Purposeful Decision-Making
Making wise choices in the age of information

If you would like your organisation to be featured in this digital magazine, contact us at editor@leaderonomics.com
NE’S worst fears and insecurities can often surface when faced with the need to make a critical decision. Do you accept a high-paying new job and leave treasured relationships behind? What is the cost to bear or the consequences you will face? Do you approach business decisions in the same vein as the decisions made for personal reasons? All these questions require deliberation, but the rational and logical can prevail even in an environment of excessive information where emotions sometimes run high.

However, what about the smaller, everyday decisions — are they any less important? It is this balance that we explore this month, looking into some of the delicate aspects of emotion that influence rational decision-making.

Read Dr Eugene YJ Tee’s take on the art of making decisions, and how people have the capacity to reason about emotion. In his article, he argues that both emotions and the voices for reason help us make informed and sound decisions.

Dr Kaihan Krippendorff presents a case study on a leading brand and how over 30 years of radical decision-making have helped to keep them at the top of their industry.

Daniel Russell lists the five simple decisions you can make every day to prevent the manifestation of unethical behaviours at the workplace.

If you’re a parent, consider how you might be hindering your child’s ability to develop a sense of agency — the capacity to act independently and make their own choices — when you don’t give them the freedom to learn and the space to fail.

What was the toughest decision that you’ve ever had to make?

Let us know how it turned out for you by writing in to us at editor@leaderonomics.com — we would love to hear from you.

THE LEADERONOMICS.COM TEAM
Leadership Insights from the Life of Salvador Dali

1. “Much of Dali’s success was due to his avid self-promotion.” — Kathleen Spies, art history professor

Dali fully understood the power of a person’s brand and persona. From his finely groomed moustaches, to his unorthodox interviews and public appearances with his pet ocelot, Babou, he mastered the art and science of cultivating a powerful brand instantly recognised as a leader in the world of entertainment, art and even advertising.

At the time of his death in 1989, Dali had truly shaped himself into an iconic multimedia artist, celebrity and thought leader. What about us? Are we concerned about our personal brand and what we stand for? Are we even aware of what we stand for and do we consistently communicate in a manner that is consistent with the brand we carry? Are we giving people something to remember?

2. “Have no fear of perfection – you’ll never reach it.”

Dali lived life on his own terms, which freed his mind to concentrate on his own process and creations. He wasn’t tied down to anyone else’s expectations or definitions of what success should look like, and he knew that perfection always remains out of reach. Nothing in life is flawless, so we should never expect ourselves to be perfect. If we try, it’s bound to lead to frustration.

3. “Mistakes are almost always of a sacred nature. Never try to correct them.”

Learning from our mistakes is how we grow. They add to our character and enrich our experience. Mistakes also let us see where we need to improve and what we need to avoid in the future.

4. “Painting is an infinitely minute part of my personality.”

We often define ourselves by the question most often asked at networking events: “So…what do you do?” But when we cling too much to our titles or job roles, we limit the opportunities and possibilities that exist outside the boundaries we create for ourselves.

As talented individuals, we are much more than what our business cards say. Just as you wouldn’t define a computer as a word processor or a search engine, we should realise that we are so much more – and capable of much more – than we can imagine.

5. “Each morning when I awake, I experience again a supreme pleasure – that of being Salvador Dali.”

We sometimes find it hard to love ourselves. Often times, we beat ourselves up for not being perfect. But God created each of us uniquely and we all have special gifts and talents that make us who we are. Dali understood this perfectly and in spite of his imperfections (and awful moustache!), he somehow loved being Dali. We should love being ourselves too. I love being Roshan. I do hope you love being who you are. You should!

By ROSHAN THIRAN

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“At the age of six I wanted to be a cook. At seven I wanted to be Napoleon. And my ambition has been growing steadily ever since.” – Salvador Dali

RECENTLY, I wrote about Andy Warhol, the pop artist. He was significantly inspired by Salvador Dali, who also influenced the Chicago Surrealist Group, Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, and even David Lynch.

There are few eccentric minds quite like the one possessed by Salvador Dali, the Spanish artist and provocateur with an electric blend of the Surrealist movement (the movement essentially encouraged artists to abandon rational control of their creativity and use their dream and unconscious to create this new ‘surrealist’ expressive style).

Never one to use drugs, Dali (1904–1989) would try to tap into his subconscious mind by staring intently at fixed objects for long periods of time. He would also induce a mental state between wakefulness and sleep by mixing in a bowl with a spoon, which would clatter as he nodded off, keeping him half-awake.

As the embodiment of weird innovation, Dali sought to see the world through a state of delusion while maintaining sanity – a state he referred to as ‘irrational knowledge’.

From an early age, the Spaniard was known for his eccentricity and unusual tendencies, dressing in ways that would have made even the flamboyant playwright Oscar Wilde look twice. Dali enjoyed his time at school but was ultimately dismissed after he insulted one of his professors during his finals.

As fate would have it, a subsequent trip to Paris would introduce this Surrealist to the pioneer of Cubism and inventor of collage, Pablo Picasso. He was so inspired by what Picasso was doing and the Cubist movement, leading him towards his famous method of tapping the subconscious mind to create fantastic imagery.

His first noted work that blurred the lines and perceptions of reality was his Apparatus and Hand painting, completed in 1927, which set the tone of his distinct style. Dali subscribed to the theory of automatism, where artists relinquish conscious control of their process and allow their intuition and unconscious mind to lead to the artistic process.

As a keen student of Sigmund Freud, the artist was captivated by the depths and potential of the untapped mind and made it a point to get out of his own way during his creative periods.

Dali and leadership?

So how is all this history relevant to business? In terms of how Dali’s style relates to leadership, his approach to his art – and indeed his life – is a reminder that it can be easy to remain stuck in the same old safe way of doing things.

His style, as eccentric as it was, showed the importance of constantly seeing things from different angles and fresh perspectives. When leaders are continually searching for different ways to take on challenges of the day, it becomes difficult for the competition to predict what they’re up to, and therefore harder for them to disrupt their way of doing things.

Having said that, it’s often difficult to let go of our fixed thinking, which is precisely what causes a lot of problems in leadership today. While we needn’t go to Dali’s extreme lengths to create fresh innovations and new ways to approach things, it’s worth remembering that when we travel down different avenues, we explore the unfamiliar, and from there we encounter unexpected possibilities.

Psychologist, Franz Epting calls our block of being a fixed thinker the ‘personal construct theory’, where we always look at things the same way. He believed the way out of this was to adopt ‘propositional thinking’, which is what Dali did. It is about being comfortable with complexity and contradiction and looking at things from a different perspective.

For example, a couple of years ago, I wrote a book and was later asked to do a book signing. Not knowing better, I went ahead and did what all other authors did – sat at a table and signed books.

When Dali wrote his book, The World of Salvador Dali and was asked by his publisher to do a book signing in a bookstore in Manhattan, he got in before the event and set up his space to look like a hospital room. He hooked himself to machines that monitored his blood pressure and even had a machine that took his brain wave measurements.

From ‘his hospital bed’, he signed books – and even gave copies of his brain wave readings to his adoring fans! Obviously, his book signing event sold many more books than mine did, simply because he never took any event as normal but instead always look at it with endless possibilities. He never had a fixed mindset.

Dali was arguably one of the most enigmatic artists in recent history, and although it’s impossible to place the man’s character in a box, his approach to life offers us some ‘crazy’ lessons. Here are some key takeaways that stood out for me after reading (and watching!) this eccentric Spanish Surrealist.

Dali with his pet ocelot, Babou. Pic: Flickr

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The Leadership Insights from the Life of Salvador Dali

Dali enjoyed his time at school but was ultimately dismissed after he insulted one of his professors during his finals.
The Corporate Citizen
How the interaction between businesses and society is changing

By CHRISTIE CHUA
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MILLENNIALS currently make up more than half of the workforce in many countries, and a report by EY estimated that by 2025, they will comprise 75 per cent of the global workforce. This cohort tends to prioritise more than just the financial bottom line and hold organisations to high standards of social responsibility.

In fact, according to a report by Deloitte Insights, a 2017 study found that “millennials are becoming increasingly sensitive to how their organisations address issues such as income inequality, hunger, and the environment. Eighty-eight percent of millennials believe that employers should play a vital role in alleviating these concerns, and 86 percent say the business success should be measured by more than profitability.”

“Corporate citizenship – which refers to an organisation’s responsibilities toward society – is more important than ever before to attract, engage and retain millennials – and more and more organisations are heeding this call and making changes to their business models, effectively transforming themselves to become social enterprises.”

According to the 2018 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, a social enterprise is “an organisation whose mission combines revenue growth and profitmaking with the need to respect and support its environment and stakeholder network.”

“This includes listening to, investing in, and actively managing the trends that are shaping today’s world. It is an organisation that shoulders its responsibility to be a good citizen (both inside and outside the organisation), serving as a role model for its peers and promoting a high degree of collaboration at every level of the organisation.”

Corporate citizenship is no longer about one-off corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, marketing tactics, or annual programmes led by the human resources department.

It has now become a business strategy that involves the chief executive officer (CEO) of organisations as it defines the organisation’s very identity.

However, while 77 per cent out of the 11,069 global respondents surveyed by Deloitte cited corporate citizenship as important, only 18 per cent said that it was considered a top priority and reflected in their organisation’s strategy – showing that organisations around the world still have a long way to go in achieving true corporate citizenship.

To do so, the report suggests that organisations need to move beyond fragmented programmes; “CEOs and executive committees should communicate a single, comprehensive, and authentic strategy that defines who the company is, what it says, and what it does. Then, they should hold organisational leaders accountable for results.”

In today’s digital age where it has become so easy for organisations to be scrutinised by its consumers, investors and employees, businesses leaders need to ask themselves: “What is the impact of my organisation on society?”

The answer to that question may very well hold the key to the organisation’s future success.

“Great leadership is a group performance, not a solo act.” — Bob Vanourek

IN the early 1900s, chief executive officers (CEOs) typically stood alone at the top, making most of the critical decisions while delegating responsibility to functional managers in the business. More CxO (or C-suite) roles soon emerged, but these individuals typically did not work closely together.

While this may have worked well for organisations in the past, the current dynamic business environment presents challenges that are multidimensional and far more complex – and thus multiple perspectives are needed before a decision can be made.

Today, tackling issues that organisations face requires both cross-disciplinary collaboration and deep functional expertise, which no single function can satisfactorily address. However, it is not just the C-suite that needs to be in sync with one another; organisations would also benefit greatly if leaders shared the load with their people.

The Leaderonomics team had the opportunity to speak to Bob Vanourek – co-author of Triple Crown Leadership: Building Excellent, Ethical, and Enduring Organizations and the former CEO of five companies – a while back, where he shared one leadership insight that he’s gained over the years.

Watch the video at bit.ly/BobVanourekLN

“When I was starting out, I thought it was all on my shoulders – that I had to have all the answers, that I had to have the confidence and never seem to be lost. And what I’ve discovered is, that’s impossible in today’s complex world.”

He says that when people are put in the right environment and culture, they have a great capability to solve problems, reduce cost, create new opportunities, and make the world a better place for all – but only if leaders create the right kind of opportunity.

“Sometimes I had people speak up to me as a voice of one. Sometimes I had somebody with no title or no authority come up and say: ‘Bob, I’m really not sure what you’re planning to do there is the right kind of thing.’ And the more that I created that kind of culture, that kind of group dynamic, the better our performance was,” Vanourek shares.

Research has indicated that is indeed the case. According to the 2018 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, respondents from organisations where the C-suite regularly collaborated on long-term interdependent work were the most likely to expect a growth of 10 per cent or more in the next year, and the move towards an environment where collaborative leadership is celebrated is quickly becoming one of the most powerful trends worldwide.

“I learnt that great leadership is a group performance, not a solo act. Think about the capabilities of people that challenge you to create that kind of culture, that kind of environment. It’s not all on your shoulders. Together, collaboratively, you and your colleagues can do amazing things,” says Vanourek.

Christie is the deputy editor at Leaderonomics. She likes to start her day with a cup of green tea and prefers to convey her thoughts through the written word. One of her favourite phrases is “It’s not that far; we can walk there!”

Collaborative Leadership

“Collaborative leaders don’t have to have the answer all the time.” — Bob Vanourek

Collaborative leaders don’t have to have the answer all the time. Instead, they provide the platform and set the tone for their organisation to enable people to come together in meaningful ways to lever the combined expertise across the organisation to create better results.
The key to Collaboration

Insights from the Malaysia Leadership Summit 2019

By CHRISTIE CHUA
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It was 8.30 on a Thursday morning and there is already a crowd at the foyer of the Setia City Convention Centre in Shah Alam, which is about 40km from the Kuala Lumpur city centre. The area was filled with the chatter of people in business attire mingling with each other while they waited for the doors to the ballroom to open.

It was the third Malaysia Leadership Summit (MLS), and the crowd was made up of people from various business and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who came together to support community initiatives in Malaysia.

Jointly organised by Leaderonomics and Together We Can Change the World — with Maybank as the title sponsor, S P Setia Bhd as the venue sponsor, and Tenaga Nasional Bhd as the gold sponsor — this year’s summit saw the largest turnout yet, with nearly 500 participants.

