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Leaderonomics

The Science of Building Leaders

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UNDERSTANDING TALENT MANAGEMENT

2 TALENT WAR: WIN, LOSE OR DRAW

6 EMPLOYEE SUSTAINABILITY RITUALS

9 WHEN OUR STRENGTHS BACKFIRE



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Let's take a look at
these five common
problems that exist
across organisations.
To fix them, there
needs to be a real
(and collective) effort
made to find and be
part of the solution.
In a way, it's right
that the buck stops
with leaders. As John
C. Maxwell suggests,
everything rises and
falls with leadership.
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In leadership, few
things are more
destructive to an
organisation than low
morale among
employees, and
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shows that between
70-80% of people
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By **JEFF BOSS**
editor@leaderonomics.com

LEADERS today are faced with a myriad of challenges that only grow in complexity by the day. The complex decisions, industry changes and the war for talent soak up much of a leader's time amidst other decision points biting at their ankles. Every. Day.

To add to the uncertainty of leadership challenges, many of these challenges are intangible.

Navigating uncertainty in any field requires the clarity to know what's "right", the competence and confidence to carry it out and the curiosity to continually question what "is".

If that's not enough, here are four more talent challenges leaders face if they want to maintain high performers.

1 UNCLEAR OR ABSENT PURPOSE

Purpose is a powerful force.

Purpose was what pulled me through eight deployments as a Navy SEAL while getting shot on two of them, surviving four parachute malfunctions and losing more friends than some people can count.

If employee performance isn't tied to purpose, then they're operating on will-power and discipline and each eventually run out.

Don't get me wrong, willpower and discipline are important, but they're "muscles" and like all other muscles in the body, they become tired.

When they tire out, that's when you raise the white flag and say, "Okay, I'm done here. Next!"

If you want to attain, retain and sustain talent, you need to tie purpose into everything you and your company do.

2 INFREQUENT FEEDBACK LOOPS

We know what it's like to be a customer returning a product to a store, only for the employee behind the desk to take forever in that process.

Or, when you call the cable company and you're on hold forever, so much that you vow to never again renew your subscription with them (but of course you do because they're a lesser degree of terrible).

The same is true for your team and your employees.

Annual or quarterly performance

NAVIGATING TODAY'S TALENT CHALLENGES

4 THINGS EVERY LEADER MUST ADDRESS



trust, because if there were trust, then people wouldn't worry about their self-interests not being met.

There are three ways to go about politicking:

● Continue playing.

This requires a systemic view of the land and a lot of medicine because the only thing you'll get from playing more politics is a headache.

● Don't play.

See above.

● Unearth relationship dynamics.

The trouble with not having difficult conversations is that the problem resurfaces down the road, leaving you no better than where you were before.

If low trust is a source of playing politics, then aim to rebuild trust by having difficult conversations and asking powerful questions.

Nothing good ever comes easily, and improved performance is no different.

Of course, this is not an all-inclusive list (I wish it was as that would make things a lot easier).

What are your leadership challenges?

■ *Jeff Boss is a former Navy SEAL who helps business teams find clarity in chaos. He is a contributor at Forbes and Entrepreneur.com, speaks at the Harry Walker Agency, and recently authored "Navigating Chaos: How To Find Certainty In Uncertain Situations". This article first appeared on Forbes. What are your thoughts after reading this article? Tell us at editor@leaderonomics.com.*

reviews never made sense to me for the following reason: if an issue is worth "correcting" or managing now, then it was worth "correcting" way back when it actually happened – today is too late!

For example, if I receive feedback on a project or behaviour that occurred six months ago, what I really hear is: this [subject] is being brought up to fill time. If it wasn't important to bring up back then, it isn't important to bring up now.

This delay in delivering feedback is also going to cause me to question two things about the feedback manager:

- trust
- competence

If I'm not receiving feedback until months later on a particular task or project, then that also tells me that my performance isn't that valued, which leads to trust issues between myself and the feedback manager.

Alternatively, the delay in feedback may not have anything to do with me – it may be the feedback manager's unwillingness to have such conversations, which speaks about his or her self-confidence as a leader. Not ideal.

3 OVERWHELM

With the onslaught of information that tries to topple us from our desks every day, overwhelm is a very real threat to managing top talent.

Overwhelm stems from a lack of clarity; uncertainty about what to prioritise or a hesitancy to ask "what's important?" and "why?"

Overwhelm comes when there's no guidance that distinguishes between urgency and importance, or, what's easy and immediate versus what requires more effort but pays dividends down the road.

When "everything" is a priority then nothing is, and this is the fastest route towards employee burnout.

4 POLITICKING

It exists in every organisation but that doesn't make it right.

Politicking – promoting self-interest – is toxic, and it drives away the most talented employees for the simple fact that they "just don't want to deal with it anymore".

The basis of politics is an absence of

IN the SEAL Teams, we lost high performers mainly due to hazards of the job.

Rarely did a high performer at the level I was at voluntarily say: "I'm done."

However, it did happen and it happened to me.

One of two questions always comes up with coaching clients and audiences for that matter after I share my story with them.

They want to know why I kept returning despite getting shot on multiple deployments and surviving four parachute malfunctions and other "stuff", and they want to know how I did it.

My answer is not "because I was SEAL and that's what we do".

The truth is, what compelled me to keep going are the same two things that great managers already know and use to their advantage to build engagement in their teams and minimise turnover.

Those two elements are:

1 WHO YOU HAVE TO RETURN TO

Jerks or people who generally suck the air out of a room turn work into "work".

They take the fun and passion out

EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

of the daily routine and instead make it a daily grind that you soon want to avoid at all costs.

2 WHAT YOU HAVE TO RETURN TO

This is the mission or purpose that you originally signed up for and the fulfilment it brings.

When that mission changes, however, it's incumbent upon the manager to understand how the new change will impact the team in order to re-clarify roles, responsibilities and fit.

This is why managers have super-powers when it comes to talent retention.

They help employees want to show up and stay because they already understand what drives that employee (assuming there has been an ongoing dialogue between the two).

Employee turnover costs US companies USD160bil a year, according to Wrike, a work management and social collaboration software tool that scales across teams in any business.

And since high performers deliver up to 400% more than their medio-

cre counterparts, the cost of wasted talent poses a serious threat to the bottom line.

Here's where I would start if reducing employee turnover is a priority for you:

1 TEAM FUNCTIONING

People want to be part of something great; they want to belong to something and work alongside like-minded individuals whom they like, trust and respect.

It's incumbent upon the manager to set the conditions that allow for such successes to occur.

Teams that function optimally have trust, a shared purpose and a clear identity. This also entails the *who* and *what* elements that I mentioned earlier.

2 CANDID CONVERSATIONS

I once gave a speech on "winning as one" and one of the questions from the audience was: "How do I motivate that one person on my team who just doesn't seem like he



wants to be there?"

My answer: "When you say 'doesn't seem', have you been in conversation with this employee about it?"

Audience member: "Well... no."

Boom. Conversations don't have to be difficult. They can – and should – be exploratory when you use questioning to your advantage.

The reason I would start with team functioning is because how the team functions is rooted in trust, shared purpose and mutual accountability.

If these "soft" elements don't exist, then having difficult conversations – conversations where you *connect* rather than just communicate – isn't likely.

Without these conversations, you lose valuable insight into employee motivations and aspirations – and then you lose the employee to the competition.

When you tap into the human element of your people, higher engagement and productivity become the natural by-products.

By **ROSHAN THIRAN**

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DID you know that, by 2020, half of the global workforce is expected to be made up of millennials?

Looking ahead, they will surely be leading the way in shaping organisational culture as they aspire to take on greater responsibilities through leadership roles.

Millennials (those born from the early 1980s to late 1990s) generally possess many positive traits that can help to drive innovation and create more authentic and meaningful collaborations, as a result of their desire to make a lasting impact on the world.

They also have an insatiable thirst for learning, are fearless when challenging traditional hierarchy, and place a greater focus on getting work done however and wherever best, rather than worrying about the number of hours put in at the office.

In short, this generation has created a shift in the way we now approach the way we do business.

