when he predicted that, “40 per cent of businesses (today) will not exist in a meaningful way in 10 years.”

While you could dismiss this statement as misguided hyperbole, the reality is that Chambers may well be spot on.

After all, the average lifespan of a major listed company has already shrunk from 67 years in the 1920s to just 15 years today.

The coming years will be marked by disruption that has the potential to threaten the relevance and survival of many businesses.

The impact of artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, 3D printing, autonomous vehicles and blockchain is hard to overestimate. And that is just the beginning.

In the face of such rapid and wide-scale change, it is critical to prepare now for what lies ahead.

Having spent much of the last decade working with some of the most visionary organisations and leaders around the world, there are three essential keys to future-proofing any business in the face of disruption.

1. Dig the well before you get thirsty

If you wait till a crisis unfolds, you will be operating from a position of vulnerability. It is always best to innovate and reinvent yourself when times are good because that is when you have resources, time and perspective on your side.

That said, it requires visionary leadership and courage to embrace change and embark on reinvention when there appears to be no pressing reason to do so.

Recently working with Toyota Motor Corporation’s leadership, I was struck by an ethos within the company that originated with its former chairman Hiroshi Okuda. Always reform business when business is good, Okuda repeatedly urged.

This principle has been critical to the enduring success of legendary brands such as DuPont, Cominx and National Cash Register who each pre-empted disruption and therefore flourished rather than floundered when it hit.

2. Focus on friction

Friction is loosely defined as anything that creates complexity, confusion, frustration or irritation for your customer. Put simply, it is anything that negatively affects the customer experience.

While a commitment to enhancing the customer experience is an innately valuable pursuit for any business, becoming obsessive about friction is critical in this age of disruption.

Why? Because the friction you are unwilling to acknowledge or address will be the very thing that leaves you vulnerable to being disrupted.

With technology lowering the barriers to enter every industry, there is no shortage of agile, customer-focused start-ups who will eagerly storm into your market with the intent of making your customer’s life easier.

Taking your customer for granted by ignoring friction gives emerging competitors the foothold they are looking for.

The example of Transferwise’s entry to the currency exchange business is a powerful case-in-point.

Capitalising on consumers’ enduring frustration with the cost and time-lag involved in transferring money across international borders, Transferwise entered the market with a solution so cheap and simple that they have utterly disrupted the incumbent industry leaders and left them scrambling to catch up.

The moment you think you have ‘made it’, you have passed it. There is no room for complacency or arrogance in an increasingly complex and competitive world.

Healthy paranoia is by far the best antidote for complacency and arrogance. Operating every day like you have a target painted on your back will keep you on your toes.

It will ensure you stay hungry for the next opportunity and humble enough to remain open to new ways of doing things.

At the core of Facebook’s corporate DNA is a belief that could almost be a definition of healthy paranoia.

Mark Zuckerberg goes to great lengths to ensure that everyone in the business operates with this mentality: "If we don’t create the thing that kills Facebook, someone else will.”

Imagine if every member in your team came into work each day with that philosophy. While it may be an uncomfortable notion at first glance, this sort of healthy paranoia is exactly what’s required to stay on your A-game.

In conclusion

Ignoring or fighting the disruptions that are poised to impact your business is futile. In the face of change, the only option we have is to adapt.

To paraphrase the great Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, resisting change is like trying to hold your breath – even if you’re successful, it won’t end well.

It will be much the same in the business world in the coming years.

3. Foster healthy paranoia

The two essential attitudes of any disruption-proof business are hunger and humility.

The moment you think you have ‘made it’, you have passed it. There is no room for complacency or arrogance in an increasingly complex and competitive world.
Coffee And Tea For Creativity

4 scientific studies to enhance our creative juices

By WILL BURNS
editor@leaderonomics.com

I have an obsession and it is human creativity. It’s why I’m in the advertising business. It’s why I started an idea-generating company. And it’s why I crave scientific studies that may give us clues as to how we can improve our creativity. Since 2013, I’ve been reporting on Forbes.com the most interesting of those scientific studies and let’s just say those scientists have been busy. Check out the following four fascinating new studies.

