THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MUSIC

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Music has a powerful effect on your brain, and smart people know how to affect their brains. Terry Small explores this idea at bit.ly/musicaffectsyourbrain

Music has been the cornerstone of every civilization, great and small, past and present. A rhythm, melody, tone, and tempo have been woven into the tapestry of cultures across the world, unique and possessing magic within it to stir the soul. An otolaryngologist from Johns Hopkins says: “There are few things that stimulate the brain the way music does. If you want to keep your brain engaged throughout the aging process, listening to or playing music is a great tool. It provides a total brain workout.”

Studies carried out by experts at Johns Hopkins has revealed insights into how music not only lifts your spirits, but perhaps, even boost productivity? Here are three ways:

1. RECALL A MEMORY FROM LONG AGO

Humans by nature, are creatures of association. We associate smells and sounds with memories. Music has the power to invoke suppressed or long-forgotten memories.

If you’re trying to remember something you’ve forgotten, reach for familiar music – especially something from the same time period you’re trying to recall. Listening to it again joins your memory and brings you back to that particular point of time.

2. JUMP-START YOUR CREATIVITY

We all vibe differently, that is we all react differently to music. Identify the type of music that works for you.

What may seem therapeutic to someone may have the opposite effect on you. Some people work best with music that has lyrics to it, whereas others prefer instrumentals or natural sounds.

The right music will help clear your mind and allow you to think clearly, therefore, awakening your creative senses.

3. BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

Several studies have been conducted on how music can improve efficiency and make you more productive at work.

However, it’s important to note that not all types of music are suitable for the office! Some can hinder your progress while others will help you move along faster.

Music is a great tool. It provides a total brain workout, therefore, awakening your creative mind and allow you to think clearly, prefer instrumentals or naturistic sounds.

By ROUBEENI MOHAN
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LOOK BEYOND YOURSELF

5 LESSONS TO HELP YOU SUCCEED FASTER

BY ROSHAN THIRAN
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I’m often asked, “What’s the number one mistake that people make when they’re trying to achieve their goals?” Whether it’s closing a deal, chasing a promotion, or starting up a business, what’s the common pitfall for go-getters?

What I’ve noticed over the years is that even high achievers can make this critical error — they make their goal all about themselves. When the close is stalling, the customer should be grateful and accept my deal. When a promotion is up for grabs, the boss should recognise my talents and hard work. When I’m starting up a business, people should be aware that my product is the best the market has to offer.

It may seem counter-intuitive in our competitive world, but it remains a neglected open secret.

Understanding many of us have the hunger to achieve our dreams no matter what it takes. Sadly, human nature is such that we always expect things to go our way, for people to recognise our value and potential, and for the road ahead to be smooth all the way.

Those who have created their own success stories know that life doesn’t always flow in our favour, and so, they take necessary steps to ensure that even if they’re thrown off course, they can quickly get back on track.

Let’s take a look at five lessons we can all use to build a sense of perspective, resilience, and determination in order to help us achieve our goals faster:

1 GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

Our ego can be a powerful driver in helpful ways, but if we let it run wild, it can rob us of seeing other points of view, empathising with others, and deploying patience when it’s needed.

All of this inhibits our learning, which means that our growth becomes stunted — and all because we prefer the comfort of being in our own bubble. By actively questioning our assumptions, views and biases, and taking the time to really listen to others, we can benefit much more than we imagine in the short and long run.

2 LOOK TO RE-FRAME (AND LEARN FROM) SETBACKS

People who display mental strength build the foundations of a strong mind by looking for the lessons and opportunities that come from setbacks, rather than to see them as failures.

So much psychological energy is wasted when we dwell on what might have been or the perceived unfairness of our situation. For example, if you get passed over for a promotion, one choice is to ruminate and grow bitter about the missed opportunity. A productive way to handle it would be in re-framing the setback to see it as a means to figure out which skills you need or which areas you need to strengthen, and work at making those improvements for the next time a promotion comes around.