In a heartfelt sharing session that kicked off the summit — which was themed ‘Connect. Collaborate. Contribute.’ — Maybank group chief human capital officer Nora Abd Manaf opened up about her experiences during her formative years and how that has contributed to her personal leadership journey.

“I was this focused, tenacious person who just wanted to win. I wasn’t very conscious of the people around me, other than what I had to do,” she said.

Nora’s tenacity and go-getter personality might have helped her move up the career ladder when she first started out, but it was only when she realised the value of collaboration and generosity that she truly became a leader.

“When I cared for my peers and others, the winning felt so much better. And so that has shaped me,” she said. “When you have a generous mindset you will then truly collaborate, because collaboration is what synergy is all about. I urge, I plead, I implore: that all of us — if nothing else — should have a generous mindset.”

Synergy was indeed on full display on July 11, with collaboration happening on our shores in Malaysia with help from 10 international speakers from the United States, the Philippines and Singapore.

Here are some key takeaways from the MLS 2019 speakers:

Communication and influence

George Walther, author of the book Power Talking, explained how the words we choose shape the image we project, both for our organisation and ourselves.

Mindsets and perceptions

We all have our own perceptions and limiting beliefs that stop us from attempting to reach our goals and make a difference in society — and when we continual-ly tell ourselves these stories and listen to them repeatedly, we soon begin to believe them.

Step Up Step Out founder Carolyn Rose Hart shared one tip to put a stop to this: “As you go through life, notice that your conversations are stopping you and use these four words, ‘Nevertheless, I am willing’ — willing to be caring, to be astute, to uphold standards of integrity.”

She urged us to notice our own qualities the same way we see the good in others — these are our standards of integrity, our values and beliefs — and say: “I know they are mine because I see them in others.”

“Own who you really are, and when people look at you, that’s what they’re going to experience, because we’re all mirrors of each other,” said Hart.

“Instead of being a weakness, kindness is in fact a strength,” stated Anden co-founder Mark Bayoud. He said that in a world that is caught up with being busy and with all the pressure exerted on us at work, it takes a strong person to be kind, to be willing to say, “Hey, I’m going to do it differently.”

He added: “I would argue that kindness is the key to success. ‘Nice’ is sometimes used in a negative light, but being nice shows a big, big pillar of strength because it’s so easy to be mean and to frown.”

Bayoud believes that it’s not the fittest and strongest who will survive in today’s world — it’s the kindest. “We all know that successful professionals use kindness as an interpersonal skill for success,” he said. “The ripple effect is comprehensive. It changes your whole philosophy of your business; changes the vibe, the feel, your staff morale... and the benefits far outweigh any time delay that’s possibly lost.”

Contribution

“At some point there’s a change in our lives when we start noticing that it’s way more important to us now to give,” said platinum album singer-songwriter Jana Stanfield. She encouraged us to ask ourselves this: “How can we give? How can we make a contribution?”

They need to begin to trust you at the level that they will not trust others. They need to see that you are there and that they are yours. When they feel that they are one people with you, they will begin to talk.”

We Can Change the World — with Maybank as the title sponsor, S P Setia Bhd as the venue sponsor, and Tenaga Nasional Bhd as the gold sponsor — this year’s summit saw the largest turnout yet, with nearly 500 participants.

Leaveronomics Youth programmes lead Rahilah Najumudeen explaining the team’s various community initiatives to a delegate.

They also determine how much cooperation we will gain from others, as well as influence our self-image, confidence and determination.

“Think about your interactions with other people,” urged Walther. “When you say, ‘I have to check on that’ or ‘I have to call you back’, you’re really saying, ‘It’s not something I want to do. It’s kind of a burden’. But if you were to say, ‘I’ll be happy to call you back’ or ‘I’d like to check with the person in charge’ — it gives you a little boost.”

Walther also suggested that we shouldn’t colour facts by speaking about it in a negative way, as the words we use to convey a neutral fact determines how people will react to us. For example, if there is a long queue, a waiter could say “I can seat you at 7.30pm” instead of saying, “I can’t seat you till 7.30pm” — the potential customer would probably be more willing to wait if he/she heard the former.

Business leader and consultant Raju Manuthyan shared that to successfully influence others, an individual first needs to become part of the person’s life and this can only be achieved by giving the other party space, trust and respect first.

“If you want to connect with people at any level or diversity, you need to not just listen to them well — be it with your heart or with everything you’ve got. You don’t need to observe them and study them as objects — you need to become part and parcel of their ecosystem,” said Raju.

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through the skills that we have, our own individual abilities and aptitudes?"

Leadership

As someone who grew up in the Silicon Valley and still lives and works there, leadership expert Rebecca Morgan has spent a lot of time studying not just her own clients, but also the other companies in the area. She pointed out a couple of indicators of a thriving workplace – your staff are excited to come to work and they solve problems without your involvement.

Morgan also referenced the findings from Google’s Project Aristotle, which lists five key areas as the basis for team success. In the order of which mattered most to employees, they are: psychological safety, dependability, structure and clarity, meaning of work and impact of work.

"Who is on the team matters much less than how team members interact (that’s the psychological safety part, how they interact), structure their work (that’s dependability, structure, clarity), and view their contributions (that’s the meaning and impact of their contribution)," said Morgan. "It doesn’t really matter if you’ve got a lot of geniuses on your team. Yet it matters, these other ways that the team comes together.”

"People are an organisation’s greatest asset, but also the greatest pain. And the higher you climb (the corporate ladder), the more people you have to deal with," said business and career coach Kim Underhill.

Some people are reluctant leaders, and Underhill said that this is because of their fear of the unknown. "If you know what you’re doing and if you would simply take what you’re doing and keep practising it, you will be fine," she said.

She shared that many of the people she has coached tell her they lack confidence and want to build it, to which she asks them, "Which aspect would you like confidence in?" She said that when we have that figured out, we then need to conduct thorough research to really understand the subject matter – and with our newfound knowledge comes a new confidence, because knowledge is power.

Personal transformation coach and speaker Paul N. Larsen illustrated the differences between a leader of scarcity vs a leader of abundance – a leader of scarcity who horded information and leads with fear and a fixed mindset, versus one who shares information, who wants to connect and contribute, and shows their vulnerability and admits mistakes.

"Stepping out of your comfort zone is something you want to do if you want to grow, to get uncomfortable a little bit, to show your vulnerability. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes," said Larsen.

Larsen pointed out that we will all make mistakes as humans, but it is how we respond to the mistakes that makes the difference. “You can react without even thinking, or you can take a nanosecond to take a step back and respond appropriately – so think about this: The next time someone in your organisation makes a mistake, how do you respond?”

The Future

Motivational humourist Scott Friedman posed these questions: “Do you see what you sell through your customers’ eyes? And what do the eyes of the future really look like?”

“You either get busy living, or you get busy dying,” said Friedman, sharing a quote from The Shawshank Redemption. He said that there are so many ways in which we could approach the future – we could fear, ignore or accept it; we can anticipate, imagine and create it.

The best way to predict the future is to create it – by making the best choices that we know of at the time and learning from the outcomes of those choices, and then making new choices. And it’s all about the connection with people, collaboration, and making a contribution to society,” he stated.

Technology analyst Manoj Menon said that small companies – which have the competitive advantage of agility, speed, and the ability to disrupt – are now attacking the big companies, creating a phenomenon he calls ‘death by a thousand cuts’. He elaborated, saying that companies “don’t die of a heart attack anymore – they’re slowly, slowly dying.”

Acknowledging that it is extremely challenging for companies to reinvent themselves in this environment, Menon encouraged everyone to first determine the value they are creating and the impact that they have on the business, and look at the company’s growth – is it linear or exponential?

“The strategy of linear growth is a strategy of the previous era. The strategy of today’s era is to create exponential growth. If you are really just delivering incremental growth, then you are dead,” states Menon. “This is what it means to be in the fourth industrial revolution – it is about the ability to use tools that give us the ability to create exponential growth.”

The Malaysia Leadership Summit 2019: Connect, Collaborate, Contribute was organised by Leaderonomics in partnership with Together We Can Change the World. Maybank was the title sponsor, S P Setia Bhd the venue sponsor, and Tenaga Nasional Bhd the gold sponsor. Head to bit.ly/MLS2019photos to check out some of the photos from the summit.
There are mostly men there. You may not have access to the executive suite if positions and you’re limiting your support,” she says. Because sometimes men hold most of the leadership holding themselves back. Women who only seek other women as sponsors risk sisters-in-it-together feel to it, but Capland says that sponsors, they are reputed to look for women to sponsor mentors.

Their organisations, although they may have multiple significantly less likely than men to have sponsors in will share contacts with you to help you succeed.” That when happens, the woman who originally made the suggestion faces an unpleasant choice. Either say nothing and let someone else get the credit for her idea, or speak up at the risk of seeming churlish, self-serv ing, and not a team player.

In that situation, it’s much better to have someone else remind the group who said what first. So much so that, in the Obama White House, a group of government women informally agreed to repeat and empha sise each other’s ideas in meetings – a practice called ‘amplification’. If you’re a woman in leadership or executive role, Capland suggests looking for some amplification for yourself, not necessarily from other women, but from your sponsor or someone else who seems interested in giving you support.

“An amplifier is someone you talk to ahead of time and whom you ask to amplify your voice if it’s not heard at the table,” she says. “So, what would happen is the person you’ve selected would say, ‘You know, Sally just said that a few minutes ago. I want to make sure we track where we first heard this.’”

Your amplifier should be someone you already have a good relationship with, she adds. “It should be someone who knows you’re trying to have more executive presence and make more of an impact and has shown an interest in helping you do that. You don’t walk into the room right before the meeting, find some guy and say, ‘I need some support.’”

Even if you have no amplifier, it’s important to make sure you’ve heard on the issues you feel strongly about, Capland says. Especially if you’re new to the executive world, she recommends putting some time and effort into developing your executive presence so that you are more likely to command attention when you speak.

“It can be overwhelming for some women to be the only woman or one of a small number at a powerful table with other powerful people, mostly men,” she says. She once heard a woman describe being the only woman at the executive table during discussions of a possible business deal.

“She said, ‘I feel pretty strongly we should not do this deal,’ and all the men said, ‘I think you’re wrong,’” Capland recalls. “She said, ‘I want to be heard loud and clear that this is a mistake and here’s my thinking as to why.’”

As she explained her reasoning, it became clear that a big part of the issue was timing – she would be much more in favour of the deal if they waited six months to do it. The company did end up waiting six months as she recommended, and when it happened, the deal was a huge success. “She believes pretty strongly that if they had done the deal when first discussed, it would have caused a big drop in revenue,” Capland says.

1 Find a sponsor – of either gender
The very first job for nearly anyone in a new leadership role is to get to know everyone you’ll be working with – your peers and counterparts in other areas as well as the people reporting to you and the people above you in the hierarchy.

“At the same time you’re developing your internal and external network, you should also be looking for a sponsor,” Capland says. “A sponsor is different from a mentor,” she explains, adding that smart leaders are sure to have both.

“A mentor or coach can be from either inside or outside your organisation, but a sponsor will be someone on the inside. This is someone you can tell your career and salary aspirations to, and their role is to help you get there. Of course, what you desire has to be something they believe in and support.”

“Your sponsor,” she says, “is the person who will speak up on your behalf when you’re not in the room. He or she will put your name forward for opportunities that you have no way of knowing about. Your sponsor will share contacts with you to help you succeed.”

Research over the years has shown that women are significantly less likely than men to have sponsors in their organisations, although they may have multiple mentors.

And, Capland says, when women do seek out sponsors, they are reputed to look for women to sponsor them, whereas men are likely to seek sponsors from either gender.

Women seeking out female sponsors has a nice sisters-in-it-together feel to it, but Capland says that women who only seek other women as sponsors risk holding themselves back. “It can be a career derailler for a woman leader because sometimes men hold most of the leadership positions and you’re limiting your support,” she says. “You may not have access to the executive suite if there are mostly men there.”

2 Make sure your voice is heard
Sadly, it’s an often-observed phenomenon that in meetings and other settings – especially in groups that are mostly men – people seem to have trouble hearing female voices. “What we typically hear is that when a woman makes a suggestion at a mostly male table, it doesn’t get picked up right away and soon thereafter, a man says the same thing and everyone says, ‘What a great idea!’” Capland reports.

When that happens, the woman who originally made the suggestion faces an unpleasant choice. Either say nothing and let someone else get the credit for her idea, or speak up at the risk of seeming churlish, self-serving, and not a team player.

In that situation, it’s much better to have someone else remind the group who said what first. So much so that, in the Obama White House, a group of government women informally agreed to repeat and emphasise each other’s ideas in meetings – a practice called ‘amplification’. If you’re a woman in leadership or executive role, Capland suggests looking for some amplification for yourself, not necessarily from other women, but from your sponsor or someone else who seems interested in giving you support.

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Your amplifier should be someone you already have a good relationship with, she adds. “It should be someone who knows you’re trying to have more executive presence and make more of an impact and has shown an interest in helping you do that. You don’t walk into the room right before the meeting, find some guy and say, ‘I need some support.’”

Even if you have no amplifier, it’s important to make sure you’ve heard on the issues you feel strongly about, Capland says. Especially if you’re new to the executive world, she recommends putting some time and effort into developing your executive presence so that you are more likely to command attention when you speak.