1. Coffee + Nap = Creativity
   You may already know about the power of a short nap in the afternoon. That it can provide you with more energy and clearer thinking. Sleep does that by flushing out a brain-chemical that builds up after lots of brain activity called adenosine. Adenosine makes you feel tired, so the nap makes you feel refreshed. But get this. A study was done where subjects drank a cup of coffee just prior to taking a 20-minute nap. It takes our bodies about 20 minutes to process caffeine, so it really doesn’t kick in until right when you wake up. The sleep flushes out the adenosine and the caffeine increases the brain’s alertness. While the study didn’t measure creativity levels, per se, one showed significant improvement in memory tests for those who drank coffee and took a nap versus those who just drank coffee or took a nap. And memory is critical in the creative process.

2. Black tea increases creativity
   First it was alcohol, then coffee and now another liquid has been proven to increase creativity: black tea. Researchers at China’s Peking University conducted a study with 50 subjects where all of the subjects completed two creativity tasks. But one group was given a glass of water just prior to the studies and the other group was given a cup of hot black tea. The group who drank the hot tea performed significantly better than the water-drinking group on both creativity tests. Was it the caffeine? Well, what’s especially interesting about this study is that the creativity tests were quite short, taking 20 minutes in total. And caffeine takes at least 20 minutes to kick in. So it’s not the caffeine.
   The researchers suggest that it’s the mental state that a “cup of tea” puts people in – a relaxed state – which they believe is an optimum state for creativity. I’m not so sure about that – there are other variables here like hot vs. cold, other ingredients in the tea, etc but whatever it is, I’m drinking more tea.

3. Mindfulness meditation may be at odds with creativity
   Art Markman, professor of psychology and marketing at the University of Texas, recently suggested in an article in Inc. Magazine that mindfulness meditation may actually work against our creativity.

4. The placebo effect: Creativity is all in your head
   Okay, this study is almost embarrassing, but is wildly interesting. It’s from Lior Noy and Liron Rozenkranz at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel and it suggests that the placebo effect not only works for physical ailments, but as a way to increase our creativity. The study recruited two groups of people who went through a typical form of creativity test. Prior to each test, one group was asked to smell a pungent smell (like cinnamon) and told that this smell would increase their creativity. The other group was also asked to smell it, but were not told it would increase their creativity.

   Turns out the group who were told that the smell would improve their creativity performed significantly better at the creativity test. I know, it’s nuts, right? But think about that. If we believe we will be creative, then we are more likely to be. Speaks to the positive attitude that is so necessary for generating great ideas.

Creating the perfect sandwich

Bringing it all together

So there you have it. Four scientific studies that prove – yet again – that creativity is more of a skill than a talent. Or at least something we can meddle with, prod, and improve. I’ll keep my eye out for more. Time for some tea.

---

A McKinsey research shows a strong link between sleep and effective leadership. We also have World Sleep Day to be a celebration of sleep. Here are 10 practical ways to sleep smarter and better. Check out this infographic on Leaderonomics.com bit.ly/TBsleepdeprived

The study recruited two groups of people who went through a typical form of creativity test. Prior to each test, one group was asked to smell a pungent smell (like cinnamon) and told that this smell would increase their creativity. The other group was also asked to smell it, but were not told it would increase their creativity.

I don’t know about you, but I always assumed that meditation and a relaxed mind would only be beneficial to the creative process. But if you think about it against everything else we know about creativity, Markman’s claim makes sense.

What is mindfulness meditation if not being mindful of the now, this moment, this breath? Well, the result is that all the busy “thought traffic” we typically experience day-to-day is quelled, if not eliminated entirely. That’s great for healthy living, less stress, etc. But it’s the opposite of creativity. Creative thinking demands lots of thought traffic. Divergent thinking requires random thoughts to collide with other random thoughts.