Failure is never final, but it is always a great teacher to the willing student.

3 SEEK HONEST FEEDBACK

It’s great to hear from others what they think we’re good at, and it’s certainly the case that leaders should praise their team whenever it’s called for.

Having said that, if we want to improve our abilities and raise our game to the next level, it’s clearly a good idea to know how we can do that and the ways in which we might be holding ourselves back.

By soliciting honest feedback, we not only get a sense of where we need to improve when it comes to our skills; we also get an insight into how others perceive us and this can prove valuable when it comes to reflecting on how we can become better in our interactions with people.

4 BE OPEN TO NEW IDEAS AND INFORMATION

How many people stop growing because they stop learning, or feel that their ways don’t need revising or updating? Any successful person you can think of today possesses this valuable trait — they never stop being students and are always on the lookout to learn new ideas, read about the latest developments, and discover what lies beyond their own field of knowledge.

The world continues to change rapidly, and new ways of doing things more efficiently and effectively are constantly being discovered. Always keep yourself open to new trends, seek out new ideas and information and, as a result, you’ll avoid being set in your ways.

5 WHEN MOTIVATION FAILS, CHOOSE DISCIPLINE

There isn’t a single person who feels great all the time, every day. We all have those moments when we struggle to motivate ourselves in order to do what needs to be done.

When you focus on creating value for others; when you’re all about solving people’s problems; when the last thing you think about is the bottom line, the return on investment will pay you back handsomely especially when you have the right motivation and pay attention to what really matters.

Where motivation is lacking, discipline never fails. Sometimes — to get the ball rolling — we might need to kick-start our discipline by, say, telling someone we respect about a particular goal and then holding ourselves accountable for achieving that goal.

Motivation is great when it works, but when it doesn’t, neither do you. Find ways to ensure you’ll be disciplined to make the most of every day and you’ll be farther along the road than those who are sitting still, waiting to be inspired.
BATTLING STRESS AND NEGATIVITY

4 WAYS TO CULTIVATE POSITIVE EMOTIONS

By SANDY CLARKE & DR EUGENE YJ TEE

WHEN we read about the benefits of mindfulness, we often come across advice on how we can deal effectively with our negative emotions. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), for instance, offers suggestions on how we can be mindful towards stressors, and the accompanying negative emotions.

One key implication of the MBSR approach is how it helps us distance ourselves from stress-inducing events. This helps us to respond rather than react, to our stressors.

However, less is mentioned in terms of how we can actually cultivate positive and pleasant emotional states through mindfulness.

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS ARE VITAL TO OUR SURVIVAL

Negative emotions urge us to respond quickly: stemming from our instinct to respond to immediate threats and dangers. Fear, for example, serves as a crucial psychological alarm system that first alerts us to an impending threat, priming us to act in the interest of safety and self-preservation.

Conversely, positive emotions don’t appear to serve a clear function or purpose. This might seem like a peculiar statement to make. After all, we tend to desire positive emotions and want to experience them regularly.

In most cases, we want to feel joyful, contented and loved. It’s rare, even odd, for one to wish for distress, dissatisfied or unloved.

POSITIVE EMOTIONS ARE VITAL TO OUR WELL-BEING

While we can see a clear function born from unpleasant emotions (as in the above example of fear), there appears to be very little purpose when it comes to positive emotions.

Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson, however, proposes that positive emotions do have an important purpose. Emotions such as joy, contentment, love, gratitude, and amusement do two things. First, they broaden our perceptions of our circumstances, and second, they build important psychological resources for effective and healthy functioning.

Contrasted with unpleasant emotions, positive emotions are what help us explore, grow, and generate psychological resources that sustain our well-being. Fredrickson refers to this as her ‘broaden-and-build’ theory of positive emotions.

Being mindful of the function of our emotions helps us realise that it not only feels good to have positive emotions, but also that these pleasant states are beneficial for our physical and psychological health.