“It can be overwhelming for some women to be the only woman or one of a small number at a powerful table with other powerful people, mostly men,” she says. She once heard a woman describe being the only woman at the executive table during discussions of a possible business deal.

“She said, ‘I feel pretty strongly we should not do this deal,’ and all the men said, ‘I think you’re wrong,’” Capland recalls. “She said, ‘I want to be heard loud and clear that this is a mistake and here’s my thinking as to why.’”

As she explained her reasoning, it became clear that a big part of the issue was timing – she would be much more in favour of the deal if they waited six months to do it. The company did end up waiting six months as she recommended, and when it happened, the deal was a huge success. “She believes pretty strongly that if they had done the deal when first discussed, it would have caused a big drop in revenue,” Capland says.

3 Surround yourself with people who will help you be more confident
Experts such as Capland have long flagged lack of confidence as one of the ways women can unknowingly deal themselves out of career opportunities – for example by considering themselves unqualified for a role that they could, in fact, take on.

“I have a client who says she’s going to get an advanced degree because she feels like she doesn’t stack up with the men in her department,” Capland says. “She doesn’t think she’s done enough, and it’s not true.”

It’s easy to see why women tend to think this way – we live in a society that tells us from childhood on that we have to work harder than our male counterparts to achieve the same results. The likelihood is high that you’ve let this kind of thing affect your thinking, whether you want it to or not.

You can fight back by taking the time and effort to build your own confidence. One of the best things you can do is make sure to spend time talking with people who believe in you and who will frequently tell you how awesome you are.

“Have regular conversations with your mentor and sponsor and coach,” Capland says.

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Work-Related Stress
Is it destroying our health?

By SANDY CLARKE
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STRESS can be a good thing. With just enough, it can act as a driver that increases our focus to help get the job done. But what happens when stress becomes too much?

A 2017 survey by AIA Vitality showed some alarming findings when it comes to work-related stress in Malaysia. For example, despite Malaysians working on average – 15 hours more per week beyond their contract hours compared to workers in Hong Kong, Australia, and even Singapore, it has one of the highest rates of productivity loss.

A closer look at the research by AIA Vitality showed that more than half of Malaysia’s employees get less than seven hours of sleep at night, and two-thirds of workers don’t get anywhere near enough physical exercise. As a result, more than 80 per cent reported having a musculoskeletal condition (the most common being lower back pain), with over half being at risk of mental ill-health.

Downside of not keeping stress in check

The Malaysian Mental Health Association has long implored employers to take care of the mental health needs of their employees, and currently, politicians are encouraging greater awareness and conversations around the importance of mental health.

While it’s great to see more conversations taking place, it’s traditionally been the case that mental health receives little more than lip-service. For things to improve, the government and business leaders alike must take tangible action if there’s going to be a shift in trends of the disturbing stats as they currently exist.

From an economic point of view, the longer mental health is neglected, the more it hurts the bottom line for Malaysia’s business. On average, absenteeism and presenteeism costs the economy around RM3mil per organisation. Presenteeism refers to employees being present at work while ill, or not being productive due to stress or a related contributing factor. Left unchecked, stress can significantly affect our health, putting us at risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. The effects of stress can include the following: headaches, muscle and chest pain, fatigue, lack of motivation, sleep problems, less physical activity, emotional outbursts, anxiety, depression, feelings of being overwhelmed, and so on.

Misconceptions about mindfulness exercises

So, what can be done to mitigate the effects of work-related stress? Whenever I’m invited to give talks on mindfulness or stress management, the typical request goes something like this: “Could you please come and give a talk on how to manage stress? It would also be good if our employees could learn some meditation or relaxation techniques to take away and practise at home.”

While I feel happy to know that organisations are taking some interest in proactively supporting their employees, it’s clear that there’s an attitude which believes that, after a few minutes of meditation and breathing techniques, work-related stress magically disappears. If only it were that easy.

Research studies into the effectiveness of mindfulness usually involve at least six weeks’ worth of practice and intervention. In other words, to reap the benefits, it takes more than a quick two-hour talk to alleviate work-related stress. Anyone who tries to sell a quick-fix to a deep-seated problem is, to be blunt, trying to make a fast buck off the suffering of others.

What organisations can do to help

In order to reduce work-related stress, leaders should first look to the company culture to see how it’s adding to the likelihood of work-related stress occurring in the first place.

For example, do people get adequate breaks? Are they encouraged to take all of their annual leave? Are they being emailed and expected to respond at 11pm or on their days off? Is there an opportunity for employees to have honest conversations with leaders when they feel overwhelmed or have a work-related issue they need to discuss?

Ultimately, leaders can throw all the wellness programmes they like at their workforce, but if the culture encourages unhealthy habits and practices, the money spent on such programmes might as well be flushed down the toilet for all the good it does.

Having said that, it’s understandable that leaders can find it tough to deal with work-related stress. After all, bosses tend to only see smiling, agreeable faces – how are they to know what’s really going on if people are feeling drained inside? Then again, if employees don’t feel like they can be upfront about how they’re doing, leaders might want to ask themselves why.

Why is it that, despite working longer hours, Malaysia has one of the highest rates of productivity loss? Why is work-related stress costing the country so much per year per organisation? Why does the problem of work-related stress keep emerging?

It’s not inevitable that work-related stress continues to grow, but it is inevitable if there continues to be no real and sustained action taken to support the mental health needs of employees.

If there is a lack of investment in this area, employees will either look elsewhere (many beyond Malaysia’s borders) or continue to turn up ill or demotivated – or both – helping neither themselves nor their organisation.

The prognosis might sound bleak, but it needn’t be the case if the people in positions of authority resolve to take swift and substantial action to ensure people have the right support and access to resources that can help them feel stable, happy and motivated to give the best of themselves to whatever role they perform.

When it comes to entrepreneurship, leaders of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are at the forefront of work-related stress and yet, due to the ‘hustle’ mindset that permeates entrepreneurship, no one talks about the very real risk of burn-out and breakdown.

In her Journal of Management Issues article, researcher Holly Buttner asked the question: Entrepreneurial stress: is it hazardous to your health? In the paper, Buttner points out that, while entrepreneurship can be highly rewarding, "entrepreneurs must bear the brunt of their mistakes while playing a multitude of roles, such as salesperson, recruiter, spokesperson, and negotiator. These simultaneous demands can lead to role overload.”

Speaking to a psychologist friend of mine recently, he suggested that entrepreneurs in Malaysia are some of "the most stressed-out people in work", not least of all because they tend to carry all the risk.

“That’s good news for you,” I replied, “there must be loads of opportunities to train them how to manage their stress effectively.” He said, “You’d think that… but most aren’t interested. They see it as a weakness, something that takes away from their working time.”

I was baffled to hear my friend’s response. How is it that entrepreneurs – people famed for looking at ways to create and maintain an edge – can’t see the obvious downside to running themselves into the ground? How effective can a burned-out businessperson be when their energy, focus and creativity all plummet over the cliff-edge?

To be clear, it isn’t the workload that causes an entrepreneur’s stress. As Buttner found in her study, “It appears that stress is associated not with the volume of work per se, but with the realisation of the decisions that entrepreneurs must make and whether they are making the right decision.”

To be unaware of the role that our mental health plays in helping us succeed is unfortunate; to be unwilling to take steps to ensure good mental health when the pressure is on is to put yourself — and possibly others — at risk of several (avoidable) issues that can arise from not taking care of ourselves.

On LinkedIn, for example, I read often about leaders who “get on the treadmill” in the mornings, or “hit the gym” before important meetings. Clearly, leaders recognise the importance of maintaining good physical health if they want to succeed and thrive. That said, there’s comparatively little mention of getting enough sleep, meditating, self-reflection, or other ways that help to take care of our mental health.

For those who might be unaware of how to take care of their mind, I’d like to offer two exercises, taken from Mindfulness and Emotions — a book I wrote alongside emotional researcher Dr. Susan Gratton. In it, we provide the scientifically-proven benefits of mindfulness, from increased concentration and focus to being able to remain calm when under pressure.

Listed below are two step-by-step activities you can practise for 10 minutes each day to boost your mental health and reap the rewards that come with it. From a business perspective, they can help to reduce excessive worrying, improve decision-making, and inspire creativity as the mind becomes re-energised and centred.

Keep in mind that these exercises offer benefits over time. It’s like going to the gym: once a month is likely to yield little results, but if we exercise regularly, we quickly begin to see and feel the benefits of the effort we put in. Let’s take a look at how we can boost our mind’s performance through these effective mindfulness exercises:

1. Strengthening awareness and focus

Sit on a chair with your back straight (but not rigid) and place your hands in a comfortable position, for example, folded on your lap or facing palm-down on your thighs. Your legs should be comfortable yet stable.

Try to avoid crossing them at the ankles, as this might cause some discomfort and distract your medi- tation. If you like, you can cross your legs, or cross- legged on the floor — the main emphasis here is being in a comfortable position with your back straight.

When you’re ready, close your eyes and carry out a

CONTINUES ON PAGE 09
quick scan of your body; is your back straight? Are you sitting comfortably? Do you need to shift your weight a little from one side to improve balance? Spend the first 30 seconds or so making sure you’re as comfortable as you can be, but don’t be afraid to adjust your position if required.

Once you’re comfortable, take some time to just be in the moment. There’s no rush to jump to the breath or centre the mind... just as you dip your toe into the water to test the temperature, open your eyes and remain feeling the weight of your body on the chair, how your feet feel on the floor, and note any ambient sounds that you can hear.

For the next few minutes, there’s nothing to do, nowhere to go – all you need to do is be with whatever comes into your awareness.

Once you’ve settled into the meditation, it’s at this point you can start to bring your attention to the breath. If you prefer, you can focus on a point where the breath comes in and out, such as the tip of the nose. Otherwise, you can simply observe the feeling of the breath as it comes in and out, without controlling it.

Noticing its natural rhythm, allow the mind to be anchored in that observation, again keeping in mind that there’s nowhere you need to be at this time, no need to worry about the past or the future. You’re just spending a few moments being exactly where you are, and how you are, right now.

You might discover during these moments that the mind likes to drift off, carried away by the tide of thoughts that pop up. Whenever you notice this, just return your mind back to the attention of the breath.

There’s no need to get frustrated or even to judge your reaction if you do – it’s natural for the mind to wander and for feelings to arise. Each time you bring it back to the centre, it’s like doing one repetition of a bicep curl or a squat: with each ‘rep’, you’re strengthening your mindfulness over time.

Should you find it difficult to stop the mind from wandering, take three deliberate deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly. This should help calm the wave of thoughts and allow you to carry on with your meditation.

If focusing on the breath alone is difficult, you can make use of a two-syllable word as a mantra to aid your focus. It can be any word you like. The idea is to mentally repeat the first syllable on the in-breath, followed by the second syllable on the out-breath, maintaining the focus on the breath as before.

As you come to the end of your meditation, it’s good to check in with the body again with a quick scan, noticing how your head, chest, arms, back and legs feel, and noting if there’s any tension.

If there is, take a few deep breaths and try to gently relax the area of tension. Don’t try to ‘get rid’ of any sensation, but rather use your deep breathing as a visualisation, as though it’s helping to softly dissolve the tension wherever it exists.

When you’re ready to end the meditation, open your eyes and remain where you are for just a few moments longer. Sometimes, the temptation is there to ‘get on’ to the next thing on your to-do list. But taking a few moments just to sit where you are, the impulse of the ‘monkey mind’ becomes less potent, with practice it feels gentler when you decide when you’re going to move, rather than being compelled by an impulse.

Developing self-reflection and regulation

Bringing a specific incident or interaction from the past day or week to mind, write down the thoughts and feelings that come to you as you think about it. Whatever presents itself, write it down on a piece of paper. This exercise – which should take a few minutes – will give you an insight into how much your mind evaluates and judges, allowing you to practise stepping into the role of ‘observer’ as you simply note what comes up, rather than getting caught up in your mental states.

The next time you find yourself listening to the news or having a conversation on a topic (e.g. politics), see if you can spot how your mind reacts in real time to points it agrees with, and to disagreeable points.

How does it feel when something aligns or contrasts with your views? Do you feel any impulse to react or respond in a particular way? Have you ever, for example, shouted at someone on TV, even though you’re aware they can’t hear you? Following on from the previous step, whenever you encounter a sentiment or viewpoint that’s different from your own, try to be aware of any impulses and see if you can hold back from immediately reacting.

This doesn’t mean that you agree with views different from your own; the point is to practise spotting impulsive intentions to react and to develop greater control over how you respond.

Over time, this exercise increases your ability to step back and consider your experience and how you will proceed, ultimately reducing your susceptibility to knee-jerk reactions. It’s also a great exercise to bring your biases to the fore. You could even ask yourself, “How can I be sure that my reaction is accurate?” as well as, “Is my reaction useful? Will my response help the situation or make it worse?” This is easier said than done, and so definitely requires some consistent effort carried out over time!

When we think about being non-judgemental, we tend to associate it with how we treat others, to the exclusion of ourselves. But, as is often the case, we can be even more judgemental towards ourselves, which partly explains why we judge others in turn.