It's now about building relationships, developing authentic connections, and having purpose as a driving force.

All of this is underpinned by the idea that what you get is inextricably tied to what you give to others.

THE BRIGHT SIDE

With a greater emphasis on building relationships (internally and externally), millennials might have the right attitude and desires when it comes to doing business – but it's a different thing altogether to be able to package those as practical skills on the ground.

Much has been written about the traits of millennials – and much has been somewhat unfair.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

BUILDING ONE THROUGH A STRONG COACHING CULTURE

There are many positive and not-so-positive qualities found across all generations, and every generation believes the one to follow it lacks in many areas.

I prefer to focus on the positives.

Even where shortcomings are to be found, surely it's better to look at how they can improve themselves rather than to criticise through the nostalgic lens of "the good old days".

One particular shortcoming that's occasionally pinned on millennials is the lack of "soft skills" such as communication, negotiation, and the ability to focus on one task at a time.

Particularly when it comes to leadership roles, these three qualities are key to being an effective leader.

Thankfully, among the many positive traits of millennials is their willingness to seek feedback and adaptability.

CULTIVATING THE COACHING CULTURE

A recent research collaboration by The International Coach Federation (ICF) and Human Capital Institute (HCI) looked at how first-time millennial managers can benefit from coaching and also in being trained on how to effectively use their own coaching skills to help their peers and team members to grow.

As Magdalena Mook, ICF Global chief executive officer (CEO), suggests, "It is crucial for organisations to know how to help them grow and prepare for the challenges and opportunities of the future."

The research discovered that, contrary to popular belief, there are more similarities across the generations than there are differences.

For example, respondents across a range of age groups considered opportunities to learn and develop as well as flexible working arrangements, as the most appealing benefits within the workplace.

It also implied a strong case for the need for organisations to build a strong coaching culture.

Of the 670 research respondents, 61% of employees were highly engaged, compared to 53% from organisations without strong coaching cultures.

Furthermore, 46% of respondents in companies with strong coaching cultures reported above-average revenue growth for 2016 in relation to industry peers, compared to 39% of those from all other organisations.

STRATEGIC SUCCESSION PLANNING

It's certainly no secret that developing a strong coaching culture is one of the central pillars that supports a stable legacy for organisations, particularly when we consider the speed of change and other factors in the business world that now requires a leadership model built on the ability to be agile, authentic, collaborative and empowering.

As observed by the *Ivy Business Journal*, executives and human resource managers know coaching is the most potent

tool for inducing positive personal change, ensuring better-than-average odds of success and making the change stick for the long term.

If leaders of today want their organisations of tomorrow to build upon current successes, we need to ensure there is a leadership pipeline that puts people at the heart of our vision for the long-term.

And while it makes no sense to hand the baton to our future leaders and expect them to run over the same ground we have covered, there are surely many lessons we have learnt that can be offered to the next generation.

This will stand them in good stead as they push for progress and strive to make their mark in the world.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

The urgent need to build, develop and nurture a strong coaching culture can't be overstated.

If we leaders are serious about creating a lasting legacy, then it begins by empowering those around us who have a great potential to take the best of what we have to offer and add that to their own unique mix of abilities and insights.

As a result, they will be able to apply their talents not only to ensuring the growth of the organisation, but to making a greater impact to our communities and wider society as a whole.

This is where they can find meaning and fulfilment in the contributions that they make.



READ US ONLINE!

Leadership insights on the go at leaderonomics.com

When most of us try to help someone, we often get seduced into focusing on the things that need to be fixed, like a person's weaknesses. In the process, we invoke the Negative Emotional Attractor (NEA) and the body's stress reaction. Do we then coach with compassion or out of compliance? Check out this thought-provoking article on Leaderonomics.com here: bit.ly/RBcoaching

■ Roshan Thiran is the founder and CEO of Leaderonomics – a social enterprise working to transform lives through leadership development. Connect with Roshan on Facebook at bit.ly/LdrRTfb and Twitter @lepacker for more interesting insights. Email us your at editor@leaderonomics.com.



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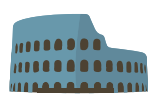
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Big picture thinking is one of the nine pillars of workplace compassion. It's the ability to keep the bigger vision of successful leadership without getting caught up in negative dialogues and excuses that rise with challenges at work. Check out how you can think in a broader perspective here: bit.ly/IJbigpicture

■ *Paul Smith is one of the world's leading experts on business storytelling. He's a keynote speaker, storytelling coach, and bestselling author of the books: Lead with a Story, Sell with a Story, and Parenting with a Story. To share your thoughts with Paul, send us an email at editor@leaderonomics.com.*

LET'S TALK!

HOW TO



HOW TO HAVE INTELLECTUAL CONVERSATIONS ON FACEBOOK

By **PAUL SMITH**
editor@leaderonomics.com

CONTRARY to conventional wisdom, it is possible to have intellectual conversations on Facebook. In fact, I think it's imperative that we do.

The reason: while social media has reunited old friends and provides a limitless variety of amusement, it's also been used to spread conspiracy theories and fake news through partisan echo chambers on both ends of the political spectrum.

It's also imperative that we do because that's where people are these days.

The old venues for important conversations are gone. People don't really discuss politics over dinner anymore because they hardly sit down and have dinner together anymore.

And Facebook is what we make of it. If you only use it to post silly memes and pictures of your dinner, then that's what it is.

If you use it to have meaningful conversations about important topics, then that's what it is. It's time to raise the intellectual bar of conversation on Facebook.

Here's how.

1 Lead by example.

Use social media to discuss serious topics more often: politics, religion, philosophy, science, history, etc. It doesn't have to be all the time.

Set a goal to make at least one out of every three posts to be about something important to our democracy. And in those instances, try to adhere to the remaining guidelines.

2 Take the time to express yourself thoroughly, like you were writing a short essay for a grade.

Real life is every bit as important as grades.

That means providing thoughtful responses, like you were writing a letter in 1982 with your whole brain, full attention, and both hands, as opposed to writing a text message in 2018 with one thumb while driving a car.

The best way to do that is to *make your comments on your computer instead of your smartphone.*

It's difficult enough to write complete sentences, let alone complete thoughts, on a tiny screen using only your thumbs.

So, most people won't do it. If that means you can't respond until you get home tonight, so be it.

Be prepared to shock some people who've never seen a three-paragraph comment on a Facebook post. Don't be dissuaded.

Injecting a little intellectual rigour into a place devoid of it is going to raise some eyebrows.

3 Stay serious in tone.

As soon as you switch to sarcasm or humour, the serious conversation is over, because everyone else will switch too.

4 Challenge people on the truthfulness of their statements and the soundness of their logic.

Think of it like you would in a debate. If someone is using an unsubstantiated "fact" or poor logic in their argument, challenge it.

5 Be open to having your mind changed and expect other people to do the same.

Think of this as an exercise in learning **what** other people believe and **why**, and express what you believe and why.

If, at the end of that, one of you has modified your position, that's good.

However, the goal should not be to force your way of thinking on others in your discussion, and you shouldn't feel

unsuccessful if that doesn't happen.

You've learnt something about each other in the process. And that's success, too.

6 If a conversation does change your mind about something, say so.

You're not admitting defeat.

You're demonstrating that you're smart enough to modify your position when presented with compelling evidence.

It's precisely the people who are unwilling to let compelling evidence alter their opinion, who are the problem. Don't be one of them.

Courageously admit when you've changed your mind. It will encourage others to be willing to do the same.

7 Ask a lot of questions.

Instead of just stating your position the whole time, be open to asking questions. This helps you understand the other side more and lets them feel heard.

8 If people don't answer your questions, ask again until they do.

Your tenacity should be like that of a journalist who's interviewing an evasive politician.

9 Don't share any articles or videos on social media that you haven't read or watched in their entirety.

If you wouldn't be proud to put your name on them as if you wrote or produced them, then don't share.

In a way, you are the 'author' when you're posting them on your wall for all to see.

I can't tell you how many fake news articles I've challenged people for posting on their wall, only to have them admit that, "Oh, I didn't really read it."

And guess what, neither did the other

27 people who "liked" it, commented on it, and shared it.