MINDFULNESS HELPS COUNTER NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Studies show that frequent experiences of positive emotions are associated with longevity and physical health. This raises an important question: How do we cultivate more positivity in our lives? This is where being mindful helps.

Let’s consider the simple example of gratitude. Gratitude is a positive emotion that is felt when we are thankful for the people and things we have in our lives that make us feel happy, joyful and blessed.

Often, whatever we receive is given to us thanks to the generosity of someone else, or from favourable circumstances. However, it is all too easy for us to fixate on whatever we feel is going wrong or is unpleasant in our lives.

We gripe about the long queue as we wait for our morning coffee, that our partners do not spend enough time with us, or that we are disservicing of that work bonus despite difficult economic situations.

But turning into our experience and being mindful of our situation allows us to be grateful for things we already have – and to realise that we have so much to be thankful for.

By shifting our perspective, we can then appreciate the fact that someone else is making the coffee for us, that our partners are probably working hard to clear off their work so that we can enjoy a night out during the weekend together, and that we still have a job despite economic constraints.

This doesn’t mean that we should be naïve and remain blindly optimistic about any unpleasant situations we face. Rather, being grateful for what we already have helps us cultivate a bit more positivity, enabling us to see that our circumstances are not quite as hopeless or distressing as our negative emotions make them out to be.

In one study, depressed individuals who participated in regular mindfulness practice experienced momentary positive emotions. Any unpleasant emotions that happened to arise were, to put it simply, dissolved by the positive emotions cultivated through mindfulness.

If you are like most people, you probably have a tendency to fixate on and accentuate the negatives over the positives.

As this study suggested, we can undo our tendency to incline too much towards negative thinking, and replace it with more positive, healthy mental states.

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While it would be absurd to propose that we could feel positive all the time, most of us need to redress the balance.

However, being under too much stress can cause considerable mental, physiological and physical problems over the short and long term.

Having said that, we can work with our minds in a way that requires minimal effort to ensure that we reduce any unnecessary stress.

By regularly taking just five to ten minutes per day to cultivate positive states, we can make all the difference to our emotional well-being and overall health. Try it out, and see how it goes.
EIGHTY per cent of the hours streamed on Netflix are of programmes promoted by its recommender system. I guess that’s what we have to thank for the indulgent binge watching with all guilty of from time to time! Like it or not, the streaming service has an uncanny ability to predict our viewing preferences and leave us unwittingly hooked on a range of shows we might never have encountered otherwise.

Sitting at the core of its clever system is robust personalisation, and it is driven by machine learning.

WHAT IS AN ‘OFFSET’?
Since the forgotten days of mail order movies, Netflix has built a business model on the identification of patterns in our likes and dislikes. Such is its ability to pinpoint our preferences, Netflix now counts as one of the world’s best organisations when it comes to the use of artificial intelligence for personalisation.

At the centre of this personalisation is a suggestion engine built upon sophisticated mathematics that calculates the conditional probability that something will happen. Alongside a series of complex interactions, the engine bases its predictions on viewer ratings and history. For instance, will someone like the movie Top Gun because he had also given a high rating to Rocky (my favourite movie?)

Work is full of offsets. Some employees are faster, while others are slower. Some are highly experienced, others are novices. Some are more diligent, others flippant.

As the company explains: “We want to estimate the conditional probability that a subscriber will like a film, given his or her particular viewing history, in light of the ratings data from all other subscribers. This will allow us to personalise film recommendations for each viewer.”

To overcome this challenge, Netflix uses something called an offset – a gauge of how far something deviates from the average. In their world, some movies are more popular than others and therefore have a positive offset.

Similarly, some viewers are more cynical and rate movies more harshly, which gives them a negative offset.

Understanding this offset concept is critical in making a personalised recommendation. After all, an average is not unique.

The winners of the 2009 Netflix US$1 million challenge to improve the company’s prediction system by 10 per cent or more went beyond a viewer’s base rating.