Mindfulness meditation might just eliminate these critical ingredients of creativity. I’m not saying you shouldn’t practise meditation for all the other health benefits, but maybe not just prior to a big brainstorm session.

I don’t know about you, but I always assumed that meditation and a relaxed mind would only be beneficial to the creative process. But if you think about it against everything else we know about creativity, Markman’s claim makes sense.

What is mindfulness meditation if not being mindful of the now, this moment, this breath? Well, the result is that all the busy “thought traffic” we typically experience day-to-day is quelled, if not eliminated entirely. That’s great for healthy living, less stress, etc. But it’s the opposite of creativity. Creative thinking demands lots of thought traffic. Divergent thinking requires random thoughts to collide with other random thoughts.

Mindfulness meditation might just eliminate these critical ingredients of creativity. I’m not saying you shouldn’t practise meditation for all the other health benefits, but maybe not just prior to a big brainstorm session.

I don’t know about you, but I always assumed that meditation and a relaxed mind would only be beneficial to the creative process. But if you think about it against everything else we know about creativity, Markman’s claim makes sense.

What is mindfulness meditation if not being mindful of the now, this moment, this breath? Well, the result is that all the busy “thought traffic” we typically experience day-to-day is quelled, if not eliminated entirely. That’s great for healthy living, less stress, etc. But it’s the opposite of creativity. Creative thinking demands lots of thought traffic. Divergent thinking requires random thoughts to collide with other random thoughts.

Mindfulness meditation might just eliminate these critical ingredients of creativity. I’m not saying you shouldn’t practise meditation for all the other health benefits, but maybe not just prior to a big brainstorm session.
This habit will change you (if you can stand it)

To a More Creative and Happier You

By MINDA ZETLIN
editor@leaderonomics.com

WHAT if there was one simple thing you could do, at no cost and took no extra time, that would make you much more creative than you are now? What if it would also make you sleep better, and perhaps happier in general—would you do it? Well, here it is: Put away your smartphone. Not all the time, and not forever, but for a day, or part of a day.

This comes from Manoush Zomorodi, host of the NPR podcast “Note to Self,” and author of Bored and Brilliant: How Spacing Out Can Save Your Best Ideas. As the new mother of a colicky baby, Zomorodi, a former globe-trotting journalist, discovered first-hand how boredom can lead to some of our most innovative ideas, which she explains in her TED Talk.

Technology that dulls your mind

It turns out that there’s a neurological reason for this. When you’re bored and you let your mind wander, you slip away from purely conscious thought and begin dipping into your subconscious mind. It’s a similar effect to when you begin drifting off to sleep. Having that bit of subconscious thought in the mix allows you to have insights and make connections you might never make otherwise. A second benefit of putting away your smartphone, at least temporarily, is that smartphone use encourages multi-tasking. Multi-tasking not only reduces productivity, it actually shrinks your brain. And there’s another good reason to set aside your smartphone—and all other tempting technology: Most of the apps you use are designed to grab onto your attention and never let go.

Several former Facebook executives have come forward lately to recount how the service was deliberately designed to be as “sticky” as possible, keeping people glued to Facebook for minutes or hours as they intended to close the app and go on to something else. As a result, Zomorodi says the average human will spend two years of his or her life on Facebook. Facebook isn’t alone. Netflix, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Words with Friends, Candy Crush, Amazon, even plain old email...they’re all designed to draw you on to the next thing and the next, capturing as much of your time and brain power as they can.

Your desire to take control of your own time and attention is up against some of the most brilliant software engineers in the world. And, most of the time, they’re likely to win that battle and you’re likely to lose. This leaves you no time at all for the boredom and introspection Zomorodi says is so essential for creativity.

But you can fight back and take back at least some of your time. To help, Zomorodi created the “Bored and Brilliant Challenge”—a week-long series of smartphone-avoiding, boredom-encouraging tasks, designed to help you take control of your time and create a few empty spaces within it.