When you find yourself reacting to anything, try to begin from a point of accepting the reaction as it is. So, for example, if someone says something critical towards you and you react negatively, you might think, “Oh, I shouldn’t have done that – what an idiot I am!” On the other hand, you might react and then say, “Well, that’s just who I am, so deal with it!”

Non-judging takes the middle road, which is to say that we should avoid being self-critical about how we react, but at the same time recognise in a matter-of-fact way when particular reactions are unhelpful.

When we react negatively, we can simply note the reaction, think about its impact and try to be less reactionary the next time around, working towards making steady progress from there.

Sandy is a freelance writer based in Malaysia, and previously enjoyed 10 years as a journalist and broadcaster in the UK. He has been fortunate to gain valuable insights into what makes us tick, which has deepened his interests in leadership, emotions, mindfulness, and human behaviour. To connect with Sandy, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.
Head or Heart?

Why you should be rational about the emotional

"Your highly emotional reaction is most illogical."
"Where there is no emotion, there is no motive for violence."
"May be that I have not thoroughly enjoyed serving with humans? I find their illogical and foolish emotions a constant irritant."

**S**tar Trek fans will immediately recognise the above quotes as attributed to Mr Spock, the science officer aboard the Starship Enterprise in the sci-fi series. Spock is the embodiment of logic in the series, often projecting a stoic demeanour through preference for facts and data.

For most of the part, he is the paragon of rationality on board the Enterprise, refusing to allow any trace of emotion to influence his decisions. Importantly, Spock serves as the antipode to the intuitive and emotional James Kirk, captain of the Enterprise.

Much of Spock’s statements place emotions as being illogical, disruptive – foolish even, in the face of decision-making. Emotions are antithetical to rationality, representing the disruptive to the ordered, and as such, ought to be relegated to a silent corner where important decisions are concerned.

Important decisions, like those made in organisations on a daily basis, are to be approached on the basis of facts. Tangible, concrete data and not fleeting, unpredictable sentiments should be the basis for our decisions.

Financial seminars tout the value of eliminating emotion from investment decisions. Employee performance is evaluated using numerical metrics, with numbers quantifying judgments of effectiveness and efficiency.

Do emotions, however, deserve to be cast under such an unfavourable light?

To some extent, yes. Emotions do interrupt decision-making, but, they are simply doing what they are meant to do: disrupt your thoughts and draw your attention to immediate demands.

Could we all be like Spock – completely unemotional, reason-driven entities with brains optimised for prioritising logic and data when faced with decision-making demands? Definitely not! Should we? Probably not.

For the simple reason that we need emotion to make decisions, eliminating emotions from decision-making is not merely impractical – it is impossible. How much we choose to rely on emotions when making decisions however, is within our control. We can be rational about the emotional in decision-making.

The curious case of Phineas Gage

A slight historical detour is necessary if we wish to understand why emotions are central to decision-making.

In 1848, a foreman working on the construction of railway lines in the United States suffered a most unfortunate accident. The foreman oversaw the demolition of rocks and rubble, in order to pave the ground for railway tracks to be laid.

One careless distraction later, and the foreman packed gunpowder into the ground without covering it up neatly for remote detonation. Disaster ensued.

He struck the ground with a sharp metal pole, the resulting friction igniting the gunpowder and launching the tamping iron out of the foreman’s hands and right into his skull.

Miraculously, the foreman survived, but his behaviour changed dramatically. He could no longer control his emotional impulses. He made poor judgments and decisions that seemed uncharacteristic and out of character.

The foreman, Phineas Gage, would tell us a lot about how emotions are central to our decision-making. When asked how he felt during his recovery, he jokingly replied, “I am not more than a common mortal. I have no more idea of what I am about than any other person.”

What is remarkable about Gage is that his injuries were contained around an area of the brain responsible to help regulate, control and use emotions for decision-making. This indicates that his injuries were contained around an area of the brain responsible to help regulate, control and use emotions for decision-making.

When it was not the case that ‘reason’ and ‘emotion’ were so intimately intertwined in our brains, we would expect Gage to lack the ability to make decisions altogether.

The fact that Gage was still making decisions – albeit poor ones on the basis of emotional impulses, shows that we rely on emotion to help us reason. Damage to this part inhibits our ability to be reasonable about emotions.

The many shades of emotions

Our brains reason about emotion, employing them as pieces of information to aid decision-making. Having pleasant feelings about an individual makes us judge them more favourably, or at least less critically.

Having a less favourable mood causes us to hesitate, to be a little more deliberate in our actions, and to nitpick on details we would otherwise miss in a more pleasant mood state.

There have been studies suggesting that emotions precede reason. That means we could very well be making a lot of our decisions on the basis of emotion, before we find reasons to justify those decisions.

Emotions shade so many of our decisions and judgments that we are oftentimes unaware of how influential they are in our jobs.

Applicant selection and the many cognitive biases associated with this process – the halo and pitchfork effects (making snap judgments about candidates on the basis of a few positive/negative qualities), contrast effect (making relative rather than objective assessments of applications) are just two ways in which emotions alter our judgments.

Emotions provide us a shortcut to decision-making that is efficient, but not necessarily optimal. Even much of our future decisions are shaded by emotions.

Let’s say you are deciding if you should stop over to your boss’ house for dinner. You foresee that your boss will be displeased, and your tardiness might be brought up to you in your next performance evaluation. Rewind back to the present. You decide in the present moment to skip breakfast altogether, opting instead for an early lunch.

How you can expect to feel in the future changes your thoughts in the present time. When we lack all the details and the facts necessary to make decisions in the present moment, we rely on expected future emotions to guide our behaviours.

And that is often the case with many decisions – we simply do not have every sliver of information, nor energy to consider every single possibility.

That gut feeling within you – that intangible, unseen sensation that sways your decisions is trying to tell you something, attempting to steer your thoughts and behaviours in the face of incomplete information.

Even major investment decisions are sometimes made on more emotional grounds than we realise. Even when armed with tangible, factual and numerical data, there’s still that pull of emotion that tells us that we should sell, or hang on to a particular stock. Our rationality is, in this sense, bounded.

Emotions fill in the gaps in our understanding to make decisions. Emotions are the imperfect necessity for making decisions in a world flooded with information.

Manage emotions prudently

Rather than try to eliminate emotion’s influence altogether from our decision-making, it’s more prudent to consider how much emotions are affecting your decisions.

Important decisions – ones that have an impact on the organisations – should of course, not be made on the basis of emotion alone. Managers making decisions based on gut feel may take a course of action that turns out to be sub-optimal in hindsight.

Making decisions in the spur of anger or impatience may lead to rash choices in words and actions that affect team harmony and morale. Making decisions largely on grounds of positive, pleasant emotions are also problematic. Sunk costs are incurred because of continued ‘good feeling’ commitment to ideas that have low profitability or viability.

Panic buying (or selling) is another clear example of how emotions drive impulsive decisions and actions. Market sentiments reflect the emotions of the masses; multiple individuals projecting their own hopes, anxieties, frustrations towards the purchases and selling decisions.

While such sentiments give us some indication of what the market will be like – no one is truly prescient regarding our future fortunes.

Managers and organisational decision-makers try to limit risks by studying markets, analysing trends and data, but the fingerprint of emotion is still evident in any projections made regarding the unknown future.

Parting thoughts

Prudence in considering both the voices of reason and emotions helps us make decisions that are ultimately more well-informed, and optimal within our limits. We have the capacity to reason about emotions, and this, at least, is a skill that we can hone to enhance our decision-making.

Even Mr Spock acknowledges that the best choices were not reliant solely on logic. Having once lost a game of chess to Kirk, he admitted, “Your illogical approach to chess does have its advantages on occasion, captain.”

To read Dr Eugene’s five tips on how to manage emotions in decision-making, head to bit.ly/ETEmotions.

The full version of this article was previously published in print.

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Becoming a Leading Brand

How 30 years of radical decisions have kept Haier on top

By DR KAIHAN KRIPPENDORFF
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If someone handed you a sledgehammer and told you to start smashing your company’s products, would you do it? That’s exactly what Haier chief executive officer (CEO) Zhang Ruimin did to prove a point to his employees.

That was the first in a long line of radical decisions that have helped Haier transform from a fledgling refrigerator maker to the world’s No. 1 appliance manufacturer – and kept it there.

Haier was founded in 1984 when the Chinese government took over a nearly bankrupt refrigerator factory, and put Zhang in charge. The company brought in about RMB3.5mil (just under USD600,000) in its first year with Zhang as the CEO.

Within two years, it was experiencing unprecedented growth, and has continued to flourish ever since. Today, the company generates over USD30bil in revenue and USD20bil in profit, and employs around 80,000 people.

Haier has managed to consistently grow year after year for more than three decades by doing what its competitors can’t or won’t: taking an uncommon stand, expanding and diversifying, unleashing the power of employee entrepreneurs, and encouraging internal competition.

Take an uncommon stand

When Haier started, it was one of about 300 refrigerator manufacturers in China, most of which were making low-quality products that they sold inexpensively. But Zhang believed consumers would be willing to pay more money for high-quality, reliable products.

Zhang instilled this focus in his employees immediately by handing out sledgehammers and having them personally destroy appliances that didn’t meet quality requirements. “They finally understood that I wasn’t going to sell just anything, like my competitors would,” said Zhang. “It had to be the best.”

By shifting their focus to quality and dependability – something no other refrigerator maker in China was focusing at the time – Haier was averaging 83 per cent sales growth by their second year in business.

By the late 1990s, China had an over-saturation of refrigerators. While competitors slashed their prices to compensate, Haier went in the other direction and raised its prices – and the risk paid off. Consumers were willing to pay a premium because by this point, they recognised Haier as a brand that would deliver high-end, quality products.

When your competitors zag, you can only differentiate yourself with a zig. What uncommon strategic stand is your company taking?

Expand and diversify

By 1991, Haier’s positioning as a quality-focused company was proving successful, as they had become China’s top refrigerator manufacturer. The next step in their growth was to expand and diversify. By the mid-1990s, the company had opened production facilities in Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Around the same time, Zhang began to acquire other companies. He looked for appliance businesses in China that had strong products and markets but weak leadership that he believed could be fixed by bringing in excellent managers.

Zhang found what he was looking for, assuming control of an air-conditioning plant, a freezer factory, and a washing machine company. Haier now has additional factories throughout the United States (US), Europe, Asia and Africa, and is the world’s leading appliance manufacturer.

In 2016, Haier Group acquired General Electric’s appliance division for USD4.6bil to help build a stronger presence in the US appliance market.

After you have proven your uncommon stand is working, how will you expand and diversify?

Unleash the power of employee entrepreneurs

Haier is adopting a model for its enterprise that we believe will define which organisations will thrive in the future. The company considers itself a platform company. But while standard platform companies – like Li & Yang – coordinate action among outside suppliers, buyers and other stakeholders, Haier has become a platform to its own internal units located around the world.

“When the arrival of the Internet, we realised that under this triangular hierarchical structure, people had a difficult time adapting to the requirements of the times,” said Zhang. “So, we reorganised ourselves as an entrepreneurial platform.”

Haier’s employees are considered ‘micro-entrepreneurs’ and are broken up into 3,000 ‘micro-enterprises’ that act like start-ups. Each unit is centred around an innovative idea or product and behaves as an independent business within Haier. The micro-enterprises are small and nimble, allowing them to quickly respond to customer needs, cultivate new ideas and innovate.

Unit leaders have the power to make big decisions, including hiring and firing their own staff, and are responsible for their own budget. They propose new ideas to Zhang and other executives, and if approved, receive financial backing to move forward with their venture. They are required to hit financial targets but are otherwise left alone to manage their unit.

“I want each employee coming to work for Haier to have the sense that he or she can find a place in the company to realise his or her own values as well as creating value for the enterprise,” said Zhang.

Haier is also breaking the rules when it comes to compensation. Rather than a fixed salary, employees are paid based on the value they create for the company. This makes strong strategic sense. Companies are, essentially, centralised mechanisms for allocating talent and resources.

We have given up centralised planning in economies, but not yet within corporations. In 2017, we interviewed Tony Hsieh, the CEO of Zappos, and he expressed his desire to do the same, to convert his employees into ‘mini-CEOs’.

“How can you transform your employees into ‘micro-entrepreneurs’?”

Encourage internal competition

In most hierarchical structures, projects are vetted, chosen, and assigned through an orderly process that removes redundancy. The thought behind this is that it’s inefficient to have two groups investing resources on the same idea at the same time.

But at Haier, employees must pit their projects against other teams with similar ones. They must compete to secure projects, and then compete further to ensure their projects succeed. This pushes them to be creative and innovative, and to use their resources wisely.

When Bruno Mars won Album of the Year at the 2018 Grammys, he addressed the other artists nominated, saying: “First off, to the other nominees in this category – Lorde, Kung Fu Kenny [Kendrick Lamar], Jay-Z, Childish Gambino – you guys are the reason why I’m in the studio pulling my hair out, because I know you guys are gonna come with the top-shelf artistry and music.”

That is the spirit that internal competition can activate – but it’s not for everyone. And that’s okay, according to Zhang. This method helps filter out the employees who can’t cut it in this environment, either because their projects rarely succeed, or because they realise they simply don’t want to work this way.

People who are entrepreneurial in spirit and thrive on competition will be attracted to Haier, and will ultimately succeed there, and others will be filtered out, leaving behind the cream of the crop.