They highlighted the importance of understanding a rating in the context of other ratings and derived their predictions from some fundamental equations:

\[
\text{overall average across all films} + \text{a particular film's offset} + \text{the viewer's specific offset} + \text{the user-film interaction.}
\]

A MODEL FOR LEADERSHIP
Today, Netflix uses this information to make better recommendations to subscribers, and you should be employing similar tactics every day when you lead.

Work is full of offsets. Some employees are faster, while others are slower. Some are highly experienced, others are novices. Some are more diligent, others flippant.

The list goes on and it applies to tasks as much as employees: some tasks are more complicated than others, some require teamwork while others can be tackled single-handedly.

When we view people and work in these terms, we can learn a great deal about leading from Netflix. In fact, when I learnt their recommender equation, it instantly made sense to me. I learnt their recommender equation, it instantly made sense to me. I imagined that the overall average rating for movies is 3.7. With this as a baseline – if Rocky has an average rating of 3.9 – then the movie offset is 0.2. Then, if a viewer’s average rating of movies is 3.6, the viewer offset is -0.1. In this case, the baseline rating is 3.8 (3.7 + 0.2 - 0.1). We need to break down work in the same way.

There is an average productivity and performance for work, then there is an offset depending on the task (work completed) and, more specifically, on the trigger (what causes the work to be done). Just as Netflix uses its offset data to make recommendations to its subscribers, breaking work down in this way gives you a deeper understanding of how to maximise performance and productivity.

Why not use this model to create your own personalised recommender? By understanding the offset, you can become more specific in your leadership nudges and actions.

Dr Tommy Weir is a CEO coach and author of Leadership Dubai Style. To connect with him, drop us a note at editor@leaderonomics.com.
WHILE there are many factors that contribute to great leadership quality, it is clear that a leader must be able to connect at the emotional level. That’s what research shows. In his book, ‘The Emotional Intelligence of Great Leaders,’ Daniel Goleman highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in the workplace.

Emotional intelligence, according to Goleman, is the ability to connect with the emotional state of others and oneself, and it is a key factor in effective leadership.

Goleman defines emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one’s emotions, and to recognize, understand, and influence the emotions of others. He identifies five key components of emotional intelligence:

1. Self-awareness: Understanding one’s own emotions and how they impact one’s behavior.
2. Self-regulation: The ability to control one’s emotions and impulses.
3. Motivation: The drive to achieve personal and professional goals.
4. Empathy: The ability to understand and share the feelings of others.
5. Social skills: The ability to use one’s emotional intelligence to influence and manage relationships with others.

Goleman argues that emotional intelligence is more important than IQ in determining success in the workplace. He states that emotional intelligence is a key factor in effective leadership, and that leaders with high emotional intelligence are more effective at motivating and engaging their teams.

Thus, leaders who are able to connect at the emotional level with their teams are more likely to achieve success and build strong, cohesive teams.

In conclusion, emotional intelligence is a key factor in effective leadership. Leaders who are able to connect at the emotional level with their teams are more likely to achieve success and build strong, cohesive teams. By developing their emotional intelligence, leaders can connect at the emotional level with their teams and achieve success.
TAKE CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

SOLVE TOUGH ISSUES AND BUILD COLLABORATIVE TEAMS

By PAUL SMITH
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A friend of mine, we will call him Tom, was a partner at a big consulting firm. One day, he showed up at one of his client’s offices and heard this: “Sorry, Tom. We’re going to have to cancel your retainer – at least for a little while.”

Now, to a consultant, those are about the worst words you could ever hear from your client. It is the equivalent of being laid off.

Except in this case, it did not just mean Tom was getting laid off. It also meant his entire team of 15 consultants was getting laid off.

THE PROBLEM
So, he knew something must be seriously wrong to warrant that kind of reaction from a Fortune 100 company. And he was right. It was serious.

His client was going to miss its quarterly profit estimates, and not just by a little – like enough to raise major concerns on Wall Street.

His client explained all the gory details about why their profits were off so much. And how it turned out.