The echo chamber gets its resonance from our willingness to share headlines instead of articles we've actually read.

10 When you do share articles or videos, summarise your takeaway in your post.

Note your learning points or direct people to the specific part of it that you felt most strongly about.

Don't just dump a link to a 3,000-word article or one-hour video in the thread and walk away. Say something about it.

11 Make sound arguments yourself.

Don't just state your opinion.

Defend it. Explain it. Justify it with facts and logic.

And don't get upset if someone challenges you on part (or all) of your argument. That's how conversations work.

12 Stay calm.

Don't take disagreement with your argument or ideas as personal attack on your integrity.

People deserve to be treated with civility and respect. Ideas do not.

Attack the **ideas** you disagree with, not the **people**.

13 Take a class in how to understand and make sound arguments.

There are plenty of online courses on how to present logical arguments, backed with reasoning and facts. So, do check them out.

I welcome all comments on this list, whether they are suggestions to be added, deleted, edited, or ignored. Let's make a difference in how we converse with each other in the age of social media.

By **GEORGE KOHLRIESER**
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ONE of the fundamentals of secure base leadership is managing conflict – being able to “put the fish on the table”.

It's an expression that means raising a difficult issue and openly dealing with important differences.

The analogy comes from a special moment in Sicily where I was observing fishermen with their fresh catches putting their fish on the table and cleaning them with laughter, camaraderie and “spirited dialogue”.

They engaged with each other and enjoyed the bloody, smelly, messy job of cleaning their fish.

At one point, they invited me to join them.

There I was early in the morning, standing at a table with an apron, cleaning those smelly fish while laughing and enjoying the bloody, smelly mess.

And the reward was the great fish dinner at the end of the day!

If every conflict were a fish and you leave it under the table, it starts to smell and becomes toxic.

This is what happens when a conflict (fish) is hidden and not openly dealt with.

If an issue is raised, we can work through the differences – which can sometimes be a bloody and messy process – to find a mutually beneficial outcome.

And to continue the analogy, have a wonderful “fish dinner”.

DO NOT BE A HOSTAGE

Many leaders in conflict situations are hostages to their fears and other negative emotions, failing to see the benefits in resolving conflicts.

This is understandable as our brain is hardwired to avoid threats and potential danger.

Successful leaders are able to communicate a model that is counter-intuitive – to see conflict as positive and as an opportunity.

If we **step towards** conflict instead of **stepping back**, we can take it as a challenge, an issue to be solved, and ultimately an opportunity.

STEPS TOWARDS CONFLICT RESOLUTION

How can you resolve conflict?

1. Bond with the other party. Remember, it isn't necessary to like someone to form a bond with him or her. We only need a common goal.
2. Separate the person from the problem.
3. Base the relationship on mutual respect and a genuine wish to help the other.
4. Avoid negative responses to attacks or intense emotions by seeking to understand the other person's points.
5. Use the law of reciprocity and concession-making to build trust.

EMBRACE CONFLICT

‘PUT THE FISH ON THE TABLE.’

CONSULTING CORNER



6. Help the other person feel empowered by offering choices.
7. Use dialogue to gain a deeper understanding, discover new information, and maintain bonding to explore creative solutions. Options, proposals, and concessions can lead to effective conflict resolution.

THE MINDSET OF THE LEADER

Effective conflict management starts with the leader.

The key is to openly face an issue and negotiate a mutual gain.

By identifying conflicts early, you can resolve them before they escalate.

It is necessary to create an atmosphere of trust where people take the risk to speak up.

Conflicts are necessary and their resolution is the lifeblood of high-performing organisational cultures.

How, you might ask?

Disputes, disagreements and diverse points of view:

- create energy
- are a source of new ideas
- bring about change
- stimulate creativity
- help build strongly-bonded teams

The key is mindset – embrace conflict and we stretch ourselves and others to the highest levels of potential.

QUESTIONS

Let me conclude by asking you a few questions for reflection.

1. Do you like conflict – that is, do you enjoy solving conflicts?
2. Do you want to get along with everybody?
3. Do you think in terms of common goals and cooperation?

4. Can you see beyond the frustration, disappointment, negativity, rejection and pain to the benefit of the outcome?

■ *George Kohlrieser is a Professor of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour at International Institute for Management Development (IMD), a former hostage negotiator, and author of the award-winning bestseller, “Hostage at the Table: How Leaders Can Overcome Conflict, Influence Others and Raise Performance”. His other book is “Care to Dare: Unleashing Astonishing Potential through Secure Base Leadership”. Send us your thoughts on this topic of conflict resolution at editor@leaderonomics.com. Kohlrieser is also a faculty trainer with Leaderonomics. To engage him for your organisational needs, email us at info@leaderonomics.com.*



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Resolving workplace conflicts is a serious matter. Once conflicts are identified, they must never be “swept under the carpet” as unresolved conflicts breed more conflicts. It's like cancer! They will spread if timely intervention is not offered. Check out this article on [Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/ELconflict](http://Leaderonomics.com:bit.ly/ELconflict)

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By JOSEPH TAN

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High performance is a simple equation – make sure that the expectations set are always increasing, never stagnant or decreasing.

In all of my coaching and consulting assignments to date, I've yet to meet a leader who would welcome in the new year with a lower expectation of performing indicators!

The projected performance is almost always on the uptrend, moving further from the past and rallying everyone to up their game to the next level.

But do employees really want to or even feel they are up for it?

MEASUREMENT VS MOTIVATION

Setting the key performance indicators is a relatively easy job for managers but firing up the motivational level of the troops to scale the wall of ever-increasing expectations is quite another challenge.

This is what distinguishes good managers from great managers – good managers create the *measurement* while great managers create the *motivation*.

While the organisation is busy thinking about corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, it will be to its advantage to be considering ESR initiatives as well, i.e. Employee Sustainability Rituals.

The saying is true – if you take care of your employees, they will take care of your customers.

Your investment into your clients and even into the community begins by first investing in your employees.

There are two principles all managers need to keep in mind to ensure a respectable “ESR score”.

ESR PRINCIPLE 1: FIT BEFORE PERFORMANCE

According to Gallup, workers who believe they're a poor fit for their jobs are unlikely to agree that they have opportunities to do what they do best every day.

Hence, the matter of employee sustainability, whether they have that extra reserve to go the second mile and to remain loyal despite challenging circumstances, really depends on the health of their job fit.

Job fit is a function of how an employee responds to this question:

“In my job, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?”

In 2017, Gallup released their worldwide employee engagement survey which stated that only 15% of employees are engaged.

Think about it – 85% of employees come to work, just to work.

When these employees are asked to meet rising expectations, will they come to work not only with their hands and feet, but with their hearts and minds too?

When it comes to sustainability, you need more than just job descriptions to keep employees engaged.

Think about it: when was the last time you heard of someone being tremendously motivated just by reading his/her job description?

Job fit vs mis-fit

Great organisations look beyond job descriptions to consider the matter of job fit.

Fit is a more delicate and personal ingredient of employee sustainability because it deals not with *what* the employee does but *who* the employee is.

In other words, what motivates you as a person (not as an employee)?

Gallup reports that an employee who is given the opportunity to focus on what he/she does best every day is six times more engaged (Source: *Gallup Worldwide Engagement Survey, 2012*).

Leaders and managers today need to create a work environment whereby there is flexibility in adjusting the job description around a person's personal talent and strength.



EMPLOYEE SUSTAINABILITY

‘WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?’

Employees become mis-fits when they are forced to squeeze their personal strengths into a job function that they cannot own and resonate with.

Essentially, the job is laden with measurements that are not integrated with personal motivation.

Here are two diagnostic questions to ascertain job fit in your company:

1. Do I have a method to identify my employees' talents?
2. Do I have a team of managers who can coach and develop others according to personal strengths?

ESR PRINCIPLE 2: CONSISTENCY AFTER COMMITMENT

It is easy to commit. It is easy to produce a ‘rah-rah’ speech and cajole everyone to sign up for a certain level of commitment.

But what will maintain the momentum of that commitment?

Just because the commitment is *visible* doesn't mean that it will be *valued*.

Here is where the practice of consistency comes in.