Do you allow – even encourage – healthy internal competition?

In summary

Are you ready to make radical decisions for your own organisation? Consider the following:

• Take an uncommon stand: When your competitors zag, you can only differentiate yourself with a zig. What uncommon strategic stand is your company taking?

• Expand and diversify: After you have proven your uncommon stand is working, how will you expand and diversify?

• Unleash the power of employee entrepreneurs: How can you transform your employees into ‘micro-entrepreneurs’?

• Encourage internal competition: Do you allow – even encourage – healthy internal competition?

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By SHANE PARRISH
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“Marking a book is literally an experience of your differences or agreements with the author. It is the highest respect you can pay him.”
— Edgar Allan Poe

YOU already know how to read. I bet you were taught how in elementary school. But do you know how to read well? If you’re like most people, you probably haven’t given much thought to how you read.

While great for exercising your memory, the regurgitation of facts without understanding gains you nothing. A lot of people, however, confuse insightful understanding with the ability to regurgitate information. They think that knowledge of something means understanding it.

A good heuristic: Anything easily digested is reading for information.

Consider the newspaper, are you truly learning anything new? Do you consider the writer your superior when it comes to knowledge in the subject?

Odds are probably not. That means you’re reading for information. There’s nothing wrong with that; it’s how most people read—but you’re not really learning anything new. It’s not going to give you an edge or make you better at your job.

Learning something insightful is harder, you have to read something clearly above your current level. You need to find writers who are more knowledgeable on a particular subject than yourself. It’s also how you get smarter.

Reading for understanding means narrowing the gap between reader and writer.

The four levels of reading


The goal of reading determines how you read—reading the latest Danielle Steel novel is not the same as reading Plato.

If you’re reading for entertainment or information, you’re going to read a lot differently (and likely different material) than reading to increase understanding.

While many people are proficient in reading for information (entertainment or education) than reading to increase understanding.

Before we can improve our reading skills, we need to understand the differences in the reading levels. They are thought of as levels because you can’t move to a higher level without a firm understanding of the previous one—they are cumulative.

Elementary reading

This is the level of reading taught in our elementary schools.

Inspectional reading

We’ve been taught that skimming and superficial reading are bad for understanding. That is not necessarily the case. Using these tools effectively can increase understanding. Inspectional reading allows us to look at the author’s blueprint and evaluate the merits of a deeper reading experience.

There are two types of inspectional reading:

a) Systematic skimming

This is meant to be a quick check of the book by:

- Reading the preface
- Studying the table of contents
- Checking the index
- Reading the inside jacket

This should give you sufficient knowledge to understand the chapters in the book pivotal to the author’s argument. Dip in here and there, but never more than a paragraph or two.

Skimming helps you reach a decision point: Does this book deserve more of my time and attention? If not, you set it down.

b) Superficial reading

This is when you just read. Don’t ponder the argument, don’t look things up, don’t write in the margins. If you don’t understand something, move on.

What you gain from this quick read will help you later when you go back and put more effort into reading.

Analytical reading

Francis Bacon once remarked: “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.”

Think of analytical reading as chewing and digesting. Analytical reading is a thorough reading.

If inspectional reading is the best you can do quickly, this is the best reading you can do given unlimited time. At this point, you start to engage your mind and dig into the work required to understand what’s being said.

There are rules to analytical reading:

a) Classify the book according to kind and subject matter
b) State what the whole book is about with the utmost brevity
c) Enumerate its major parts in their order and relation, and outline these parts as you have outlined the whole
d) Define those terms or problems the author is trying to solve

You’ll probably notice that while those sound pretty easy, they involve a lot of work.

Fortunately, the inspectional reading you’ve already done has primed you for this. When you’ve done this, you will understand the book but you might not understand the broader subject.

To do that you need to use comparative reading to synthesise knowledge from several books on the same subject.

Syntopical reading

This is also known as comparative reading and it represents the most demanding and difficult reading of all. Syntopical reading involves reading many books on the same subject and comparing and contrasting the ideas.

This task is undertaken by identifying relevant passages, translating the terminology, framing and ordering questions we need answered, defining the issues and having a conversation with the responses.

The goal is not to achieve an overall understanding of any particular book, but rather to determine how to make the books useful to you. This is all about you and filling in your gaps.

These are the five steps to syntopical reading:

a) Finding the relevant passages

You need to find the right books and then the passages that are most relevant to filling your needs. So, the first step is an inspectional reading of all the works that you have identified as relevant.

b) Bringing the author to terms

In analytical reading you must identify the keywords and how they are used by the author.

This is fairly straightforward. The process becomes more complicated now as each author has probably used different terms and concepts to frame their argument.

Now the onus is on you to establish the terms. Rather than using the author’s language, you must use your own. In short, this is an exercise in translation and synthesis.

c) Getting the questions clear

Rather than focus on the problems the author is trying to solve, you need to focus on the questions you want answered. Just as we must establish our own terminology, so too must we establish our own propositions by shedding light on our problems to which the authors provide answers.

It’s important to frame the questions in such a way that all or most of the authors can be interpreted as providing answers. Sometimes we might not get an answer to our questions because they might not have been seen as questions by the authors.

d) Defining the issues

If you’ve asked a clear question to which there are multiple answers then an issue has been defined. Opposing answers, now translated into your terms, must be ordered in relation to one another.

Understanding multiple perspectives within an issue helps you form an intelligent opinion.

e) Analysing the discussion

It’s presumptuous to expect we’ll find a single unchallenged truth to any of our questions.

Our answer is the conflict of opposing answers. The value is within the discussion you have with these authors. You can now have an informed opinion.

Become a demanding reader

Reading is all about asking the right questions in the right order and seeking answers.

There are four main questions you need to ask of every book:

1. What is this book about?
2. What is being said in detail and how?
3. Is this book true in whole or in part?
4. What of it?

If all of this sounds like hard work, you’re right. Most people won’t do it. But, that’s what sets you apart.

This article was previously published in print.

Shane Parrish is the founder of Farnam Street. He helps companies make better decisions and foster innovation. What tips do you have for reading? Tell us at editor@leaderonomics.com.
Shifting from a Job to a Purpose

How one mother made the leap from the creative field to entrepreneurship

By SANDY CLARKE
editor@leaderonomics.com

A

S an uncle of five nephews, I know how confusing it can be to look after new-born babies – after just a few hours of babysitting. My admiration for mothers is, therefore, off-the-scale; it’s nothing less than heroic how women juggle all the challenges with bringing up a tiny human, all the while managing the other 101 commitments and responsibilities.

Watching my sisters raise their children, it was clear that there was so much for them to learn. They were often on the phone with our mother, asking questions and seeking advice about everything from teething and sleeping habits, to handling the stress of feeling tired and uncertain.

No doubt, there must be a million questions that run through the minds of new mothers, and an equal number of self-doubts that lead them to question if they’re ready for the most important role anyone can be given.

Of motherhood, the American author Jill Churchill has said, “There’s no way to be a perfect mother and a million ways to be a good one.” Certainly, it’d be impossible to get everything right when raising a child, but the strength of a mother’s love is shown by the fact that she never gives up trying to be the best for her baby.

In 2010, Ruchita Dar Shah had just given birth to her second child, and the then mother-of-two (now of three) had an idea to create an online community to help support first-time mothers through the ups and downs of their life-changing experience.

Since then, Ruchita’s online business, First Moms Club, has grown into a popular and indispensable resource for mothers to share their exciting moments, challenges, hopes, dreams and fears, knowing that they are among an abundance of supportive women.

The accidental entrepreneur

Applying on CEO Chats, Ruchita talks about how she sees herself as an ‘accidental entrepreneur’ who went from being a creative stalwart in the advertising industry to a founder of a much-needed online forum. Ruchita recalls how she was the first among her friends to be married and become a mother, and so naturally, when her friends became mothers themselves, Ruchita was flooded with questions about her own experience and how she handled motherhood.

She says, “It was around the time this whole ‘Google parenting’ thing came about. I realised that most of us weren’t living in the cities we grew up in. We were not staying with our families, so there was no help – no mother-in-law or mother, so you’re trying to figure things out on your own.

“So, I started in 2010, creating a group on Facebook for my friends where we’d just share with each other. Sometimes, I’d read articles that were helpful and I’d feel like sharing with them – it was just easier. That’s how it started.

“It just grew organically, and for the first few years it would just be me and my friends, and then they would add friends, and everybody found it useful.”

With over 72,000 ‘likes’ on Facebook, and a strong following across Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, First Moms Club has gone from strength to strength, covering all aspects of motherhood, including how women can make time for self-care, which is a point that Ruchita believes is crucial both for mother and baby.

She says, “We started to do a lot of stuff to inspire women to go back to work or get back to their hobby, or start something from home – anything that inspires and empowers them.

“We should keep in mind that, whatever we do, our child is watching and they will follow what we do. So, I think it’s important for us to be inspiring to our children.”

A community for mothers

One of the driving motivators behind the First Moms Club (check out the website at firstmomsclub.in) was that it provided a communal support system, rather than new mothers having to follow individual ‘influencers’ who, while they can offer value, can be difficult to relate to if they present the picture-perfect image that sponsors prefer.

Instead, Ruchita devoted herself to building a community where mothers – whether they’re first-time mums or otherwise – could feel accepted and included by people who are on the same journey together. As a result, Ruchita’s ‘accidental’ foray into entrepreneurship has given mothers across India and beyond a place where they can share their stories, tips and advice.

When asked what ingredients go into making a successful entrepreneur, Ruchita emphasises discipline and passion as key elements of building a business that serves a strong purpose.

She says, “You have to be very motivated; you have to be extremely passionate about the idea, and you have to have a sense of discipline, which I realised only when I started on my own. When we’re working for someone, you’re expected to turn up to the office and clock in – you’re getting paid to do that, and that’s part of the ecosystem we follow.

“Even when you freelance, there’s a deadline and clients are expecting you to deliver. But, when you’re doing things on your own – especially in the space of an online community – it was all driven because I wanted to do it.”

Sandy is a former managing editor at Leaderonomics, and previously enjoyed 10 years as a journalist and broadcaster in the UK. He has been fortunate to gain valuable insights into what makes us tick, which has deepened his interests in leadership, emotions, mindfulness, and human behaviour. Get in touch with him by emailing editor@leaderonomics.com.
It Comes with Experience
Learning how to filter the noise from all directions

By SANDY CLARKE
editor@leaderonomics.com

Are leaders born or made? That was the question pondered by the president of Switzerland’s International Institute for Management Development (also better known as IMD Business School), Jean-François Manzoni as he chatted with host Roshan Thiran on The Leaderonomics Show.

Manzoni re-joined the prestigious award-winning school in Sep 2015 as professor of leadership and organisational development, before taking up his role as president and dean on Jan 1, 2017.

As a PhD holder from Harvard Business School, his research and teaching interests are focused on leadership, development of high-performance organisations, and corporate governance.

In working with leaders in the capacity of consultant, Manzoni looks for ways in which leaders can create high-performance working environments, and how they can shape their leadership style in a manner that accommodates the desired result.

Leaders are born and made

The debate over whether leaders are born or made is one that has been bubbling for decades; however, a general consensus exists to suggest that both nature and nurture play their parts, given the numerous factors such as environment, circumstances and capabilities that come into play.

To pin down leadership to a formula is almost certainly an impossibility, which begins with the difficulty of defining leadership in the first place. In academic research, there are currently over 350 definitions of leadership, one of the things you realise is that every existing articles that suggest leaders need to listen and this is true – leaders do need to listen. But when you’re in a position of leadership, one of the things you realise is that everybody has an opinion – and they don’t all have the same opinion as one another. Sometimes, they don’t have the same opinion even at different times of the day.

“So, one of the things you have to learn as a leader is to find your way through this rather confusing feedback. You’ve got to be able to press the ‘mute’ button and say, ‘Thank you very much, this has been quite helpful, and now we’re going to go in this direction.’ I’m not saying leaders should be hard of hearing, but that they should have the capability of being hard of hearing.”

Having said that, the professor stresses that being hard of hearing doesn’t mean that leaders should become deaf. Some leaders, he says, leave the ‘mute’ button on for too long to the point where they become disconnected from what people are saying.

“If leaders lose sight of their own emotions, detaching from and becoming unable to connect with people, problems begin to arise as these leaders begin to walk around with ‘a shield in front of them’.

Be a value creator

For young professionals who may soon find themselves in positions of leadership, Manzoni offers some valuable advice, calling on people to “try to create value before you capture it”.

He adds, “Another thing I would say is continue to learn. Have a practice that will lead to learning, because learning doesn’t fall from the sky and hit us on the head – you have to capture the insights.

“If you want to capture the insights, you first have to identify them. So, develop a reflective practice, where you stop, look back and ask, ‘What have I learnt this week? What would I have done differently?’ The faster you learn, the steeper your learning curve will be.

“Finally, be honest. You’ve got one reputation, you’ve got one brand, so be of use to the world – to create value, and to do this as honestly as possible.”

Sandy is a former managing editor at Leaderonomics, and previously enjoyed 10 years as a journalist and broadcaster in the UK. He has been fortunate to gain valuable insights into what makes us tick, which has deepened his interests in leadership, emotions, mindfulness, and human behaviour. Get in touch with him by emailing editor@leaderonomics.com.