THE SOLUTION
That was when Tom told his client about their ‘Monthly Challenge’. It was a friendly competition among the consultants at Tom’s company.

Every month, all the partners are presented with a particularly challenging client problem, without naming the client. Then they are encouraged to take their teams out for a lunch or dinner, talk about the problem, and come up with recommendations.

Think about that. Just for that hour, tens of thousands of consultants are working on exactly the same issue.

However, with only an hour, they do not have time for research or analysis. All they have time for is to share a few stories and brainstorm ideas.

The stories they share are about when they encountered similar problems in the past, what their client did about it, and how it turned out.

Then, whichever team has the best solution gets recognised in front of the whole company.

That kind of competition is really genius. The client with the problem gets the collective brainpower of the entire consulting company working on their issue.

The competition also helps foster more collaboration and better working relationships among the consultants.

THE RESULT
So, Tom immediately posted his client’s problem to every partner as a monthly challenge. Within 48 hours, tens of thousands of consultants started working on it.

Within three weeks, they identified two non-competing clients that experienced the same issue as Tom’s client and had three creative solutions offered from across the globe.

Tom presented the solutions to his client and worked with them to implement the best one.

Now, Tom’s client still had a tough quarter. However, it was not nearly the debacle it would have been without his help. The best part was Tom never heard another word about needing to cancel his retainer.

THE LESSON
The lesson, I think, out of all this is that establishing a regular time and place to swap stories about current business challenges is just a really good idea.

Besides, you do not need to be in the consulting business to benefit from swapping stories with your co-workers. No matter what business you are in, it will surely lead to new ideas and a more collaborative organisation.
TIMELESS LESSONS FROM RASHOMON

INSIGHTS FROM A 68-YEAR-OLD CLASSIC THAT CHANGED THE FACE OF VISUAL STORYTELLING

By LYDIA GOMEZ
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SOME stories never get old.
I was recently with a group of old friends, recounting a funny incident from 10 years ago. As far as reunion topics go, this was the winning horse — it never fails to bring out the hysterics.
In fact, we realised that the topic somehow became funnier over time.
As I thought about this, and watched the news amid a revised call to ‘Look East’ — a policy first introduced to Malaysians in the 80’s — I began wondering about timelessness.
What is it about specific ideas and stories that allow them to endure the test of time?
Amongst all of history’s groundbreaking classics, my mind landed on the memory of watching an old Japanese film for the first time, 16 years ago.

THE BREAKTHROUGH FILM

In 1950, Rashomon — directed by an era-defining master of cinema, Akira Kurosawa — burst onto the international arthouse stage with its novel camerawork and unique screenplay.
Before its release, few people — including studio executives and crew — could fully understand the depth of its storyline (more on this below). It was a puzzling piece of art, and reviews in Japan were mixed.
But one year later, the film won the highest prize at the prestigious Venice Film Festival (The Golden Lion award), and immediately drew the attention of a post-war, international audience towards Japanese cinema.
Kurosawa — as well as Kurosawa’s subsequent work — would go on to influence some of the greatest filmmakers of our time including Werner Herzog, Zhang Yimou, Steven Spielberg, and Martin Scorsese.

THE ‘BACKSTORY’

There’s no success sweeter than the one borne of a hard struggle.
The making of this film, in itself, is a powerful story of innovation, courage and individuality — all key ingredients of timelessness.

In his 1981 book, Something like an Autobiography, Kurosawa recalls how three assistant directors assigned to him by the studio had found the script ‘baffling’ even after reading it several times.
“We believe we have read it carefully, and we still don’t understand it at all; that’s why we want you to explain it to us.”

Kurosawa wrote: “I gave them this simple explanation: Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves — they cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. This script portrays such human beings — the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are.”
The studio executives were not entirely convinced. It has been said that a top studio boss was so dissatisfied with the final product that he asked for the name to be removed from the end credits.
But Kurosawa, teaming up with cinematographer, Mihajuro Kozu, persisted with their unconventional techniques in storytelling.