Consistency has to do with the fundamental response to two basic scenarios that will send a clear message as to whether we are serious about the commitments made.

The two scenarios are:

1. When people do what is right, are they recognised?
2. When people do what is wrong, are they reprimanded?

According to Gallup, employees who do not feel adequately recognised are twice as likely to say they will leave their company in the next year (Source: *12 Elements of Great Managing, Gallup*).

The matter of recognition is such a basic human need that it has become a major blind spot for managers as the gruelling work environment creates a tunnel-vision where meeting the bottom line supersedes the human factor of being attentive to the emotional need for recognition.

Recognition and feedback

One of the most effective ways to improve recognition of employees is to discover how they would like to receive feedback.

Here is where an individualised approach is key to a manager's role in ensuring sustainability.

Not everyone is excited about receiving a certificate of achievement.

A shopping voucher given in an insincere manner might not motivate consistent performance.

Hence, before a manager becomes too quick to hand out the rewards, he/she needs to spend some time studying the personalities and preferences of each employee.

A great manager is someone who would first study his/her team members well before considering the scope of the performance required.

We all have a fundamental desire to be known and appreciated as unique individuals.

When employees do what is right, meet expectations of performance or go the extra mile, take effort to recognise them consistently in a way that matters to them.

Your investment
into your clients
and even into the
community begins by
first investing in your
employees

Culture of accountability

While recognition sends out a clear, motivating message, we also need the other aspect of consistency as well, i.e. the practice of reprimanding when things go wrong.

Human nature is such that people need to see fairness and justice in the way that leadership actions are taken in an organisation.

If an organisation consistently closes a blind eye to wrongdoing and ignores warnings of standards not met, then it is headed towards being a corrupted culture. History affirms that a corrupted culture is not a sustainable culture.

The right thing to do then is to create a culture of accountability.

Herein lies the challenge – accountability cannot be created in the absence of justified reprimanding of those who do wrong.

When actions are not taken against

those who defy the commitment of the team, then it sends a de-motivating message to those who do.

Care and concern

Effective leadership requires that we be comfortable not only in dishing out the rewards but also in demanding accountability and compliance to what is agreed upon.

Your ability to convey the truth with a genuine attitude of care and concern is key.

Having accountability conversations is never easy but it is more manageable if we take the following practices into consideration:

● Deal with the wrongdoing as soon as it arises.

The longer you wait, the offender will interpret your silence as leniency and acceptance of his/her misbehaviour.

● Obtain the testimony of witnesses.

If there are no rituals within your organisation that looks into the issue of job fit and consistent recognition and reprimanding, then you might be unconsciously moving in the direction of having a disengaged culture.

As you implement measurements to keep track of performance, you would do well to consider the matter of employee sustainability by integrating practices and habits of motivation because first and foremost, we are in the **people** business.

CONCLUSION: ENERGY AND EXPECTATIONS

ESR is about ensuring that the energy level of every employee rises in tandem with the expectations of high performance.

If there are no rituals within your organisation that looks into the issue of job fit and consistent recognition and reprimanding, then you might be unconsciously moving in the direction of having a disengaged culture.

As you implement measurements to keep track of performance, you would do well to consider the matter of employee sustainability by integrating practices and habits of motivation because first and foremost, we are in the **people** business.

DIFFERENTIAL TALENT MANAGEMENT

SORTING EMPLOYEES BY PERFORMANCE AND ROLE-FIT

HR TALK



By GEORGE BRADT

editor@leaderonomics.com

WHEN managing talent, most organisations fail to differentiate.

Treating everyone the same produces schools of average ducks.

Instead, sort people by performance and role-fit; then invest, support, cherish, move up, move over or move out as appropriate.

Expect to find most people effective and in the right role. Support them as a top priority.

Then, sort people based on performance (underperforming, effective or outstanding) and whether or not they are in the right roles.

Treat your other people differently, cherishing outstanding performers in the right roles and doing what it takes to help underperformers improve their performance or circumstances.

(Check out *Figure 1* to see how this approach is done.)

EFFECTIVE IN THE RIGHT ROLE – SUPPORT

Hopefully most of your people are in the right roles and are effective.

Pick your analogy: They are your girders, your backbone and your foundation.

Without them, your organisation won't function.

You need to invest appropriately to support them in their current roles, helping them to grow, perform and be happy.

If everyone were like them, you would not need a differential approach to talent management and your job would be easy.

OUTSTANDING IN THE RIGHT ROLE – CHERISH

A small set of your people are going to be outstanding performers in the right roles.

Cherish them.

Over-invest to help them grow, perform and be happy in their current roles.

The traps here are treating them the same as the first group (effective in the right role) or thinking you need to promote them.

Don't do the first.

These people are so much more valuable than the effective performers that they are worth dramatically more investment.

Don't promote them to their level of incompetence.

Not all great performers make great managers. Don't force them.



Figure 1

UNDERPERFORMING IN THE RIGHT ROLE – INVEST

The “underperforming in the right role” group are some of your trickiest cases. The temptation is to write them off.

If you were recruiting for their replacements, you'd hire them.

They have the strengths, motivation and fit to succeed. But something is wrong.

Generally, it comes to poor role definition, poor direction or supervision, poor training or lack of resources. Those are fixable barriers.

Do what it takes to define their roles, give them the training or resources they need and they will perform.

OUTSTANDING IN THE WRONG ROLE – MOVE UP

At some point, some outstanding performers outgrow their roles.

You need to promote them before somebody hires them away.

When that happens, you'll try to save them. Unfortunately, counter-offers are almost always a bad idea.

Timing is everything. These people think they are ready for promotions before you think they're ready. If you wait too long, someone else will think they're ready.

Move them up sooner than you're comfortable but with more support to succeed in their new roles.

EFFECTIVE IN THE WRONG ROLE – MOVE OVER

These people are the hardest to identify. On the surface, everything looks fine.

What you can't see is that they are having to work much harder than their peers to deliver the same results.

It's a tribute to their motivation that they are willing to do so. But it's not sustainable.

At some point they'll burn out or quit.

Find them and move them to the right role before that happens.

UNDERPERFORMING IN THE WRONG ROLE – MOVE OUT

The trap with people underperforming in the wrong role is trying to save them. You know they're underperforming.

You just don't know if they are in the right role or the wrong role.

If they're in the right role, you should invest in them.

If they are in the wrong role, do what you should to treat them with respect.

But get them out with a minimum of discretionary investment.

The number one regret experienced leaders have looking back on their careers is not moving fast enough on their people.

With people in the wrong roles, move faster than you think you should to move them up, move them over or move them out.

■ George has led the revolution in how people start new jobs. He comes equipped with years of experience in sales, marketing, and general management roles from having worked at huge multinational companies.

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JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

HOW A YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP HELPED ME IN THE PROCESS



By **VICTORIA LOW XIN WEI**
editor@leaderonomics.com

Starting Young is a column featuring stories written by individuals who have been a part of Leaderonomics Youth, our community arm which focuses on developing youths through various leadership initiatives. If you have participated in any of our programmes – be it as a student or a facilitator – and would like to share your experience, do write in to us at editor@leaderonomics.com!

Want to know more about Leaderonomics Youth? Email us at youth@leaderonomics.com or check out @leaderonomicsyouth on Facebook and Instagram!

In your journey through life, there will surely be at least one person who inspires you a lot.

It could be your parents, teachers, friends, or sometimes your favourite singer or movie character.

Well, for me, my inspiration and the ones who motivated me to become a better person are the people in Leaderonomics.

They have taught me what it is to be a true leader and at the same time, to humble myself in helping others, especially my teammates.

WORKING IN A TEAM

I also found my passion in writing when I attended the DIODE Leadership Workshop organised by the Leaderonomics Youth team at their Leaderonomics office premise in the middle of last year.

During the workshop, we had to come up with an article on cyberbullying.

My team had to do research, brainstorm for ideas and interview people who had been bullied or been bullies themselves.

Everyone in the team played a role, from editing, writing, taking photographs, interviewing and researching, to make the project a success.

Obviously, I did the writing and I was really happy as everyone cooperated and did a good job.

