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■ In a game of football, who do you think are the unsung heroes? Who ensures conditions are just right for these players to be at their peak to bring glory to self and nation? Check out this thought-provoking article on Leaderonomics.com: [bit.ly/footballheroes](http://bit.ly/footballheroes)

■ If a picture is worth a thousand words, Albert Einstein would appear to be simply having the most joyful time on his bike. In fact, Einstein wrote that he conceptualised the theory of relativity while riding his bicycle. So, there is more in riding a bicycle that meets the eye. Read it here on Leaderonomics.com: [bit.ly/Sabikerides](http://bit.ly/Sabikerides)

■ Justin Ooi T.Y. has 16 years of experience in corporate communications and marketing. His professional experience provides him with rich insights in public relations and brand-building through strategic engagement with stakeholders. Who are your unsung heroes, and why? Write to us at [editor@leaderonomics.com](mailto:editor@leaderonomics.com) – we would love to hear from you!

■ While the most part of this article was written by Justin, Lay Hsuan couldn't help but to include a short portion of her thoughts of Abe's mothers in this story. She supports the content team whenever her service is needed. To recommend some credible leadership resources for her to read (books, magazines and web-sites included), write to her at [editor@leaderonomics.com](mailto:editor@leaderonomics.com).

By **JUSTIN OOI T.Y.**  
and **LIM LAY HSUAN**  
[editor@leaderonomics.com](mailto:editor@leaderonomics.com)

IT'S easy to miss the invisible engines that keep the wheels turning in the organisations where we work or the communities that we live in.

Here are the five most valuable characteristics of unsung heroes who work silently but steadily among us.

**1 HUMILITY**  
Let's start with humility, one of the endearing but elusive traits found mostly among unsung heroes today. Everybody loves humble leaders and supportive colleagues, but in today's Twitter trigger-happy age – led by the United States (US) President Donald Trump, no less – most of us would prefer to be the star of the day (these writers included).

Humility is also probably what makes modest heroes, 'unsung' to begin with. They are not likely to post their achievements on Facebook to get the most 'Likes' possible, simply because they perceive such acts of service and standards of excellence as part of their job.

Other times, extraordinary efforts of ordinary heroes just go unnoticed because of their status or lack thereof.

Take the *lai sui muis* (Cantonese) or Kongsu Women during the Independence period of Malaysia (Malaya), for example. "The *lai sui* who?!" one may ask.

Precisely. These humble female labourers were unheralded heroes of Malaysia's nation-building process.

Armed with nothing more than their bare hands, shoulder poles and buckets, these resilient women toiled at muddy construction sites in the 1950s and 1960s to bring us iconic buildings such as the Subang Airport, the Parliament House, Stadium Negara and more.

Humble people are also willing to acknowledge their mistakes. In fact, they are glad to learn from them.

So, they continue to improve and make the organisation they work for better. Often, quietly and steadily.

Of course, there are many loud and visible leaders, who have also exercised humility when warranted.

No Malaysian can forget the video in which our Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is seen teary-eyed, explaining to a young child why he is still working at age 92 – admitting he has made mistakes in the past and acknowledging there is much to do in rebuilding this country in his final years.

There were probably many Malaysians who were moved to vote for him and the then opposition parties in the 14th General Election (GE14), which led to a sweeping change of the Government after 60 years under the previous administration.

Malaysia's GE14 was celebrated as a triumph for democracy in Asia and a bloodless coup.

Of course, there were other macro issues such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), rising cost of living and financial issues, but it's amazing how a little humility can go a long way in transforming the lives of many, if not an entire nation.

Meanwhile, true humility is hard to find because, ironically, the moment you think you are humble, you no longer are.