Ultimately, 20,000 listeners participated in the challenge. These are three of the most powerful.

1. Put your smartphone in your pocket.
   If you’re riding the bus or waiting in line at a coffee shop, or otherwise have a few minutes of empty time, you are likely to be in the habit of pulling out your phone or tablet and checking social media or email or perhaps playing a game or shopping. Resist that temptation. Leave your phone turned off and just...be.
   Stare out the window.
   Observe your surroundings.
   You might get bored, but that’s the whole idea.

2. Delete that app.
   You know the one. The one that eats up all your time even though you never mean it to.
   The one that’s like slipping into a black hole that you only emerge from an hour later, blinking and wondering what that “something” is, up to you, but Zomorodi invited listeners to “take note of one person, object, or interesting, uneventful detail you would have missed if your nose was glued to your phone.”

Now that you’re leaving your phone in your pocket, at least for a little while, take a look around you. What do you see?

3. Notice something.
   What if it would also make you smarter than you are now?

You might get bored, but that’s the key to productivity. Do you want to take control of your mobile technology, or will the technology, the platforms will decide for you? Zomorodi says is so essential for creativity. But you can fight back and take back at least some of your time. To help, Zomorodi created the “Bored and Brilliant Challenge”—a week-long series of smartphone-avoiding, boredom-encouraging tasks, designed to help you take control of your time and create a few empty spaces within it.

Ultimately, 20,000 listeners participated in the challenge. These are three of the most powerful.

1. Put your smartphone in your pocket.
   If you’re riding the bus or waiting in line at a coffee shop, or otherwise have a few minutes of empty time, you are likely to be in the habit of pulling out your phone or tablet and checking social media or email or perhaps playing a game or shopping. Resist that temptation. Leave your phone turned off and just...be.
   Stare out the window.
   Observe your surroundings.
   You might get bored, but that’s the whole idea.

2. Delete that app.
   You know the one. The one that eats up all your time even though you never mean it to.
   The one that’s like slipping into a black hole that you only emerge from an hour later, blinking and wondering...
Countering Misinformation In The Digital Age

Ask yourself these 4 questions before you click ‘Share’

By CHRISTIE CHUA
c christie.chua@leaderonomics.com

M OST of us are critical consumers when it comes to material goods. We tend to carry out in-depth research before purchasing big items such as phones and laptops, patiently going through articles and online reviews to get a better understanding of the pros and cons of our choice before making a decision.

We’re more than capable of analysing what’s worth our money, but all too often we fail at determining what information is worth our time. Becoming a critical consumer of information has never been more important, due to the current pervasiveness of social media and viral content online.

Unfortunately, anyone with access to the Internet can now publish their opinions, and not everyone feels an obligation to produce factually-accurate and unbiased content. Social media posts are typically reactive, and opinions often take precedence over facts. The ability for such posts to spread quickly compared to the reporting by traditional media outlets creates further opportunity for misinformation to be circulated.

The onus is therefore on us, the consumers, to carefully examine the information we are presented with before deciding what to do with it.

Here are four questions to consider before you hit that ‘Share’ or ‘Retweet’ button on social media.

1. How credible is the source of the claim?

As any good researcher would tell you, always ensure the source of your information is credible.

If you have difficulty in determining the credibility of a source, check against other credible websites such as The Associated Press and Reuters, and compare the information given. Utilise established fact-checking websites like Snopes.com, FactCheck.org (United States), and Boom (India) to help you decide if the information is true.

Read up on the issue, and – just like you would when you’re looking for a new laptop – actively seek the negative reviews.

It’s important to fully understand the downsides of your choice, so that you can decide if those weaknesses will be a deal-breaker, or if you can live with it because the strengths far outweigh the weaknesses.

If you won’t buy a laptop based on information from one website, you shouldn’t be so quick to believe information from a single online post either.

2. Is this the whole picture, or are you only seeing a snapshot of it?

Again, as any good researcher would tell you: Read the article in its entirety before you share it.