Throughout the workshop, Leaderonomics and their team provided us with guidance and sound advice.

A journalist from their editorial team even came to give us feedback on our work.

After attending the workshop, my confidence was boosted and I learnt to get out of my comfort zone.

DIODE YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP

The experience at the workshop was so profound that I immediately signed up for their Youth DIODE Leadership Camp held from Nov 27–Dec 2, 2017.

The camp was another incredible experience. It was a six-day camp held in an eco-resort near Batu Caves, Selangor, and it was my first time away on my own.

There were many participants from diverse backgrounds, aged between 13 to 16.



Some even came from children's homes.

This observation, in itself, inspired our team members to raise funds for these homes as part of our team's M.A.D. (Make A Difference) project.

At the campsite, we had a schedule laid out for sharing sessions, games, projects and, of course, meal times!

I had to learn to be independent and disciplined, minus the comforts of home.

I also learnt to mingle and interact with people from different backgrounds.

Here are some of the key takeaways from the camp:

1 Mark of a true leader

I used to think that by positioning myself as a leader, it was okay to be proud, and it was okay to care more about myself than the people around me.

Well, guess what? I had the wrong mindset.

I learnt that not everyone has the same ability to do the same things: each person is gifted with something unique that only they can do best.

At the camp, my pride took a hit as I faced hurdles that really challenged me.

Not wanting to take responsibilities and fail, I often felt like slipping into the follower mode and letting someone else do the hard work and take the blame.

However, the Leaderonomics team was just incredible. Day in and day out, for the entire six days, they drum into you all the good attributes of a leader.

This actually sunk into me, for I began to think more maturely.

Each person is gifted with something unique that only they can do best

I started to feel that I can be a strong leader and I will work things out.

It wasn't easy at all: thinking of bright ideas, coming up with plans and solutions, yet still having to convince my teammates and earn their trust.

In the end, all of our efforts paid off as we did our M.A.D. project successfully as a team.

2 Stepping out of comfort zone

The camp was not all work and no play.

There were many fun and challenging team games that tested our leadership skills and helped us bond with each other.

We also had a session where we had to build our confidence by sharing our thoughts, fears, dreams and challenges that we dread to overcome.

I had extreme stage fright: I simply turned jelly and had butterflies in my stomach!

Listening to the others, I realised that I wasn't the only one going through difficulties; the people around me faced similar challenges too.

It was tough, but I picked up my courage and stood in front of the audience and presented my paper.

In the end, I felt good and proud of myself, even though I felt like there was an earthquake inside of me.

3 Looking within thyself

There was another session that I really enjoyed where we had to reflect on ourselves.

This was a rather serious session. Some broke down and wept openly.

The experience taught me that everyone makes mistakes and that nobody is perfect.

The turning point is to acknowledge your mistakes, change and carry on to be a better person.

It really touched my heart as it did for the others, too.

A CHANGED PERSON

Before we said our goodbyes on our last day of camp, we had a piece of paper stuck behind our backs.

Everyone was encouraged to write nice or meaningful messages to the person.

That piece of crumpled paper is still hanging proudly in my room, constantly reminding me of what I can become and what I can achieve.

The camp was truly life-changing!

I'd recommend you students out there to experience this camp yourselves!

YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP

This is a 6-day camp for secondary school students between the ages of 13-16 who want to be great leaders of the future!

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ARE WE OVEREMPHASISING OUR STRENGTHS?



WHEN TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING IS BAD FOR YOU

By **DANIEL RUSSELL**
editor@leaderonomics.com

THE strengths-based development movement has taken the leadership and development world by storm since the book, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton was published in 2001.

In fact, that book and its associated StrengthsFinder assessment have been used by millions around the world to identify their talents and focus on their unique collection of strengths.

The strengths-based development wave has been further energised by the positive psychology movement which focuses on optimising human performance.

There are two well-intentioned reasons that the strengths-based approach has caught on so strongly around the world:

1 It's 'nice'.

In many ways, it's easier for development professionals to embrace a programme built around emphasising the positive in everyone.

These programmes are encouraging and participants love them.

Given the over-reliance on participant reactions as training evaluations, strengths-based programmes will show strong numbers.

Usually, strengths-based writers highlight their articles with feel good quotes such as "the sting of criticism lasts longer than the balm of praise" or even quasi-related scientific research showing that people remember criticism longer but respond more to praise.

This approach to development has been a very helpful antidote for overly critical workplace cultures.

For example, companies where managers have spent an inordinate amount of time dealing with performance problems rather than helping good employees have improved as a result of adapting a strengths-based approach.

Switching the focus from criticism to praise is a good thing.

2 It's 'easy'.

The strength-based approach greatly simplifies development.

It has taken many theories covering personality, motivation and values, and abridged these into a relatively short list of 34 items.

This list is further shortened to only the top five for any individual.

Now, individuals need only focus on how to maximise their use of these strengths.

This approach doesn't ask people to change.

A *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) article entitled, "How to Play to Your Strengths" highlighted the quote, "Why should a natural third baseman labour to develop his skills as a right fielder?"

Of course, he wouldn't do that.

The "natural third baseman" would continue to hone his quick reflexes and throwing accuracy rather than focusing



on skills related to any other defensive position.

There are clear applications of the strengths-based approach to career counselling and job fit.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?

Although the strengths-based approach is intuitive and attractive for employee development, it has many drawbacks.

In fact, some authors assert that you should *Fear Your Strengths* (book title by Robert E. Kaplan and Robert B. Kaiser).

Perhaps the enthusiasm about the strengths-based approach has gone too far and has oversimplified employee development and done more harm than good to individuals and the workplace at large.

1 It's 'too easy'.

Coming back to the example of our "natural third baseman," what if he is a terrible hitter?

He has quick reflexes, strong arms, and throwing accuracy but simply can't hit.

If the movie *Moneyball* taught us anything, it was that we needed to choose players based on the numbers.

Extending this example to the typical workplace, the example of a "natural third baseman" still doesn't really hold up.

The idea of one being able to focus only on five strengths – and ignoring weaknesses – isn't practical in today's complex workplace.

Few jobs today are so unidimensional that they require only a few strengths.

Growth in weak areas is especially important as individuals progress into higher level jobs that require new skills and abilities in coaching subordinates, influencing others, leadership, and business management.

The world renowned coach, Marshall Goldsmith, said it best with the title of his book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*.

While the strengths-based approach to development is simple, it focuses only

on the relative strength of the themes within the individual.

That is, the StrengthsFinder assessment identifies the top five themes (called "strengths") of an individual, relative to all the other strengths on the list.

What we don't know is how strong the strengths are relative to others.

For example, we don't know if the person is stronger than 90% of the world in 15 themes.

You only know the relative strength of the themes compared to your other themes.

While this information helps people discover generally what they like and what they do well (relative to other tasks), it tells us nothing about how strong they are compared to other people.

Growth in weak areas is especially important as individuals progress into higher level jobs that require new skills and abilities

2 It's actually not 'nice'.

The strengths-based approach can be deceptively simple and potentially misleading to individuals.

This information may give an individual a false sense of confidence about his "strengths" only to find out that there are others who are actually stronger in those themes.

Is it "nice" to mislead someone about strengths?

Development professionals have long known that "overused strengths" quickly become weaknesses.

Acting in ways that align with one's strengths is natural and comfortable. Thus, individuals will tend to demonstrate behaviours in line with their strengths – even when they aren't appropriate.

Furthermore, individuals tend to seek out feedback from others that confirm behaviours aligned with their strengths.

They never learn to behave flexibly and incorporate behaviours from other themes into their work style.

PARTING THOUGHTS

As stated by Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic in his HBR article, *Strengths-Based Coaching Can Actually Weaken You*, there is no scientific evidence that strengths-based development works.

We know based on decades of research that programmes incorporating both strengths and weaknesses yield statistically significant performance improvements.

In my opinion (along with other authors referenced here), although strengths-based development programmes are popular (and costly), we may be doing a disservice to the participants and our organisations by continuing to use them.

Clearly, the strength-based approach to development has gone too far.

What started out as a constructive reaction to negativity in traditional performance reviews and development planning has become 'harmful'.