“The days when such an approach was not uncommon to point the camera directly at the sun, but at the time Rashomon was being made it was still one of the taboos of cinematography. It was even thought that the sun’s rays shining into your lens would burn the film in your camera. But my cameraman, Miyagawa Kazuo, boldly defied this convention and created superb images,” Kurosawa relates in the book.

Kurosawa. Pic: NerdSt

They speak directly into the camera. All four flashbacks — which give accurate basic facts but stray wildly in details and motivations — raise questions about the relative nature of truth, deception, guilt and points of view.
These contradictory testimonies become amplified by the film’s refusal to provide a proper ending to the mystery. It gives no concrete answer as to who really killed the samurai. All accounts can be both true and false. It implies that there is no absolute truth.
Now, the audience is free to choose their own truth as well as their own criminal by setting what they have just heard against their own frames of reference.
The viewer is fully empowered to judge the characters and is now a major part of the story.

But to draw a conclusion from a film as allegorically beautiful as Rashomon, one may need to watch it several times — our judgements and decisions may only be as valid as our current state of mind.

Kurosawa’s narrative had, at the time, boldly confronted some of the timeless, perennial issues that surround mankind, and Kurosawa’s idea to present it on film could have been read as too far-fetched for his time.

But he went ahead to address the complex human psyche through the cinematic experience, and it worked.
It would be the start of Kurosawa’s lasting influence on world cinema. After a career spanning nearly six decades, he died in 1998 at the age of 81.
His legacy would give birth to modern, non-linear storytelling as we see it today — a timeless idea has universal appeal.


A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE ENDURES

Our first experiences tend to shape our defining moments. In Leaderonomics, we study such ‘touchable moments’ in the formation of a leader. They could be good, bad, bittersweet, or even frightening. From these powerful experiences, we derive lessons that drive us from one stage of life to the next.

Through Rashomon, Kurosawa had achieved milestones for himself, the industry and the audience.
His team offered new technical expertise and the film is credited as one of the first to heavily feature unreliable narrators.
He opened the door for the Western world to appreciate the richness of Japanese art and culture through its cinema.
He examined universal values but allowed the audience to apply their own on the characters.
The film’s critical acclaim brought world attention to his body of work which would include his next — and arguably most influential — magnum opus, Seven Samurais (1954).

And the film? Close to 70 years after its release, Rashomon retains its position as compulsory viewing for storytellers and aspiring filmmakers worldwide.
More filmmakers began using its style of presenting conflicting accounts of the same event (known more widely by the term ‘Rashomon Effect’) — we see traces of it in films such as The Usual Suspects (1995) by Bryan Singer, Memento (2000) by Christopher Nolan and Hero (2002) by Zhang Yimou.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Towards the end of Rashomon, an abandoned baby is seen where the three men are sitting. The situation becomes a dual of morality between two of them.
What one of the men does for the crying infant — against the bleak events of the crime earlier — becomes a symbol of hope in the film.

A timeless idea has universal appeal. It lives within common human traits, from one country to another, and from one generation to the next.
It teaches and inspires, yet releases its power to let us make choices. It triggers fresh perspectives.
Most importantly, an enduring idea gives us a reason to look on the bright side. As the story of Rashomon teaches us, amid all the self-serving biases we may face, there is still a place for goodness and positivity in people.

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- Remember the movie Maleficent, the story about the antagonist we’ve always associated with Sleeping Beauty? If you remember her black raven, you’ll probably remember the character Diaval, her loyal servant. Let’s take a step back and reflect on the people who have been ‘Diavals’ in your life. Head on to www.leaderonomics.com here:
  bit.ly/MDiavalcharacter

- Stories. They are like nutrition for our souls. They are memorable because they connect with us at the emotional level.
Here are seven storytelling structures to help you become master storytellers. Check out some tips from this interesting infographic: bit.ly/StorytellingTips

- Lydia is the managing editor of Leaderonomics. She loves world cinema, and understands that while good stories deserve to be told, it is often the greatest ones that are re-told.
NAVIGATING THE MALAYSIAN MUSIC SCENE

By LOUISA DEVADASON
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The Malaysian English music scene has been growing in recent years with more diverse creative acts performing at popular venues across the Klang Valley. However, as music isn’t widely encouraged in Malaysia beyond formal learning, many lack the tools to navigate a career in the music industry. Due to a fundamental lack of infrastructure in this industry, many artistes are left struggling to figure out a lot by themselves.