**2 EMPATHY**  
We often hear that behind every great man, there is a great woman. In the case of Abraham Lincoln (we'll call him Abe thereafter), the 16th US President, there were two – her birth mother Nancy Hanks Lincoln who passed away when Abe was nine, and her stepmother Sarah Bush Lincoln. Her 'favourite' question is: "Are you still working? Or just looking after the kids these days?"  
As a deep introvert, she would just answer affirmatively to the latter. Though it would be interesting to see her give a no-holds-barred answer like,

# UNsung HEROES

## WHAT MAKE THESE LEADERS TICK



developmental years. It enabled the unassuming, self-taught gawky lawyer from Illinois to become one of the greatest presidents of the US, remembered for his extraordinary character traits – honesty, resilience, integrity and empathy.

Sarah Bush, in particular, was said to have dressed young Abe up to 'look more human' when she was brought into the family's unprivileged living conditions, according to Jeff Oppenheimer, author of *That Nation Might Live: One Afternoon with Lincoln's Stepmother*.

Under Sarah's motherly care, Abe developed a great hunger to read all the books he could get his hands on. It showed in his later years of leadership, as he communicated some of these ideals he had read before through his well-known oratory skills.

She also helped Abe develop a feminine touch as an empathetic listener. It was a 'rare' soft skill back in his day, especially as a political leader, which eventually served Abe well in his position as a president.

Working with his core team – who initially hated each other – he turned his political rivals into allies and earned their utmost respect for him as the commander-in-chief who listened to other people's point of views, before he made decision for the country.

**3 COMMITTED TO A CAUSE**  
Unsung heroes are committed to give more than they take. They are focused on the big picture and are willing to sacrifice time and effort for the good of others, whether in the family or the organisation they work with.

**Case 1: Homemakers**  
The first example that comes to mind are modern-day homemakers such as my wife [in reference to writer Justin Ooi's wife].

Despite holding a Master's degree in biomedicine and being an award-winning writer, she gave up her career as medical writer to focus on looking after our twins when they were born three years ago.

Her 'favourite' question is: "Are you still working? Or just looking after the kids these days?"

As a deep introvert, she would just answer affirmatively to the latter.

Though it would be interesting to see her give a no-holds-barred answer like,

"Oh, I'm not writing anymore if that's what you mean. But I'm breaking my back round the clock looking after my two boisterous twins and husband.

"I'm just the maid who wakes up at the crack of dawn every day to prepare their breakfast. Even though I was awoken several times the night before by my boy or girl while my hubby snores on blissfully.

"I'm also the chauffeur for the kids, driving them to kindergarten and clinics, and the nanny who cleans their puke, other mess.

"I'm also the teacher who taught them how to speak, sing and recite ABC and count 123. I'm their life-coach who toilet-trained them, showed them how to ask for help without screaming their heads off and say 'please', 'thank you' and other basic courtesies.

"I'm the cook who shops for groceries, plans a varied daily menu and prepares delicious, nutritious meals for my family.

"I double up as the cleaner throughout the day – sweeping, mopping, scrubbing and doing endless piles of laundry.

"Because I have spare time left in the evening, I'm also a therapist whenever my husband comes back from a stressful day at work.

"I listen and dispense subtle advice so he thinks he comes up with most of the solutions himself. Did I also mention that I handle the household finances, juggling the bills and our budget?"

"But to answer your original question, no, I'm no longer working. I'm 'just' a homemaker these days."

Yup, that would be one heck of a scenario.

**Case 2: Teachers and volunteers**  
Looking beyond a happy home, other quiet heroes we would like to highlight are teachers, and polling agents and counting agents

(PACAs) of Malaysia's electoral system. Sure, we celebrate Teachers' Day once a year around the world.

After all, they are the women and men whom we entrust to teach our children to read and write, count, think, solve problems and groom to become overall decent human beings.

Yet, we pay them salaries that are a fraction of what pop stars and professional footballers earn in a single concert or club match.

**4 COURAGE TO DO THE RIGHT THING**

Real courage is required to follow one's conviction. Unsung heroes take action, rise against status quo and make changes for the betterment of others.

At a backpacking trip in China five years ago covering Beijing, Chengde, Hangzhou, Suzhou and Shanghai, I [Justin] noted Mao Zedong's ubiquitous influence was evident throughout the country.