The strengths-based approach has become an overused strength.

I am a strong believer that when it comes to individual development, it's important to have an approach that celebrates strengths, supports efforts to close gaps, and provides opportunities to develop new strengths which allow individuals to grow into new roles.



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Appreciation is an important part of work life, and a key characteristic of every good leader is the ability to appreciate his or her colleagues. In their book, *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*, Gary Chapman and Paul White talk about the five basic ways to express appreciation: through Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, and Physical Touch. Are you showing enough appreciation to your work mates? Check out bit.ly/STappreciation

■ Dan was the managing director of a US-based consulting firm focusing on leadership assessment, development and coaching. For advice on which assessment tool is best implemented for your organisation, kindly email us at info@leaderonomics.com.



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■ *Want to share
some of your travel
experiences and
lessons from them?
Share it with us at
editor@leaderonomics.com.*

By **ADELINE TAY**
editor@leaderonomics.com

AS I boarded the plane, I was both thrilled and nervous. My very *first* solo trip and to my dream country, no less! I had placed months of effort and thought into making that occasion special and memorable.

You'll find many articles on reasons to travel solo, or how solo travelling can change your life.

Although it was certainly one of the best decisions I have ever made, it still came with its fair share of challenges.

Here's how I managed to turn my four biggest obstacles into a 5-star solo trip of a lifetime.

CHALLENGE #1: THE APPROVAL

I'm from a family where you simply cannot go on a trip alone without their blessings.

You see, I'm a Malaysian girl who's just under five feet, and can still pull off looking like a high school student despite my age.

Plus, I was still recovering from a knee surgery from about a year before this trip materialised.

My family was reluctant. Safety was one of their main concerns, followed closely by finances.

So I made sure I gave myself enough time to recover from the injury before the trip, and I told them that I would use the money which I had kept aside for such an occasion (for the past two years, in fact).

I was not about to neglect my responsibilities to the family just because I wanted this trip to happen.

I didn't think it was an easy decision for them to make, but they were certainly more at ease after seeing how much I had prepared for this.

Life lesson: You are not a lone ranger in life. Every decision you make will have a ripple effect on others, especially those whom you are accountable to.

Be prepared to present your case with solutions at hand to alleviate people's fears and concerns.

CHALLENGE #2: THE LIMITATIONS

I had eight days and RM6,000. Half of it went to flights and accommodation.

I had also set aside 10% for emergency. That left me with about RM2,400 for transportation, food, recreation and shopping during the trip.

This was actually a decent budget to work with, but who am I kidding? When is money ever enough when you're in Japan?

I wanted to dress up in a kimono, eat in the best sushi/ramen/soba/tempura restaurants, visit all the animal cafés, and go to both Disneyland and Disney Sea World.

Plus, I hadn't even started on my shopping list yet. So, I had two options: (1) expand my budget by digging into

MY FIRST SOLO TRIP EXPERIENCE



PACKED WITH UNFORGETTABLE LIFETIME LESSONS



Image 1

my savings, or (2) stick with the same budget and forego some activities.

Despite what the travel advertisements might say, you can't have it all.

There will always be a tradeoff.

So yes, I went with option 2.

Although sacrifices had to be made, I learnt to be creative in getting the most value for each dollar, such as visiting the museums for free on a national holiday.

Life lesson: You can't always have it your way.

Sometimes, you just need to put to good use the limited resources available for you and just make it work by considering other alternatives out there.

CHALLENGE #3: THE GOLDEN MOMENTS

This was an important occasion so I wanted to ensure that my first solo trip album would not consist of mainly picturesque sceneries and food pictures, nor did I want to see my face covering 70% of the photo by taking selfies.

Sure, I could get strangers to help from time to time but I wanted something foolproof.

I had friends who would write little quotes on small pieces of paper, and they would take pictures of the places they visited with it.

I thought those were pretty neat and decided to do the same.

However, I had a tough time coming up with suitable quotes, and since my handwriting is not exactly the best in the world, I decided to forego this idea.



Image 2

The next thought is for me to look great in the pictures by having different outfits to match.

While I was looking through my wardrobe and struggling to decide how much clothes I should be bringing, an idea hit me: What if I could take pictures of myself *before* the trip in different outfits and poses, print them out, and use them so I would be *in* the picture?

To know what I mean, here is how my idea translated into (see image 1 and 2).

It's the birth of the Mini-Me series!

I could dress myself up without bringing along my whole wardrobe, and I now had an album which contained some pretty unique pictures, perfectly capturing this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Life lesson: You can always take an original idea and turn it into something that works best for a given circumstance.

It's called reinvention, or innovation. Also, for every challenge we face in life, there is always a solution if we look hard enough.

CHALLENGE #4: THE MISHAPS, MISSTEPS AND MISFORTUNES

I had invested so much time preparing for this, and yet Murphy's Law slapped me right in the face during the trip.

I found out that the subway pass I had purchased was not enough to cover all of my travelling expenses.

I ended up having to fork out extra money from my budget for transportation, and by the time I was halfway through the week, I'd lost my hostel key card **and** the train pass.

I was annoyed and I had to remind myself not to let those misfortunes ruin my trip.

To make it worse, I then fell ill the next day from dehydration.

Despite having set aside some cash for emergency, the consequences were painful.

Every decision I made after that (i.e., what to eat, which train route to take) had to be calculated very carefully.

So you can imagine the relief when I finally checked-in at Haneda Airport on the last day with *just* enough cash for one meal.

I almost didn't have enough to make it to the airport.

Life lesson: Things don't always go according to plan, and it is so easy for us to focus on the negatives that we sometimes have to take some time off to reflect ourselves.

Make the conscious effort to focus on being grateful for the opportunities, instead of focusing on our losses.

FINAL THOUGHTS

After reading about some of the unpleasant surprises that came my way, you wouldn't see this as a 5-star experience, would you?

Aptly, Charles Swindoll puts it: "Life is 10% what happens to you, and 90% how you react to it."

To me, all that happened during the trip – the good and the bad – are what made this trip so uniquely mine.

And that is my secret to having a 5-star experience in everything you put your heart and mind to do in life.

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Leaderonomics
The Science of Building Leaders



By **PAUL TEN HAKEN**
editor@leaderonomics.com

LET me start by saying that I love technology. I mean, I *love* technology.

I was one of the first to own Google Glass (which I eventually sold on eBay), the Recon Jet smart glasses (again, sold on eBay), the first-generation Nike FuelBand, the inaugural Fitbit, the Apple Watch, yadda, yadda, yadda.

I've had more iPhones than I can count, and my Jeep is a WiFi hotspot. You get the idea.

It's safe to say I'm an early adopter. Technology has made my life easier in so many ways. Living on a screen is basically my job.

We live in a generation that hides behind screens. Slack, text messages, emails, direct messages, Facebook messages, and the list goes on.

THE LOST ART

We are a generation who is amazingly versed in the art of **digital** communication.

Conversely, we are slowly losing the art of **verbal** communication – or at least, forgetting the value it holds.

I have dealt with several issues in the past months where so much confusion and wasted work time could have

JUST PICK IT UP!



COMMUNICATING BETTER THROUGH A SIMPLE PHONE CALL

been avoided by a simple phone call. One call, problems avoided.

Want to make your intern squirm? Tell them they need to answer the phones.

Want to shake up a younger member of your team? Reply to their email by simply saying, "Give me a call, and we'll discuss this."

I am not exactly sure when the art of the phone call started to die, but it is dying a very slow, productivity-killing death.

One only needs to Google "voice-mail memes" to see how despised the phone call, and even worse, the voice-mail has become.

OLD SCHOOL IS STILL IN

While I would like to say I am not guilty of relying mainly on screen-based communication, in reality, I am as guilty as anyone.

I love the nature of the digital message – the ability to choose my words carefully, the ability to respond on my

time, and the other comforts digital communication affords.

But I am also becoming acutely aware that a good old-fashioned phone call will never go out of style.

And in many cases, it is the easiest and most efficient way to communicate.

Forget the texts and emails that are prone to being taken out of context and try picking up the phone from time to time.