DEVELOPING BASIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

There is a big range of competencies that fall under this. Some key ones are decision making, driving change, bonding with others, attention to quality and excellence. Developing these and many more is a process that takes significant time and refining over the years. This is part of Leaderonomics’ Science of Building Leaders, a framework which indicates important elements that need to be developed at each stage of one’s life, in order to empower the individual to become an effective leader. Head to bit.ly/SOBLP1 to find out more.
Accountability in a Culture of Empowerment

By CHONG SOOK LENG
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EMPLOYEES desire freedom to exercise their intellect, explore options and contribute ideas. They seek flexibility and space in the process of accomplishing their work. As we move towards an economy of managing a workforce of knowledge workers, employees want autonomy and control to carry out their job regardless of their age, rank or experience.

Typically, employees are asking for empowerment, which is about delegating power and authority to another person, usually someone whom you can trust.

The need for trust?
Trust in a person is built over a period of time and through proven track record that demonstrates that an individual is someone you can count on to consistently achieve expected results.

This recurring trend proves a person’s credibility and accountability to deliver the required service quality and goals.

Their reputation makes this person a candidate worthy of more power and authority to make bigger-impact decisions. But is trust a sufficient yardstick to qualify a person as worthy of being empowered?

Let us first consider what empowerment is not. Empowerment is not about entrusting power to someone and adopting a hands-off approach from thereon. During one of my regular coffee sessions with an old friend who is a chief executive officer (CEO) of a public listed company, he shared with me that he trusts his senior directors because they have been with the company for more than 10 years, and he knows that they have the best interests of the company at heart.

As a result, he gives them free rein to manage their respective functions. When I asked if he was pleased with the results they were achieving, he mentioned that there were mixed feelings involving both contentment and disappointment.

Although business remains profitable, it isn’t growing as fast as its peers and there were several missed opportunities which relegated the company from being a leader in the industry to lagging behind its newer competitors.

How many leaders have you known who started out as an employee and rose to become the CEO? In most organisations, a formal or informal performance management system is already in place. Setting clear goals and desired results are excellent ways to manage expectations of the empowered and avoid micromanaging by the business leader.

Goal-setting also allows both parties to be aligned and on the same page.

1. Set clear goals
In most organisations, a formal or informal performance management system is already in place. Setting clear goals and desired results are

2. Set up a monitoring system
Agree on milestones to be achieved, and identify critical paths and approval processes. Establish regular check-ins and both sides must be comfortable with the frequency.

3. Set aside time for mentoring and coaching
During the check-in process, seek opportunities for mentoring and coaching. Adequate support and guidance are essential as the person learns to make judgment calls, select choices, evaluate risks, consider different perspectives and build stakeholder engagement.

Feedback is important to help further expand on strengths and close developmental gaps. At the same time, these sessions are opportunities to further deepen engagement between the employee and the manager.

In the case of my niece, Sally, when she graduated with a communications degree and joined a new startup of about 20 employees in the business of social media marketing, the laissez faire environment was unsettling.

Whenever she referred to her seniors for guidance, they would advise her to be more assertive and proactive in carrying out her work.

Since it was Sally’s first job, she needed more supervision to give her the direction and confidence that she was on track as she developed her ideas on the project.

Keeping the right distance
How then does one avoid getting too close for comfort to the point of micromanaging versus being too distant and lose sight of the sinking ship?

For empowerment to be successfully practiced, both the giver and the taker need to hold each other accountable to ensure they each succeed in their roles.

In making each other accountable, a simple mechanism should be agreed by both parties.

The process is no different from any project management exercise of setting goals, tracking milestones and disciplined execution.

Here are some easy steps to build a structure of accountability:

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Gain a better understanding of yourself
Find out how you can assess your strengths and weaknesses at bit.ly/assesstraits
Giving Honest Feedback

Are you hurting feelings or changing behaviour?

By ETHAN GANES
editor@leaderonomics.com

“Pretty words are not always true, and true words are not always pretty.” — Aiki Flinthart

Honesty is a fantastic policy, with potential to bring clarity, fresh starts, and openness. However, honesty alone is hardly a miracle cure; the way it is conveyed can make all the difference. Do we tell it like it is and expect it to hurt, or do we add in some glitter and hope that the truth is seen?

Blurred lines
A while back, I ran into a friend of mine from secondary school. The two of us had been in charge of a fundraising event under a school club. We caught up and enjoyed a little bit of chat when suddenly he said, “You know, Ethan, I really admire how you led the team. You were really direct!”

I was confused. ‘Direct’ is hardly a word I would use to describe myself. Picking up on my confusion, he continued, “When someone did something you didn’t like, you just told them off.”

As the look of shock spread across my face, I remembered an incident where the event treasurer was late in providing the programme funding. I recall saying, “You’re overdue. You’re doing a terrible job.”

I doubt it came off as harsh. To be as honest and clear as possible I thought I needed to emphasise the intensity of the situation. Instead, I ended up hurting feelings in my attempt. A better way to have said it would’ve been: “I notice that you haven’t been keeping up to expectations.”

Clearly, these are very different statements. Here are some tell-tale signs that can help you identify a blunt statement:

1. It sounds too personal
   Tone is useful for more than the music world. The pronouns we use have the potential to make a statement sound accusatory. Using too many ‘you’s can make something sound like blame.
   “You are overdue. You’re doing a terrible job.”
   “The work you promised me is due. You need to get it done.”

   Although the intent is to achieve clarity, it can come off as being brash.

2. Check the adjectives
   An adjective is a part of speech that describes something. While they are very useful, with great power comes great responsibility. Words like ‘terrible’, ‘horrible’ and ‘disappointing’ are great adjectives, but they also carry a lot of negative connotations.

3. The why and how of being direct
   Generally, people do want to improve. Being direct helps show them the areas for improvement and helps them separate ‘self’ from the point the other person is making, it makes things objective. When they don’t take it personally, it helps them distinguish exactly what needs to change.

   When suggestions are given and come off as angry, it could result in the receiver feeling like they are the problem, rather than their actions or habits. Here are some things that may help add tact to honesty:

   Focus on the action
   Keep the spotlight of the statements on the action you have observed, rather than labelling the person’s character. For example, saying “You are lazy,” attaches a label. Saying “Your progress is slow,” focuses on the visible behaviour, and does not make it a personal description.

Before having a tough conversation, be ready with a single sentence that clearly states the point. This helps ensure that no matter what, the message stands.

At the end of the day
Many years after secondary school, I am now more active than ever in curricular activities. Many times, there’s a situation where a truth must be told, and it is so tempting to just drop unrefined truth bombs.

Whenever that happens, I step back and remember that being blunt can hurt and it can break bonds.

Ethan is passionate about meeting and understanding people. Filled with a strong sense of wonder and curiosity, to him challenges are only learning opportunities. Allergic to half the planet, he has learnt to look for the silver lining in every dish life brings him. To connect with him, email editor@leaderonomics.com.
The Power of Role Models
Making sense of personalities

By ROSHAN THIRAN
Based on research by EVA CHRISTODOULOU
editor@leaderonomics.com

A 10 months, Helen Keller suffered “an acute congestion of the stomach and brain” which left her deaf and blind. She struggled with life until she met Anne Sullivan, who became her role model. Anne challenged her to greatness and she succeed, becoming an inspiration to millions, including me as a young boy. I also had a football coach, the late Datuk Mohd Dahari, who became a huge role model – he kept pushing me out of my comfort zone.

Role models
The question asked in the survey in relation to role models was, “Does your child have a role model?” To this question, 49.5% of respondents answered yes, 6.8% answered no and 43.4% answered maybe.

From those who responded yes, 32.7% mentioned parents (either the father or mother as a role model), 9.7% mentioned uncles, grandparents and other extended family members, 7% mentioned people that their kids interacted with (i.e. teachers, community, colleagues), 3.7% mentioned a specific famous personality (Cristiano Ronaldo, Amal Clooney, Jack Ma) or a film character like Rocky Balboa. Two per cent mentioned religious figures.

These results seem to be in line with other studies conducted in other countries on choices of role models. Some parents explained further on why and how they think their children came to have these role models. For example, the parent whose child looks up to Ronaldo explained: “My son loves to play football and watches football on [the] Internet most of the time.” He idolises Ronaldo because he is not only good at football, he also helps people in need, visits sick children and inspires people that dreams do come true, especially since he comes from a poor family himself.

“My son would follow Ronaldo’s life story and he knows Ronaldo’s hard work – from poverty to stardom.” Another stated Rocky Balboa as the role model, citing that “he never gave up”.

Many parents stated that their children’s perception of a role model was usually someone extraordinary. This created an awe effect in many of these kids. They put their role models on a pedestal.

When my son was young, I remember reading Hans Christian Anderson’s The Ugly Duckling to him one night. It’s a simple story that begins when a swan’s egg is inadvertently left in a duck’s nest.

The swan spends its formative years surrounded by ducks and starts to behave and act like a duck. All this ‘ugly duckling’ had as role models were other ducks and so he tried his best to conform. However, the other ducks saw him merely as a big, long-necked failure.

So, the story goes on and on about how sad this ugly duckling’s life was until, by chance, he saw some other swans flying overhead and his vision of life’s possibilities becomes dramatically transformed.

He observed his new role models (the swans) and talked to them. He soon realised he had the ability to do so much more. The story ends with the ugly duckling transforming into a beautiful swan in his new environment with the other swans.

Why did this transformation happen? Not because the ducks didn’t train him well. They did, but he could never achieve his full potential. Having the right role models matters tremendously, just as it did for The Ugly Duckling.

In the survey, parents whose children had no role models, about 3.5%, explained that this was due to age (too young) or lack of importance in the family of encouraging role models for their kids.

Many parents want their kids to have role models but did not know how to go about identifying one. Parents play a huge role in encouraging and intentionally matching role models for their kids.

Choosing role models
Role models provide learning and inspiration, which helps individuals to define themselves. Individuals choose their role models and the qualities that they wish to emulate. This makes role models distinct from mentors (who may be allocated) and models of behaviour promoted by organisations or communities.

Individuals’ use of role models often comes in the form of judging themselves against the standards role models set, and thus seeking to become more similar (or different) to them.

Gibson, an academic researcher on role models, categorises role models as below:

Positive – Individuals emulate the role model
Negative – Individuals avoid being like the role model
Global – Individuals admire all qualities of the role model
Specific – Individuals admire specific qualities of the role model
Close – Individuals learn about specific tasks from close role models
Distant – Individuals admire the conduct of distant heroes
Up – Individuals’ role models are in superior positions
Across/Down – Individuals’ role models are in equal or junior positions

Children and youth watch and imitate people around them and also the people they look up to. They observe and learn from those they deem successful adults, including their parents and teachers.

It is critical that we not only surround our children and youth with positive role models, but that we also check ourselves and model the behaviours, beliefs and character traits that we wish to see grow and develop in our kids.

But we may not always be able to control who our children choose to look up to or emulate. They may become beholden by a celebrity for example, or they may admire a fictional character or a popular student in school, which we may not approve of.

Anderson and Callavaro (2002) looked at children as young as 10 years in the United States and tried to understand who these children chose as their role models. In their study, more respondents described a person they knew (65%) rather than a person they did not personally know (35%).

Parents, followed by other family members were the most popular choices. Role identification theories explain that people are attracted to and motivated by those similar to themselves (Kohlberg, 1963).

Regardless of how awesome Justin Bieber or Romelu Lukaku is, most of the time, you are a bigger influence to your child’s growth and development than any celebrity or superstar will ever be. So, play your part wisely!

Anderson and Callavaro explain: “One feature of role modelling is that children tend to choose role models whom they find relevant and with whom they can compare themselves.”

What parents can do is discuss with their children the characteristics that make these role models so desirable and encourage them to reflect on what makes them attractive and whether these are worth-while traits to emulate.

It is also important to remember that there is no such thing as a perfect person – if you think of all the famous leaders of the world you will soon find at least one area in their life that is dark; perhaps it was their temper, or their infidelity, or their focus on their work to the detriment of their family.

Discussing with children both the positive and negative aspects of their role models will help them understand that there are certain aspects that would be great to emulate, while avoiding others. It also helps them to realise they cannot attain perfection and should not feel bad and should forgive themselves when they fail to meet high standards.

What parents can do
Can parents determine the choice of their child’s role models? While it would be great to control the exposure our children have to various people and personalities they meet, watch, or read about, it is often impossible to push them into accepting someone as their role model.

What parents can do is intentionally surround and introduce their children to people with great values and qualities. Follow up by constantly discussing the people they interact with, their values and character. Remember, most role models comprise people that your kids know personally.

Celebrities and politicians are usually poor role models as you don’t see their lives up close and personal, and they generally disappoint at some point. For example, Tiger Woods and Ryan Gigg were role models to many but their infidelity caused great grief to many followers.

In conclusion
Generally, the best and most enduring role models are people you know – people who your children encounter in a real way, like you.

That is why, as parents, being able to provide exposure and options of role models for your children, and to be willing to provide a dialogue that is open enough for children to make sense of the people and personalities they come across, will have great impact in ensuring your child does not end up as an ugly duck but as a beautiful swan that can soar to greatness.