The danger in basing your opinions off one small portion is that the excerpt highlights what the individual wants you to see; this may not be an accurate representation of the full story.

Summaries should also be treated with caution, as they are an individual’s interpretation of the original content.

Make it a point to read the original content, so that you can be the judge of the credibility of the content. This is the least you can do, especially if you don’t have time to check multiple sources.

Information from secondary sources may be coloured by the opinions of others, so don’t build your case based solely on other people’s claims.

3. Are there hidden motives behind the claim?

This may seem very cynical, but it is wise to question the motives of the person making the claim, especially if it sounds quite far-fetched.

Ask yourself, “Does the individual have something to gain from making such claims?”

For example, Andrew Wakefield and his research associates who published a scientific paper in 1998 claiming that autism is strongly linked to measles, mumps, and rubella vaccines had falsified the data, and they did that to reap monetary benefits.

Though the research has been retracted and publicly discredited, its damaging effects are still seen globally today.

Some parents still refuse to vaccinate their children for fear of the potential side effects, contributing to regular outbreaks of measles across Europe over the years.

Such is the far-reaching consequences of misinformation. Even if someone doesn’t have a hidden agenda, their claims could still be driven by their personal beliefs, which are likely to be biased.

4. Are your personal beliefs influencing your reaction to the claim?

We naturally focus on information that confirms our existing beliefs, while filtering out information that goes against them – this is known as confirmation bias.

If you find yourself agreeing with a claim, ask yourself this: “Am I acknowledging this information because it (conveniently) fits in with my beliefs, or am I acknowledging it because it is true?”

And if you disagree with it, ask yourself if it’s because there’s a flaw in logic, or if it’s because the points raised force you to confront the flaws in your own beliefs.

In a nutshell

Not all information you receive online is true, especially in this age where social media and websites that thrive on click-bait articles, reign supreme.

Treat every day like it is April Fools’ Day, in that you are sceptical about everything you see and hear. Asking these questions will not only make you a more informed reader, it will also help you build stronger arguments.

When you can articulate why you support an issue without using phrases like “I support it just because I do,” your defence becomes all the more substantiated. And instead of resorting to name-calling, you can then engage the opposing side in an intellectual debate.

But of course, don’t just take my word for it – go do your own research on how to be a more critical consumer of information.
DURING the first few weeks of 2016, we said our goodbyes to three hugely imaginative non-conformists: David Bowie, Alan Rickman and Glenn Frey.

Each made an enormous impact on the world, and their respective works will surely continue to influence the generations after them.

The deaths of famous people like this actually tend to weigh heavily on our individual psyches. Reflecting on how their work affected us personally, we grieve their loss much in the way we would a family member’s or a close friend’s.

But we also take things one big step further. Often unconsciously, we take stock of our own lives in the context of theirs. We wonder about our influence in the world, what our legacies will be.

Many of us question whether the work we do has significance and come away feeling distressed by the comparison.

So, the release of an inspiring book by Wharton professor, Adam Grant couldn’t be better timed.

Author of the ground-breaking New York Times bestseller Give and Take, Grant has written, which Drawing on exhaustive research, Grant shows us that people who couldn’t be better timed.

But the guidance Grant offers his students ultimately applies to just about everyone: "We overlook all the ways just adopting a little more originality in our day-to-day lives can make the world more interesting, if not better. There are just so many different opportunities to seize and say, ‘I’m going to see if there’s a better way to do this.’"

Most of us have unfounded beliefs about the downsides of what would happen if we did step up. Renowned business executive Melody Hobson once observed that “there are so few originals in life, because people are afraid to speak up and stand out.”

But Originals proves that fear needlessly prevents us from maximising our own potential. In a conversation I had with Grant, he told me: “After spending years studying and interacting with truly original people, I am struck that their inner experience is not different from our own. What sets them apart is that, despite their fears, they take action anyway. They know in their hearts that failing would yield less regret than failing to try.”