You'll be surprised at how efficient this "old school" communication vehicle can still be.

■ *Paul Ten Haken is an entrepreneur, fitness enthusiast and digital expert. He started in digital media at the dawn of the dot-com boom and spent several years in high-level roles in the corporate sector. His greatest professional success is in building a company that is steadily awarded for its positive workplace culture. To share your thoughts with us, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.*

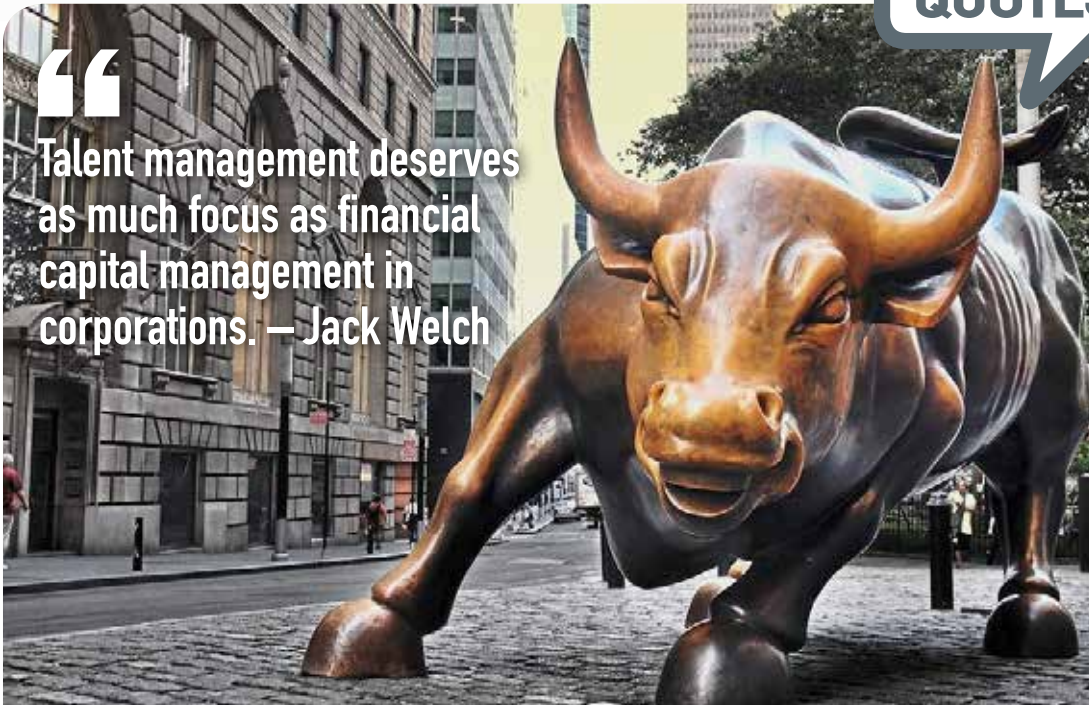
What is dialogue? According to Professor George Kohlrieser, it's about thinking together. In this short video, the Professor of Leadership Behaviour and Organisational Behaviour at IMD Switzerland and veteran FBI hostage negotiator shares his thoughts on how you can dialogue better in the workplace. Check this out on our Leaderonomics Media YouTube channel: bit.ly/LNYTdialogue

Our body language plays a very important role in how people perceive us. It is also a very useful communication tool. Here are a few tips on how to make the best out of any situation. Go here: bit.ly/HPbodylanguage

QUOTES



Talent management deserves as much focus as financial capital management in corporations. — Jack Welch



You've probably heard that it's good to have empathy, but do you know what it really entails? In this Raise Your Game session, Leaderonomer Kathleen Tan discusses empathy and its relevance in today's leadership practices. Listen here: bit.ly/RYGempathy

Online Exclusive

Watching a movie can be fun and educational at the same time. Leaderonomer Wong Ee Ling shares her thoughts on the movie *Goodbye Christopher Robin*, which tells the story of Winnie the Pooh creator, A. A. Milne, and his family. Read it here: bit.ly/lessonsCRobin



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Have you wondered about the life of comic artists, who incessantly tickle our funny bones with their drawings, bubble talks (sometimes none at all) and exaggerated cartoon characters? Let's read about the life of a real comic artist on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/ADILcomicartist

Do you believe that a team that laughs together, sticks together? Throughout the years, the tradition of pranking at Leaderonomics has helped foster a culture of inclusion and cohesion. Watch some of our pranks captured on video, here on Life@Leaderonomics, on our YouTube channel: bit.ly/LifeLDRplaylist

WHY SO SERIOUS?

LAUGHTER AND HUMOUR, OUR BEST MEDICINE

By **ROHINI RAJARATNAM**
editor@leaderonomics.com

HUMOUR has been around ever since the beginning of time.

Even chimpanzees, gorillas, bonobos and orangutans show laughter-like vocalisations in response to physical contact such as wrestling, play chasing or tickling.

So, what is humour?

The word is said to derive from the Latin word "umor" which means "body fluid".

In medieval physiology, our relative proportions of body fluids determine our physical condition and state of mind.

Most think humour is something that exists for mere entertainment.

Studies have shown that it is actually an aspect of the human mind in processing information.

A lot of research has been done to highlight the importance of humour in our daily lives.

Even Sigmund Freud noticed the correlation between humour and the unconscious mind and pondered upon the question on **why** we laugh.

If this is so, how does humour impact us?

Here are the three aspects in which humour plays an essential role and how:

1 MENTAL HEALTH

It's pretty evident that humour can help in improving one's mental health from stress, depression or even just a bad day.

Laughter reduces mental tension and increases energy, enabling you to stay focused and accomplish more.

It also stimulates both sides of the brain, encouraging clarity, creativity and better problem-solving abilities.

2 PHYSICAL HEALTH

Remember the movie *Patch Adams*, directed by Tom Shadyac which tells the true story of a medical student using humour to treat patients?

The real-life Adams, also known as Dr Hunter Doherty "Patch" Adams, founded the Gesundheit! Institute as part of his initiative to change the American health-care system by incorporating laughter, joy and creativity as an integral part of the healing process.

Studies have shown that humour does boost one's immunity.

A good hearty laugh is said to benefit one's circulation, lungs and muscles, especially those around the belly area.

It also helps one deal with pain and physical adversity.

Take Norman Cousins, for example, who was diagnosed with a degenerative disease that caused the breakdown of



collagen, leaving him in almost constant pain and motivated his doctor to say he would die within a few months.

He claimed to have recovered from it with just laughter from tonnes of comedies!

3 SOCIAL HEALTH

Unsurprisingly, humour brings people together.

You are more likely to keep social contact with those who make you laugh and can take a joke. Humour boosts one's communication connection.

Most studies find humour to be a

highly desirable attribute, which explains why the acronym GSOH (good sense of humour) found its way into personal and online dating posts.

CONCLUSION

So, tell a joke once in a while and have a good, hearty laugh because humour is an integral part of human survival.

■ *Rohini is a law graduate and freelance writer. Her areas of interest are personal development, social rights, and reflective writing. Share your thoughts with us at editor@leaderonomics.com.*

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TALENT PROGRAMMES FOR HULK, IRON MAN AND THOR

HOW WOULD YOU ALIGN TALENT AND MOTIVES?

By **ELISA DASS AVIN**
editor@leaderonomics.com

"There was an idea to bring together a group of remarkable people, so when we needed them, they could fight the battles that we never could..." – **Nick Fury, superspy and recruiter of The Avengers**

WITH that idea in mind, Nick Fury formed a strong team of superheroes with Captain America, Thor, Iron Man, Hulk, Black Widow and Hawkeye. Though they were remarkable (and imperfect), Nick had different challenges with each of them.

Very much like the Avengers, we often find that an organisation's high potentials come with their own challenges. Let's focus on the alignment of talent and motives of an individual and how we can approach it.

DEFINING MOTIVES AND TALENTS

Werner Barkhuizen, chief executive officer of Saville Consulting defines **Motives (M)** as what you need or enjoy doing; and **Talent (T)** as the behaviours you are effective in.

We often say you'll do well in what you enjoy. Is it always true?