To understand what it takes for a business to make it in this industry, Leaderonomics sat down with Breaking Music, a boutique record label and artist management agency based in Kuala Lumpur. The company includes: Isaac Ravi, 30, who handles artistes, marketing and brand relations; Andrew Yap, 34, who oversees business affairs; and finally, music producer Afnan Rahman, better known as The Chief, 27, who works directly with artistes to create the music.

The guys are members of popular local band, Paperplane Pursuit, and have also enjoyed their share of success overseas. They are currently working with artistes the likes of Talitha Tan, lost.spaces, and Crinkle Cut.

With experience to spare, the three of them shared their thoughts on how to take charge of your own music career and navigate the local industry.

HOW CAN MUSICIANS GO THE DISTANCE?

Getting noticed and staying ahead in the music business often poses the greatest challenge to many. The reality is that artistes need more than just talent. “Endurance is the hardest part of working in the entertainment industry. You’re only doing well for as long as you’re relevant to your audience. Knowing the challenges ahead and being pragmatic about how you can overcome them will go a long way. Also, be flexible and adaptable because this is an industry that’s constantly shifting,” says Isaac.

“For artistes, it’s about setting their gaze towards the long-term vision rather than just looking to earn a quick buck or gain their 15 minutes of fame,” says The Chief.

“There needs to be a sense of discipline, urgency, drive, and eagerness to learn from mistakes which fosters longevity.”

MAKING MUSIC, THE ART OF COLLABORATION

While self-expression is personal, creating art that can be shared with others often requires collaboration – the meshing of more than one person’s creative vision. That’s where producers come in.

“Producers are like project managers in a company. An artiste comes to a producer to help facilitate and flesh out his or her ideas in an orderly and structured manner. Most artistes have many ideas but it’s the producer who lays the groundwork for the final product. The preparation should be about learning to communicate your ideas and being ready to handle feedback,” says The Chief.

Being attuned to meaningful collaboration is key in the music industry both artistically as well as in business. While there’s no fixed way to collaborate, there are some things that are important. The Chief believes that the productivity of a collaboration needs to be shouldered by both parties – saying, “the artiste or producer should explore the different perspectives from all parties and work towards finding common ground.”

According to Andrew, collaboration at its core creates conflicts. “The ability to iron out these conflicts makes for better strategy and a more consistent push in the same direction.”

“Methods differ, so you also have to be open to the possibility of doing things differently – which basically means you need to leave your ego at the door, or at least most of it. Being able to do that means the collaborators spend more time creating and getting things done, instead of arguing. In my experience, a lot of the arguments eventually proved petty in hindsight,” Isaac adds.

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

As members of Paperplane Pursuit, Isaac, Andrew and The Chief have made music together, performed many gigs and collaborated with their share of artistes. They got creative – troubleshooting and brainstorming their way through unexpected challenges, eventually making their way onto mainstream radio. So, what has it all taught them?

“Success doesn’t come overnight. Fall in love with the process of creating and do it repeatedly. Practice, evaluate, and keep trying. I think one of the main lessons I’ve learnt from running a label is to ignore the noise and do what needs to be done,” says The Chief.

Andrew strongly believes that mentors and guidance are valuable. “No artiste makes it alone. Get these basics right and you’ll go further. Artistes generally don’t start off with an understanding of the business side of things. It takes time to make them realise the realities of the business.”

Balancing real world business savvy and artistic ideas takes time and patience.