Universal aspirations

"Most of us want to be more original." Grant says. He adds, "If you look at the American culture, individuality, self-expression, and uniqueness are huge priorities.”

Yet despite these being our core cultural values, because of a sense of risk, many of us lean toward fitting in rather than standing out. "We all have ideas that could improve the world around us – whether in our own workplace, community, or families," Grant told me, “and most of the time, we don’t speak up.”

The fear of being squashed and the expectation that sharing our ideas will prove futile are two of the biggest reasons we lay low. But Grant says most of us have unfounded beliefs about the downsides of what would happen if we did step up.

"A lot of people walk around with the theory that if you speak your mind, you’re going to cut your boss’s throat, or you may suffer as a result," he says.

"And most of the people who believe this have never seen this happen to anyone! Of course, challenges to the status quo should always be proposed thoughtfully and professionally. "But the odds that things will go well are much higher than most of us think."

Regret weighs tonnes

Research shows that there are very few people who speak up, champion new ideas, and end up regretting it. Instead, it’s those who fail to take action in life who end up saying, “I wish I had given it a try. I should have taken a little more initiative. I should have gone out on a limb.”

Grant believes that what really holds most people back from realising their full potential is that they idolise people who appear to be larger-than-life originals. "I hear it from students all the time," he says. "I’m never going to be a Steve Jobs, so why bother trying?"

But the guidance Grant offers his students ultimately applies to just about everyone: “We overlook all the ways just adopting a little more originality in our day-to-day lives can make the world more interesting, if not better. There are just so many different opportunities to seize and say, ‘I’m going to see if there’s a better way to do this.’"

"Most of us have never sold 100 million records, act in a Hollywood movie, or perform before thousands of screaming fans, but we may not have to. The lesson of Originals – in the words of Bowie – is that we still can be heroes."

None of us was put on earth to be small.
Creativity And Innovation
Your keys to a successful organisation

By DANIEL BURRUS
editor@leaderonomics.com

The companies that have thrived over the long haul are those who are the most creative and innovative. These organisations don’t copy what others do; instead, they may use innovative ideas from others as a springboard to come up with a unique application, product, or service for themselves.

They tend to differentiate themselves from the competition. If they see another company copying what they do, they create something new and better.

In other words, they are able to leverage their creativity and their innovative capabilities to attain long-term success. Would you like to be one of those organisations? You can be.

In fact, all companies can be more creative and innovative regardless of their expertise, product, or service.

When you apply creativity and innovation to every aspect of your business, you are able to stay ahead of a changing marketplace.

What is creativity?
Creativity is a function of knowledge, curiosity, imagination and evaluation.

The greater your knowledge base and level of curiosity, the more ideas, patterns, and combinations you can achieve, which then correlates to creating new and innovative products and services.

But merely having the knowledge does not guarantee the formation of new patterns.

The bits and pieces must be shaken up and iterated in new ways. Then the ideas must be evaluated and developed into usable ideas. In other words, there really is a process.

To help you master that process, you must first understand three important levels of creativity:

1. Discovery

As the name implies, it’s when you become aware of (or stumble upon) something – you discover it.

For example, there is art called “discovered art.” It might be a rock with a unique shape or a piece of wood with an interesting pattern. If you have ever purchased a piece of natural stone or wood art, that art was discovered art. Many inventions start with a discovery.

2. Invention

Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. But you have to ask yourself, “Would the telephone have been invented without Bell?”

The answer is yes. Eventually the telephone would have been invented because the science was there. It might have taken longer, but it would have happened. So, while invention is higher than discovery, it’s something that is going to happen. If you don’t invent it, someone else will.

3. Creation

This is the highest level of creativity. For example, the stage play, Othello, is genuinely a creation. Elizabethan drama would have gone on without Shakespeare, but no one else would have written Othello.

Similarly, there are things that only your organisation can create! The key is tapping in to what those things are.