**5 CONSISTENT EXCELLENCE AND TEAMWORK**

Attention to detail and teamwork are two core traits of those who contribute behind the scenes. They work towards the team's objective and deliver quality performance every day, whether for major projects and minor tasks.

"It is the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen," said legendary basketball coach John Wooden.

This brings us to retired National Basketball Association (NBA) All-Star Scottie Pippen, who doesn't get nearly enough credit for his achievements. He played alongside the great Michael Jordan for the Chicago Bulls in the late 1980s and 90s.

Pippen was consistent and reliable, averaging about 20 points and seven rebounds per game in his prime, while playing top notch defence.

Constantly honing his all-round skills as a player, whether attacking the basket with high-flying athleticism, chasing down opposing players to block shots or improving his jump shot over the years, Pippen was Jordan's trusty partner, both in offence and defence.

He sought to complement Jordan's effort night after night in NBA games rather than try to outshine the superstar.

Together, this dynamic duo scored about half the team's points in most games. This ultimately led to the Chicago Bulls winning six NBA championships, one of the most enduring dynasty in the modern era of basketball.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

So let's ask ourselves:

- What are we currently doing towards continual excellence as individuals?
- How can we help improve our team's performance as a steadfast leader or a supporting player?

Ultimately, the people who genuinely want to contribute to the team and help others, want to do better and be better, whether they receive credit or not.

In the process, they improve the lives of those around them and inspire others to achieve greater heights.

# FLOWER POWER

## 3 LIFE LESSONS FROM THESE BEAUTIES



By **ASEEM PURI**  
[editor@leaderonomics.com](mailto:editor@leaderonomics.com)

WHY do flowers exist? They exist so that others can live. The only reason flowers exist is for others.

Hence, they are prized, valued, admired, loved and are precious.

Considering how vital they are to life, here are three lessons we can learn from how a flower lives its life:

**1. Flowers give out beauty**

They are often found in various colours; adding beauty to our world, our lives, our homes, our weddings and our festivals.

You, too, can do this every day. Offer a smile to the people you meet, a "how are you" to a colleague, a compliment to your spouse – simple ways to become a beautiful bloom.

**2. Flowers give themselves to others**

The whole reason flowers exist is to produce pollen which is then used to produce other flowers and plants. They create life every day.

With your time, energy, ideas and resources, you can too.

Give a little to charity, help someone without seeking a reward, help educate a child, feed someone who is hungry, mentor a younger person, take a teaching class in a subject that you know well.

Give yourself to others and experience the enormous pleasure of creating a better life for someone else.

**3. Flowers collaborate with everyone else**

To create life, flowers realise that they cannot do it alone. They need to collaborate with other 'stakeholders' in the universe to send pollen to all corners of the world.

They depend on the wind, insects,

and birds – to spread their pollen. The moment we realise that our success is a result of our relationships, and we invite others to come to our help, we start to accelerate our success.

We do this by actively listening to others, asking for their advice and support, inviting them to partner with us and acknowledging their contributions.

**WRAPPING IT UP**

Flowers play a vital role in the ecosystem and contribute greatly to the lives of others; they represent an embodiment of love.

Let's choose to emulate the lives of flowers.

Let's share our scent and our essence with the whole universe. That's the only way to live a beautiful and happy life.

■ Aseem is a digital coach and a faculty trainer with Leaderonomics. He has many years of experience creating disruptive online and offline campaigns around the world. To engage him for digital transformation of your organisation, email us at [info@leaderonomics.com](mailto:info@leaderonomics.com).

We all know we should be kind to others – our families, co-workers, neighbours, strangers. Everyone benefits. But did you know that kindness benefits your brain? Read on Leaderonomics.com to find out more: [bit.ly/kindness-brain](http://bit.ly/kindness-brain)

While we seem to be doing a whole lot of communicating, we seem to be struggling with connecting. Learn how a simple banana made a difference in someone's day at: [bit.ly/2MSQ35B](http://bit.ly/2MSQ35B)