Learning the ropes and being vigilant is also crucial. Isaac advises: “Learn how the industry works for yourself before relying on anyone else and put in the time and work. Don’t expect to make music and become successful from that alone – there’s a lot to compete with. I’d say having a career in music can be a lot tougher in some ways than a desk job, so don’t be surprised if you’re going to have to work a lot harder than most to get somewhere in the industry. Ultimately, I believe that those who really want something, will find a way.”

They believe that Malaysia isn’t lacking in talent or potential, but they know it’s a tough industry with harsh realities, where artistes and even labels tend to fade before they can realise their potential.

“It takes a lot of optimism and belief in the end goal to keep going,” says Isaac. “So, developing resilience, thicker skin and staying focused on the goal has been a key component in the last 10 years of being an artiste and running a label. Overcoming the challenges faced is half the fun!”
REFRESHING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

By CAROLYN TAYLOR
editor@leaderonomics.com

YESTERDAY, I had a conversation with an organisational development manager who used this word to describe his organisation’s goal in relation to their efforts on culture next year.

“We need to refresh our culture and re-engage people in our purpose for wanting to improve it.”

Given so many companies already have dedicated effort to building values and behaviour that suits their goals and strategies, there is likely to come a moment where it seems important to refresh.

As always, in thinking through my response to his comments, I reverted to my basic framework of walking the talk.

To refresh their organisation, leaders will have to refresh themselves. This ‘refreshing’ process will happen to my basic framework of walking the talk.

To refresh their organisation, leaders will have to refresh themselves. This ‘refreshing’ process will happen in stages.

1. REVIEWING THE BUSINESS VALUE

When an organisation starts to focus attention on culture, the business case for doing so is usually well defined. A change in market conditions, a failure to meet certain performance standards, a new strategy.

Over time, initiatives to align culture to meet these conditions take on a life of their own, as any complex project does.

A training programme, for example, may be rolled out to large numbers of people. Leaders can lose touch, during the course of all this activity, with the original driver for the required change. And, with time, the new strategy may become business as usual.

It is valuable at this point to pause and review how the businesses require people to behave.

Is it still relevant that we focus on culture? Which elements of culture are now most important?

2. RECONNECTING WITH THE PERSONAL VISION

There is a point after the first or second phase of activity associated with changing culture where there can be a pause in the action, and employees look to the leaders to see whether this is ‘just a programme’ or a way of life.

The answer will depend on the leader’s values, passion and vision. A leader who has integrated the cultural aspirations into who they are will be credible regardless of any planned, scheduled set of cultural activities.

As a cultural leader, this can be a good time to hold up the mirror. Check with others (formally through research, or informally) how they see your behaviour.

Check with yourself whether you see culture as a task or a way of life. Consider hiring a new coach to refresh your own thinking.

A leader who continues to commit to their own personal growth will continually refresh the culture, in line with his or her own learning process.

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Sashe Kanapathi shares sports in the workplace

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to do everything yourself.

Why aren’t you delegating?

The delegation hack

Leaders need to start using a delegation hack.

A simple way to delegate is to start by sharing the task and working with your
direct report to create a one-page plan together.

Leaders need to start by asking their staff what steps they believe need to be
taken to accomplish the task – not telling them!

Once the staff member starts sharing ideas, the leader can also contribute and

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DELEGATE CORRECTLY

The most common mistake a leader makes when delegating is that they
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They often just tell a staff member to do something without providing any context or information around expectations or how they want it completed.

The result is that the task is not completed to the level that is required, or in the timeframe needed, and the leader stops delegating.

The unfortunate by-product of this situation is that after a while, staff are not being developed and they realise that with a little bit of pushback, their managers will do it themselves.

After a while the leader also starts to get frustrated because of the increased workload.

This can occur when a new leader is starting with staff and they are struggling to shift from doing to delegating or when an experienced leader is a perfectionist and doesn’t trust their people to get the task done the right way.

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