Here’s an example of how this could play out in your company. While at a conference, you might discover a tool, a technology, or a process that you didn’t know before.

You purchase the tool for your staff, and that discovery helps everyone work better. After some time, that discovery may also spur an innovative idea of how to apply the discovery differently.

You may then use that innovative idea as an inspiration that yields something never seen before, something created by your company that helps you and your customers. That’s how the three levels of creativity can work together.

Realise that creativity and innovation are different.

Creativity refers to generating new and novel ideas. Innovation refers to the application of an idea and, in many cases, is a collaborative enterprise. Innovation is applied creativity.

When you apply creativity and innovation to every aspect of your business, you are able to stay ahead of a changing marketplace.

10 strategies to increase your creativity and innovation

Now that you understand the various levels of creativity, you can implement some strategies that will boost your company’s ability to create and innovate.

1. Truly creative people have developed their ability to observe and use all of their senses, something which can get dull over time. Take time to “sharpen the blade” and take everything in.

2. Innovation is based on knowledge. Therefore, you need to continually expand your knowledge base. Read things you don’t normally read.

3. Your perceptions may limit your reasoning. Be careful about how you’re perceiving things. Defer judgment.

4. Practise guided imagery so you can “see” a concept come to life.

5. Let your ideas “incubate” by taking a break from them. For example, when I'm working on a big business project, one of the best things I can do to take a break from it is play my guitar or take a ride on my motorcycle. It shifts my brain into another place and helps me be more innovative and creative.

6. Experience as much as you can. Exposure puts more ideas into your subconscious. Actively seek out new experiences to broaden your experience portfolio.

7. Treat patterns as part of the problem. Recognising a new pattern is very useful but be careful not to become part of it.

8. Redefine the problem completely. One of the lines I’ve been sharing is: “Your problem is not the problem; there is another problem. When you define the real problem, you would have solved it long ago because all problems have solutions.

9. Look where others aren’t looking to see what others aren’t seeing.

10. Come up with ideas at the beginning of the innovation process, and then stop. Many times, we come up with several ideas and start innovating. Then we come up with more ideas and never get a single idea done. At some point, you have to turn off the idea generation part of the process and really work on the innovation and execution part to bring a project to life.

Create your own success
The more creative and innovative you and your team members are, the more long-term success you’ll achieve.

So, rather than constantly chasing the “next big idea” in your industry, bring creativity and innovation into what you’re currently doing.
Enthusiasm = Wholeheartedness

7 tips to nurture it

BY DAN ROCKWELL
editor@leaderonomics.com

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Nearly all the great improvements, discoveries, inventions, and achievements which have elevated and blessed humanity have been the triumphs of enthusiasm." – Orison Swett Marden

Meaningful effort. Enthusiasm indicates wholeheartedness.

7 ways to nurture enthusiasm in a half-hearted world

1. Don’t compare yourself with slackers. It’s not fair that you work hard and someone else drifts. Forget about it. Resentment quenches enthusiasm.

2. Notice low enthusiasm and take action to expel it in yourself. Low enthusiasm insults your humanity. You’re better than half-heartedness.

3. Send chronic complainers to your competitors. Complainers love explaining why half-heartedness is appropriate.

4. Do your best to hang out with enthusiastic people. Those who delight in complaining, criticizing, and gossip destroy enthusiasm.

5. Enjoy appreciation, but don’t need it. You are seldom appreciated as you deserve. Painful labour done enthusiastically is completed sooner.

6. Have enough confidence to learn difficult work with enthusiasm.

7. Do difficult work with enthusiasm.

Confidence-building 101 for leaders

When confidence declines, enthusiasm heads for the door. If you want to build enthusiasm in your team, instil them with confidence.

Here are some ways:

• Your confidence fuels confidence. Believe in your team’s ability to deliver meaningful results.

• Remember people’s effort and contributions. When you remember someone’s effort, you instil them with enthusiasm to keep working. “I remember when you…”

• Discuss and honour progress. “Tell me about the progress you’re making.”