Roshan Thiran is the founder and CEO of Leaderonomics while Eva Christodoulou is the head of research. They both have children of their own and realise how tough and daunting parenting is but would like to encourage all parents to keep fighting the good fight. For more insights on the parenting survey, email info@leaderonomics.com
Future-Proof Your Children

Teach them skills that will be forever useful

By KIERAN FLANAGAN and DAN GREGORY
editor@leaderonomics.com

To be a parent in the 21st century is to experience a sense of angst when it comes to education. Newly-minted mums and dads have been known to enrol their children at private schools on the way home from the maternity ward, academic inflation has all of us worried about whether our child is in front – or gasp! falling behind – and even teachers are not entirely sure that the subject matter they are sharing will prepare the students in their charge for a world that is changing at an ever-increasing rate.

In this maelstrom of confusion, we’d like to offer a raft of calm. In fact, the panic around the worlds of change, education and training is one of the primary reasons we chose to pursue the research for our book, Forever Skills.

Our view, put simply, is that our collective perspective on change is rather too narrow and that, in addition to understanding what is changing, we should also pay some attention to what will be unchanging.

We’re not alone. Behavioural scientists and change managers the world over regularly advocate for emphasising the familiar and evergreen when it comes to encouraging new behaviour and for making change stick.

So, if we want to future-proof our children’s education, it makes sense to spend our time, money and focus on skills that will forever useful.

Our research with hundreds of educators, leaders, futurists, economists and business people around the world identified three key categories of ‘forever skills’:

1. Creativity skills
2. Communication skills
3. Control skills

It seems what we used to think of as soft skills are more enduring than their hard, or more technical, counterparts.

This may appear a little surprising against a background of what seems like universal calls for more science, technology, engineering and mathemat- ics (STEM), or teaching children to code, or our current commercial focus on information technology, but when you consider that information technology work is often offshore and that artificial intelligence (AI) is on the verge of ‘self-coding’ in languages it will develop for itself and execute with speed and efficiency no human (offshore or otherwise) can match, perhaps it shouldn’t be.

These are skills that have their origins in our histories, are those that employers are currently crying out for (according to research shared by LinkedIn) and are also considered to be increasingly important in the future.

In a world that seems to be constantly asking, “Can AI do it?” or “Will I be replaced with a robot?” perhaps better questions to ask are, “What will human beings always excel at?” or “What will we always find rewarding and choose to do for ourselves?”

Creative skills include activities beyond art, design, music and the industries we typically associate with creativity, including problem solving, insight generation, converting raw resources and information into new products, services and formats as well as developing mental agility – the ability to learn, unlearn and releam (to borrow a quote from Alvin Toffler).

Communication skills such as the capacity to build influence, sell others on our ideas, engender trust, build teams, and translate information across contexts and generations take on increasing importance in a world that is hyper-connected and ‘always on’.

Control skills which encompass everything from self-control to resource management and the ability to establish social consensus and order also have strong roots in our evolutionary past and will remain relevant and important in our shared futures.

Of course, it makes sense to give our children as broad an education as possible and to ensure that they are acquainted with the specific technical skills of the age that they inhabit. Although, it’s also worth remembering that at some point, even working a forge was considered revolutionary.

So, if we are to truly equip our children to navigate a world of work that no one can accurately predict or guarantee, it also makes sense to invest in their educations in forever skills.

In a world that seems to be constantly asking, “Can AI do it?” or “Will I be replaced with a robot?” perhaps better questions to ask are, “What will human beings always excel at?” or “What will we always find rewarding and choose to do for ourselves?”

Are your stories inspiring action?

The most successful leaders are storytellers. By mastering business storytelling they achieve extraordinary business results. As a modern day leader, this is a must-have skill that needs to be developed.

Let us help you put stories to work!
It is built into every parent’s DNA to have expectations for their children because they want what is best for them. However, humans tend to be extremists and are often sucked into the pressures surrounding us to compare our children.

As a result, we tend to overprotect them by setting high expectations that hinder and prevent their growth, which may be much faster with a different approach.

Before trying to groom children to grow up well, we have to also examine ourselves and see if our lives reflect a good example of who we want our children to be. Working as a music therapist over the years, I find that children are very observant and good at modelling behaviour and gestures.

One of the challenges in my line of work is to manage parents’ expectations as some want their child to progress as quickly as possible without addressing the child’s needs. I have encountered several children who only learn by following instructions, which may lead to children just blindly imitating without actually understanding the concepts behind it.

Hence, I allow some choice and control by letting them choose their favourite songs or actions that complement the objectives of my session. I found that by doing that, some children learn and improve at a faster rate.

Be a supportive parent

Parents usually consult a music therapist because they find that their child has an interest in music. It’s great that parents are able to identify when their child has a passion.

However, I believe that exposure to different hobbies would also reveal a child’s strengths or interests that would groom them in their growing up phase. If a child does not do well or does not show any improvement or interest in any skill, it does not mean that they must immediately stop pursuing it.

Neurodiversity teaches us to embrace their identity as a child no matter how different they may be from the majority of society. All children have varied progress rates which is why we, as caregivers and educators, should support them until they are independent enough to make life decisions.

Dealing with children with special needs, some parents can be a bit more anxious and want to pave the way for their child, especially if they are non-verbal. However, I have observed that even these children are able to speak their own mind and communicate through non-verbal gestures.

Some parents have also trained their child from young to write journal entries to pen down their thoughts as well as to communicate their wishes and feelings to their parents. This shows that nothing is impossible if we have the right support and approach in grooming our child. Some space for freedom in creating their own identity would allow them to live more independently and allow them to overcome hardships in life more easily.

Guide, not control

We – as educators and parents – need to always have faith and leverage a child’s own strengths, abilities and creativity to allow them to explore and learn to live like a child. Allowing mistakes, as long as the child is not harmed in any manner, will also help a child develop.

We need a constant reminder that every human being has their own strengths and gifts that are hidden unless they are freely explored and discovered.

Children are curious beings and like to explore in the initial stages of their lives. Hence, it is a good sign that children have that instinct to try and use their senses in gaining knowledge of the world.

The world may be dangerous but rest assured, as long as we are there to guide them to the right track, they can always travel different routes to get to the destination.

We just have to do our best, find a balance between their strengths and our acceptance, impart every experience we have learnt, and leave the rest to the child.

Isabel Tan is a degree graduate with an extended major in psychology and a minor in music. She took her masters in music therapy at the University of Queensland. She is a formally-trained pianist and violinist who also plays the guitar, ukulele, drums and cello.

Isabel is now back in Malaysia as a private practitioner for children with special needs and older adults. To connect with her, email editor@leaderonomics.com.

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How Are You Wearing Your Leadership Hat?

Sam Walton, the late owner and founder of Walmart, the world’s largest retail store which began in the United States, showed us an excellent example of a leader. Walton despised corporate fat cats and would handle the cash register as well as stock the shelves in any of his Walmart stores all by himself if there was a need to.

Although his company’s operating income in a year averaged between USD10bil to USD12bil, he still chose to drive his old, rusty, dented pickup truck because it had plenty of good mileage left in it.

Walton captures the perfect picture of what every leader should aspire to be like. Humble and open in character, ready to serve the needs of others when the opportunity arises.

He told his employees that “if American management is going to say to their workers that we’re all in this together, they’re going to have to stop this foolishness of paying themselves USD3mil to USD4mil bonuses every year and riding around everywhere in limos and corporate jets like they’re so much better than everybody else.”

To run a company, a leader’s main role is to delegate to his or her workforce. But when you pick your spot, roll up your sleeves and are prepared to work, you will see the entire organisation following your lead.

I think Walton summed it up best by saying; “If you get your hands dirty, you become involved in something where the realities might compromise your principles. It can also mean that a person is not just stuck in an ivory tower dictating strategy, but is prepared to put in the effort and hard work to make the details actually happen.”

Concluding thoughts

Till today, nobody has fully grasped or understood the meaning of leadership. This is because it is an area so subjective and broad that each individual carries his or her own unique leadership style.

It is easy to wear the ‘leadership’ hat when we step into our office in a power suit and tie; easier still to tick off checklists simplifying leading qualities. But the true test comes in the form of our integrity in our actions when no one is around.

Everyone is entitled to his or her own form of leadership. These are tools to be used to add to your arsenal as you strive to be a better leader, or simply a better person.

This article was previously published in print.

Joshua Yee is a caffeine-dependent life-form. He wants to live in a world where cars can fly, teas are banned, and iPhones are cheaper. He is passionate to see young people stand up to fulfill their fullest potential in their own unique way. To connect with him, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

By JOSHUA YEE
editor@leaderonomics.com

B ACK in college, my Economics lecturer once asked a classmate a very simple question, “Who are you?” My classmate stood there baffled by the simplicity of it. After gathering his thoughts, he finally replied, “I’m in university now, pursuing my degree in business.”

Our society holds quite strongly to a working belief that what you do defines who you are. If someone is a chief executive officer (CEO) of a renowned company, he or she is expected to have the profile of a CEO.

This gives the impression that the person always dons a power suit, carries the latest smartphone, is chauffeur-driven and has a personal assistant. The projected image of a leader is one of immaculate attire and articulate speech in the presence of others.

However, the reality is that there are many different aspects to leadership. Every one of us has different roles and responsibilities in life. We wear different hats for the many roles we play.

When we step into our workplace, we immediately put on our ‘boss’ or ‘employee’ hat. When we reach home, we discard it for our ‘mum’ or ‘dad’ hat for the children in the family. Once we have tucked the children into bed, we put on our ‘wife’ or ‘husband’ hat.

We swap, rotate, and sometimes put on more than one hat in serving others. Despite all that, there is one hat that we never take off: the ‘leadership’ hat.

1. Choose influence over authority
   Influence is the ability to affect someone or a group of people with your words, actions or position. Authority is the power and position in which one holds to assert domination over others through orders.

   A manager of a retail store has authority over his or her employee, but it is based on the position that he or she holds, not through influence.

   Although it is true that both leadership and management go hand in hand, at the root of it, these are two very distinct perspectives. This is vital in knowing your own leadership style. In his book, On Becoming a Leader, the late Warren Bennis compiled a list of different aspects to leadership. Every one of us has different degrees in business.”

   He is passionate to see young people stand up to fulfill their fullest potential in their own unique way. To connect with him, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

2. Put people first
   Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and many other social media channels have turned the world into a self-absorbed culture of ‘likes’, ‘comments’, and ‘re-tweets’.

   Social media is not necessarily negative, but the compulsive need for social acceptance that it brings out in us is. We want the latest gadgets, and to own a house and car that we cannot even afford to maintain.

   These individualistic pursuits for material gain shape the way we think about ourselves, and others. Oftentimes, it’s the former.

   However, as leaders, people should matter the most. Your employees need to be your priority. The thing is, people need people. Investment in the lives of those who work with you is significant.

   A leader sees employees as human beings. Therefore, he or she treats them as human beings, not as ‘people who work for them’. Showing appreciation to your employees after they have accomplished a goal empowers them as well.

   Praise pays off when it comes to increasing the overall success of your company. Recognising your employees’ accomplishments increases their interest in their work. This goes without saying that honesty is the best virtue when it comes to praise and affirmation.

   Responsible leaders always look for decisions which benefit the company and the people, never for themselves. Possibly the most important, yet often forgotten fact about an organisation is that your assets are your employees.

3. Lead by example
   Leadership is serving. Being a leader does not free you from getting your hands dirty. In fact, more often than not, the opposite is true. Successful leaders work the hardest to show and set the bar for all employees to follow. Many leaders of the world today strive to be successful, rich and powerful.

   They want to be the next Steve Jobs, or Henry Ford. But many more are not willing to do what it takes to get there.

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Email us at info@leaderonomics.com to find out more today!
Approach Matters More Than Age

3 ways young people can gain workplace credibility

By DINESH DORAI RAJ
ditor@leaderonomics.com

We live in an era of information explosion surrounded by many intelligent, self-driven, talented and determined young people who are hungry for the opportunity to make a difference in the workforce today.

Despite this, most of us have encountered a situation where we had amazing perspectives to challenge a discussion but shied away in the presence of senior colleagues, thinking to ourselves, "Well, they have over 20 years of experience more than I have and they might rubbish my thoughts."

I can imagine two possible scenarios here.

First, you might have been shut down previously when you voiced an opinion just because you were a ‘newbie’, or you suffer from a sense of inferiority because you never believed in yourself in these moments.

Fret not – you are not the only one; most of us have been there too.

In 2016, I took up a role in Leaderonomics to lead an internal incubation process as part of our strategic initiatives to scale the organisation’s performance capability. This meant that, if something had no strategic business or organisational impact, we did not pay attention to it.

This required daily conversations with multiple stakeholders, especially those with strong professional backgrounds and experience, and on several occasions, I was caught in the second situation mentioned above before it struck me that I needed to overcome my self-doubt and fear.

I went through several conversations and made deep observations – especially among the senior folks with vast experience – and as I tried emulating some key behaviours, I received affirmation that being young is an advantage and these are the qualities that leaders and successful organisations seek in their people.

You will always be willing to go beyond the set threshold to achieve something you are passionate about and these are the qualities that leaders and successful organisations seek in their people.

You will always be willing to go the extra mile to accomplish something, seek answers and challenge the incumbents, and these qualities will help you gain a competitive edge despite your limited professional experience.

As psychologist and author Angela Duckworth puts it, “A passion is more developed than it is discovered.”

I decided to put this belief statement to the test when, together with my colleagues, I started exploring areas that weren’t my forte in order to develop organisational and people development solutions for clients.

I took the initiative to get involved in brainstorming sessions along with my colleagues, and I unexpectedly became a lot more passionate about what I did. This passion led to greater credibility which turned me into a sounding board for others.

Lesson 2: Do your homework

Do your homework, gather your facts, be biased towards data-driven conversations and offer a look out beyond what you can see.

Ever been intimidated by ‘high-level’ conversations among senior leaders in your organisation and found yourself thinking, “This is too much to digest or too much experience for me to match”?

Take a closer look at these conversations and you will realise that they are backed by valuable information that may have been gathered through various levels of interaction and experiences in dealing with organisational issues.

Among the generations in the current workforce, we are especially privileged by our facility with the unlimited knowledge around us. We need to make an effort to leverage this content.

This was reinforced when a colleague, who was younger than most of us, left us all – including the senior ones – in awe after her presentation. When I asked her the key to her impactful and inspiring few minutes, she simply said, “Preparation is key to success.”

Lesson 3: Be accountable

Accountability is one of the most desired traits in any organisation but it is often overlooked at the workplace. Being accountable starts with basic things like notifying your colleagues that you will be late for a meeting – even if you are delayed by just five minutes.

Accountability fuels a gradual increment of respect and confidence among your colleagues before you are given the freedom to decide and challenge others to a better performance as part of your journey in becoming a better leader, even at a young age.

I remember missing an important deadline that I promised one of my directors and during a weekly meeting, he brought it up just to reinforce the importance of accountability.

That led to an important personal development for me in terms of accountability and before long, I was given more room to lead and provide opinions, and gained a sense of respect among the senior folks. Walk the talk. This needs to be instilled from the beginning of one’s career.

Final thoughts

You are observed on how you do things at work. It’s your approach that matters, not your age, and as you rise through the hierarchy, you will realise that despite having bigger digits for your age, you will not be seen as a credible leader to be heard from if you do not learn and apply the essentials mentioned above. Start the practice of making an impact as a young leader now!

This article was previously published in print.

Dinesh wants to prove his credibility as a business and people leader and is willing to go all out to make it a reality. He continually learns from the leaders around him and enjoys the pain of growth along the journey. He strives to inspire and build more credible leaders around the world over time. Write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com to share your thoughts on this story.
MOST attention on the topic of business ethics is focused on leaders. There are many articles for leaders about how to communicate and enforce ethical decision-making within organisations. The media and government also seek to hold leaders at the highest levels of accountability by uncovering evidence of corruption. However, very little is written about the role of ‘rank and file’ employees – followers – in corruption cases. These individuals pay a high price as a result of government and corporate corruption. When corruption is uncovered, bankruptcy and loss of employment are common.

Furthermore, researchers at Stanford reported that working for a company involved in corruption can tarnish the reputation at all levels – even those not involved in unethical behaviour. Their research found a ‘moral spillover’ in which the unethical activities of a few can lead the public to develop a general negative ethical impression of everyone in the organisation. As an example, researchers often highlight the ongoing negative public impression of Enron employees even now – more than 10 years after that firm failed in 2001.

What responsibility do followers hold when they learn about unethical business practices? What should they do when asked (or ordered) to participate in corrupt practices? What can ‘rank and file’ employees do to increase the overall level of integrity within their workplace?

Global anti-corruption non-governmental organisation Transparency International, provides five things followers can do to fight corruption.

1. **Speak up**
   Whistleblowing is less common in Asia due to strong cultural influences discouraging the practice. As a high-power distance culture, Malaysian employees generally expect to be told what to do and not to openly challenge leadership. Malaysians tend to be highly collectivistic, and thus, place high value on loyalty to the group (e.g. employer) as well as peaceful relationships. Despite these cultural influences, whistleblowing does exist in Asia. One positive example of whistleblowing in Asia is the case of Jiang Weisu who exposed a tainted milk product in China. He blew the whistle on milk powder contaminated with melamine that resulted in the death of at least six babies and hundreds of thousands of illnesses. Jiang was a pioneer in fighting for food safety in China and helped improve conditions across the industry.

2. **Say no**
   It is important for individuals to personally say ‘no’ to unethical business practices, especially bribery. We each must consider our individual entitlement to behave badly oneself. For corrupt or abusive bosses may lead to a sense of entitlement to behave badly oneself. Getting caught or technical legality. Each of us must integrity and transparency – not on the likelihood of disruption, loopholes quickly emerge.

3. **Ask questions**
   When speaking up against corruption, it’s better to start by asking questions about how decisions and behaviours align with these standards. Use phrases like “Can you help me understand...” or “Can you help me see how this fits with our policy on...” Sometimes, colleagues are not aware of the potential ethical implications of their actions. Discussions such as these help keep ethics at the top of the mind and create a culture of integrity.

4. **Know your rights**
   An in-depth review of Malaysia’s anti-corruption and whistleblower protection laws is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is important to read and understand the specific processes outlined in these Acts. The Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission website (www.sprm.gov.my) is a good reference point for these laws and an avenue to submit a report of corruption.

5. **Practise good values**
   We each play an important role in creating high integrity cultures within our workplaces. All of us will face ethical dilemmas from time to time in our work. Ethics experts David De Cremer and Bjarne Lervik have explained how easy it is for us to rationalise questionable decisions in ethical grey areas.

   Of course, the consequences to others of relatively ‘small’ ethical violations may be greater than anyone anticipates. Perhaps even more problematic is the tendency for people to quickly become increasingly comfortable with more egregious violations.

   Research and practice demonstrate the dangers of a gradual decline in ethical decision-making. Transparency International recommends that individuals take responsibility to actively nurture a lifestyle of integrity, justice and fairness.

   Furthermore, building a network of colleagues for encouragement and mutual accountability is an important way to drive a culture of integrity at the grassroots level. Reaching out to others for support helps in the struggle to stand firm in the small and large challenges that come with daily ethics.

   Practising integrity continually in all areas of our lives helps to repel those who would seek to influence us into corruption and helps us to quickly recognise when a decision is wrong.

**Food for thought**
   The scandal whereby Volkswagen (VW) cheated on air quality emissions test results is a clear case where both leaders and followers were at fault. While it isn’t clear what the most senior leaders knew (or didn’t know), there is evidence suggesting that teams of engineers were involved. Could this scandal and resulting fallout have been avoided if one (or two) engineers had said ‘no’, asked questions about the discrepancies, or reported the wrongdoing through VW’s compliance process?

   Certainly, this would not have happened if each of these engineers individually abided by the ethical guidelines of VW and the Software Engineering Code of Ethics.

   Instead, the company was embroiled in scandal and faced massive fines. It had to plan substantial layoffs to cut costs as it prepared for the financial impact. Furthermore, scientists have estimated that the environmental impact of the deception is between 40 and 106 deaths in the United States alone.

   This case shows how unethical decisions about something as remote and hidden as lines of software code can have serious repercussions for the environment and human life.

**Advice for speaking up**
   A Harvard Business Review article provided some specific advice about how to speak up against ethical problems at work. The author, Amy Gallo, provided four pieces of advice:
   - **Don’t overestimate how difficult the conversation will be or the consequences of speaking up.** Building up fear of the situation often causes us to rationalise the situation and ignore our responsibility to report it.
   - **Do clearly think through the pros and cons of making the report.** Is reporting a colleague for leaving early really worth it? Does she complete her work on time? Consider how the situation is violating an important ethical value to you or to the larger group.
   - **Seek to understand the motivation behind the behaviour.** It’s helpful to try to see the situation from the other person’s point of view. Perhaps there is an ethical way to work through the situation.
   - **Consider the cost of speaking up by weighing the pros and cons to the company, stakeholders, and yourself – including your personal ethical reputation.**

**This article was previously published in print.**
The Future of Marketing in Asia

By DR SUBRAMANIAM SRI RAMALU
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The concept of marketing myopia came to light in an article published in the Harvard Business Review by Theodore Levitt back in 2004. Marketing myopia suggests that businesses will do better in the end if they concentrate on meeting customers’ needs rather than on selling products. Since then, it has changed the way in which major companies view their approach to the market and their business models. It also has changed the way companies market their products. Among the many others, generational marketing that uses generational segmentation in marketing communications is becoming popular. The reason behind this is that people from different generations have different values, preferences, mindsets and behaviours, and respond differently to marketing communication.

Instead of launching broad-stroke marketing campaigns in an attempt to reach as many customers as possible, companies now segment their marketing campaigns based on different generations.

The generation gap

Currently, five generations make up our society. Each of those five generations has an active role in the marketplace and they are categorised according to birth years: Gen Z, Gen, or centenarians (born after 1996), millennials or Gen Y (born 1977-1995), Generation X (born 1965-1976), baby boomers (born 1946-1964), and traditionalists or the silent generation (born 1945 and before).

The millennial or Gen Y generation, in particular, has become a target for the majority of companies simply because of their collective size as a global cohort and the resulting influence on society, culture, and business. According to demographers at Pew Research Center, the millennial generation accounts for 27 per cent of the global population, or about two billion people. About 58 per cent of global millennials live in Asia, which means they make up a fair share of the marketing audience. Asia is slightly over-represented by its millennial population relative to its overall share of the global population (58 per cent of global millennials vs 56 per cent of the total global population).

Additionally, although millennials in general share certain generation characteristics, the national cultural values could make a difference. Unlike Europe and America, the Asian collectivist culture could pose some challenges to businesses targeting Asia as their market segment. Although Asia sounds like a prospective market in terms of volume, it is important for businesses to assess the employment and consumption prospects in these countries. Whether millennials are a source of economic opportunities and Asia can be very challenging in this regard.

Eight countries, in particular, stand out as being in the top 20 globally for both of these measures of their millennial populations: Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Iran, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Africa, and Vietnam. It is no coincidence that all of the ‘millennial majors’ are emerging markets and they are concentrated in countries with lower per capita income. Additionally, except for South Africa, the others are from the Asian continent.

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For more information, email info@leaderonomics.com

Dr Subramaniam Sri Ramalu is an associate professor and a deputy dean for Academic and International at OYAGSB. To connect with him, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.
The Key Driver in Customer Experience

By KAREN GATELY
editor@leaderonomics.com

It’s hardly difficult to find examples of organisations who have failed spectacularly in building customer relationships based on trust and respect. There are endless examples of what happens when people lose sight of the customer and behave poorly.

In pursuit of profits and personal gain, people across the banking industry have behaved in ways that are abhorrent to most decent-minded people. As Commissioner Kenneth Hayne, Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry in Australia, commented: “Very often, the conduct has broken the law. And if it has not broken the law, the conduct has fallen short of the kind of behaviour the community not only expects of financial services entities but is also entitled to expect of them.”

Ensuring your customers’ rights are respected and upheld is the just the first step toward building the depth of customer loyalty needed to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market. According to the 2017 Gartner Customer Experience in Marketing Survey, 81 per cent of organisations expect by 2019 to be competing mostly or completely on the basis of customer experience.

While it’s common for organisations to aspire to be the best in their industry – many struggle to deliver on the standard of customer experience needed to turn that vision into reality. At the heart of the issue is typically staff engagement.

As research by Temkin Group found, customer experience leaders have “1.5 times as many engaged employees as do customer experience laggards.” Temkin reports that “companies with stronger financial performances and better customer experience have employees who are considerably more engaged than their peers.”

Reflect for a moment on what it’s like to do business with your organisation. Do your customers experience a level of service that earns their trust and inspires them to keep coming back? Do their experiences motivate them to recommend your services to other people? Now reflect on the members of your team and the influence their attitudes and behaviours have on the loyalty your customers typically feel.

1 Driving customer experience through people starts with being clear about what is expected and needed. Ensure every member of your team understands the behaviours needed to create the quality of customer experience you want. Build a clear view of what customer service excellence means to your organisation and how your team is expected to act to deliver on those outcomes.

2 Hire well. Get it right from the start by taking a disciplined and uncompromising approach when it comes to selecting the right people for your team. Avoid the all-too-common mistake of placing priority on technical capability over culture alignment. Explore the values of each person you consider and take steps to validate the likelihood of them behaving in ways that build strong customer and colleague relationships.

3 Be targeted in your efforts to optimise customer experience. Build understanding of the touch points between your customers and business, and the opportunities people must make a positive difference. Create awareness of not only who your customers are, but also why they come to you and the expectations they hold.

4 Tap into what your customers are thinking and feeling. Listening to the voice of your customer is fundamental to your efforts to continuously improve and ultimately achieve excellence. Ask for feedback at every opportunity and establish formal processes to regularly tap into the insights of your customers. Have the courage to see the shortcomings your customers are telling you about and work with your team take steps to address them.

Removing roadblocks to service excellence requires first being aware of how the people on your team think and behave. Proactively monitoring the approaches taken and standards of service delivered is essential to any leader’s ability to recognise when corrective action needs to be taken.

Hold yourself and other people accountable. All too often leaders set behavioural expectations that they themselves struggle to live up to. Leading by example is every leader’s number one priority. Earning and keeping the loyalty of your customers’ demands that you take clear and decisive action to address performance and behavioural issues that arise.

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