• What’s different about you?”

Leadership without enthusiasm is soul-sucking drudgery.

Conclusion

What are your thoughts? How might leaders build the confidence of others?

How might leaders nurture and protect their own enthusiasm?

The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.

― Sylvia Plath

What can the act of riding a bicycle possibly teach us about leading well? Growing up in Taiping, Perak, Dr Stan Amaladas’ bicycle was his main mode of transportation. He shares the lessons he learnt from riding his bicycle in his latest article. Read them at: bit.ly/SAbikerides

Political and social upheaval, coupled with technological disruption, has altered the playing field that businesses were once so familiar with. Thian Woon Foong shares how companies can effectively prepare and develop leaders for this new reality. Listen to the podcast: bit.ly/RYGleadership4

For more insights, visit us at: www.leaderonomics.com/bm or follow us on Facebook at: @LeaderonomicsBM
‘What Have You Accomplished?’

Here are some ‘tricky’ job interview questions, along with some of the best answers.

By JEFF HADEN
editor@leaderonomics.com

SOME job interviewers (including chief executive officers) take an unusual approach to interview questions, and most job interviews involve the most common questions and answers. Yet most job interviews also include at least a few questions designed to reveal not just what a candidate thinks, but what he or she has actually done: Goals achieved, skills attained, situations encountered, actions taken.

Since the past is a reasonable indication of the future, here are some great interview questions intended to find out what job candidates have done. (And if you’re a job candidate, I’ve also included a guide to preparing your answers to these questions.)

1. “Tell me about a goal you recently achieved. What did your initial plan look like? What worked particularly well?”

This is a great icebreaker question. Any candidate who can’t talk in detail about a goal achieved is likely to be a terrible candidate. Most candidates will describe a goal that was set for them, a plan that they were in large part given, and then the steps they took to achieve the goal. And that’s fine, but what you’re really looking for are candidates who set their own goals, created their own plans, and then not only followed those plans but adapted to circumstances and changing conditions along the way.

After all, the best employees are able not just to plan well, but also to respond and adjust well.

2. “Tell me about a goal you didn’t manage to achieve. What happened? What did you do as a result?”

Disappointment, adversity, and failure are a part of life – both professional and personal. That’s why everyone has failed. (In fact, most successful people have failed a lot more often than the average person; that’s why they’re successful now.)

Most candidates will take responsibility for failing. (The ones who don’t, you definitely don’t want to hire.)

Good candidates don’t place the blame on other people, or outside factors. They realise that stuff happens, and a key element of success is having the ability to adjust.

Great candidates take responsibility but also learn key lessons from the experience, especially about themselves.

3. “Tell me about the last time someone got upset with you. What did you do in response? How did it turn out?”

Conflict is also a fact of professional life. Every job at some point requires dealing with conflict. (Possibly the last time someone got upset is the time the candidate raised an uncomfortable issue.)

The candidates you definitely don’t want to hire place the blame on other people – and place the responsibility for making the situation better on the other person, too.

Good candidates worked to address and resolve the problem; they didn’t shy away from conflict but dealt with it in a professional (and hopefully emotionally intelligent) manner.

And they can share what they learnt from the experience. (My favourite job candidates are the ones who consistently share what they’ve learnt – because those candidates are consistently working to improve themselves.)

4. “Tell me about the first three months at your last job. What did you do? What did you accomplish?”

The best employees don’t want to spend their first few weeks just learning about the organisation, getting their feet wet, and finding their way. They want to hit the ground running. That means they can describe:

• how they determined their job created value, and how that helped them focus on doing the right things,
• how they immediately applied the skills they brought to the job,
• how they identified practical changes – for greater efficiency, or quality, or customer satisfaction, etc – and then found ways to implement those changes.

The best candidates are self-starters. They don’t wait to be given tasks, duties, responsibilities – they dove in.

After all, every employee is an investment, so don’t want to start seeing a return on that investment as soon as possible.