In our workplace, do we always find pleasure in what we do well? Is there an alignment between our **M** and **T**?

With these questions in mind, how does it impact an organisation's plan for development and succession planning of their talent pool?

SUPERHEROES AT WORK

Taking the cue from our favourite Marvel characters, every organisation has their talent pool of Avengers. They have gifts, superpowers, gadgets, and skills that are unique to them.

Unlike our identified talents, some superheroes fully (and happily) leverage on what they have, some desire more and there are others who battle within themselves to use their superpowers.

In our talent management and succession planning efforts, we sometimes forget an important synergy that should exist in an individual – the Talent-Motive Alignment.

In most assessments, we often observe only what we can visually see – the talents – the competencies, skills and knowledge displayed by an individual.

An individual may show some level of competency in leading others, developing strategies, or presenting during these assessments.

However, in most conventional assessments, the motives of the individual is not apparent. Hence we don't know if the top performer with the good presentation skill actually enjoys doing it or wants to continue leveraging it as a key skill in his career.

Motives or a person's aspiration (or the lack of it) can only be discovered with some friendly interrogation.

WHERE ORGANISATIONS FAIL

When planning for development and succession, many companies fail to consider this area – the alignment of what the candidates in question are good at and what they enjoy doing.

This can be translated into fully understanding their aspirations while at the same time spotting derailment and development opportunities.

Having understood all these aspects of a person will also help us gauge the individual's fit into the company culture. The job and culture fit then plays a big role in giving us an indication of retention probability of the person.

At Leaderonomics, we create a few platforms in our assessments that allow us to discover, validate and, if necessary, shape the motives of a high-performing individual.

With these platforms, we are able to advise clients accordingly on the suitability of an individual for a future role and the development that is required. This also helps us zoom into areas very pertinent to the individual during their coaching sessions.

SUPERHEROES: IDENTIFIED AND ASSESSED

Let's look at the common three scenarios that we find among the high potential candidates and the recommended development plans.

1 THE INCREDIBLE HULK – HIGH T, LOW M

The Hulk is indestructible. That makes him almost more powerful than Captain America and Thor. However, he'd rather retreat to Calcutta as Dr Bruce Banner than try to leverage on his strengths, confining himself in his own cave of fear.

At times, we have Hulks among our high potentials too. They may be very competent in an area of work but have little interest in putting those skills to use.

It could be someone who shows much talent in public speaking but turns down such opportunities.

One may say, "I'm good in analysing data" (**T**) but "I'm not interested to do so" (**M**). Here we see that their motive to perform is not as high as their talent.

Looking deeper, there can be a few reasons for this:

- They feel that in their current role, they need to focus on other skills.
- They may have leveraged on these skills previously but saw no benefits to it.
- They may feel that they are not appreciated for their strengths, hence have taken a step back from wanting to do what they are good at.

Hulk's reasons were clear. He was initially afraid of the unknown if he were to transform into the Hulk.

At some point, he was also fearful of those who would want to misuse him and his strengths.

ACTION PLAN:

It is important for the coach/mentor to zoom into this and allow the individual to share more about why they have lost interest in their areas of strength.

When someone has no will to perform, it often starts with a simple reason of discouragement or lack of support.

More importantly, look out for hints of derailment or burnout should there be more than one area where the **T** is higher than the **M**.

At its worse, if the individual is not interested in doing what he is

good at, a counsellor can be called in to assess the possibility of depression.

After identifying and removing the obstacle(s) hindering them from enjoying what they are good at, it's also a good opportunity to find out if this individual is in the right job which allows him to maximise his strengths.

2 IRON MAN – HIGH M, LOW T

Iron Man may not have super strengths but is very intelligent and displays high-learning agility. He constantly wants more and seeks opportunities to improve himself through his power suit, literally.

Similarly, we have high performers who show a lot of potential but is not quite there yet. The good thing is that they have an eagerness to learn and be better (**M**), yet they acknowledge that their current skills set (**T**) is not on par.

ACTION PLAN:

For the Iron Man in your organisation, this signals a good opportunity to focus your development on the key areas that they have shown interest.

This is the best time to develop them through experiential learning such as workshops, projects, mentoring, as they are eager to learn.

For these high potentials where their **M** is higher than their **T**, they probably enjoy the challenge of a steep learning curve with very little help.

However, you may find that there are high potentials in your team who may inherit the egoistic side of Iron Man, i.e. they don't get along in a team and like to work alone.

Although they are very eager to learn, their attitude may get in the way. Try putting aside your frustrations dealing with someone as such.

As a coach/mentor, it helps to highlight the bigger picture of their role in the organisation and what they can improve on.

3 THOR – T-M ALIGNMENT

Unlike Hulk and Iron Man, Thor is very much at peace with his powers, is not hesitant to fully leverage on his strength and is ready to fight when needed.

Thor is more balanced and he seems to have self-awareness of his strengths and limitations.

This is an instance of when one's skills match his interests – what Peter Saville of Saville Consulting calls a Talent-Motive alignment.

ACTION PLAN:

When our high potentials know where their interests lie and have developed their skills to a desired level, they tend to be more confident in executing their tasks.

The challenge for human resources is to ensure that this level of talent and motivation is sustainable

and sufficient for future roles.

When leveraging on the Thors in your team, remember to reward them accordingly in career/growth opportunities and remuneration.

This helps the company retain such talents without making them feel like The Hulk – having to down-play his powers to avoid others from taking advantage of him.

Although Thor is at his peak now and will likely contribute immeasurably more than others, his needs need to be taken care of too.

IN SUMMARY

The effectiveness and success of your talent management plans depends on how you are currently addressing and managing the gaps between the motive and talent of your Iron Man and Hulk.

One of the advantages of the Avengers is that they are a combination of different characters, but once they are united in purpose (i.e. saving the world), it brings all their strengths to the forefront and their limitations are covered for by each other.

Similarly, help your pool of high potentials to see a common goal that is beneficial to them and the organisation at large.

So, the next time you plan your talent management or succession plans, be Nick Fury! Be the recruiter of your company's own team of Avengers by considering these:

- Be transparent in your talent identification process to assess strengths, limitations and aspiration of your "superheroes".
- Put in place measures that can help you assess the talent and motives alignment of each one of them before you plan for their development.

These may help you identify and effectively harness the capabilities of the Hulks, Iron Men and Thors among your midst. This comprehensive talent programme will help you build stronger teams.

All the best!



■ **Elisa Dass Avin** pioneered the *Leaderonomics Talent Assessment Division* and utilised various platforms and tools to ascertain the motive-talent alignment of individuals to help them be at their best. To get in touch with us, email info@leaderonomics.com

BLACK WIDOWS AND HAWKEYES IN OUR MIDST

WHY DO WE NEED THEM WHEN THEY ARE JUST MERE MORTALS?



By **DINESHSETHU RAMACHANDRAN**
editor@leaderonomics.com

THE *Avengers: Age of Ultron* – Much has been said about it; much more will be said about it. This will not be another article dissecting the lessons learnt from the movie.

Instead, it will be one that looks at two particular members of the Avengers who have appeared in the string of recent Marvel movies.

Of the entire team, there are only two members who are not “superheroes” in the actual sense of the word, and they are Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow and Clint Barton aka Hawkeye.

When compared with their counterparts (the enhanced super-soldier, the man with an iron suit, the God of Thunder and the green rage monster), one would question if Black Widow and Hawkeye have what it takes to be in the team.

Indeed, they don’t have superpowers of their own but they do possess other qualities that allow them to make up for their human shortcomings and be worthy of being called an Avenger.

ORGANISATIONAL DILEMMA

Organisations are no stranger to this dilemma. It is a frequent question that pops up during the hiring process.

Should they hire the crème de la crème or the ones with talent that seem insignificant when placed alongside the “elite”?

Of course, there are those amongst us who would say the obvious choice would be the “elite” group. However, this article intends to persuade you to reconsider the “underdogs”.

So organisations, listen up! This is a message on why you could use more Black Widows and Hawkeyes in your team.

1 KEEPING EMOTIONS FROM THE EQUATION

In *The Avengers* (2012), Black Widow never loses focus of her primary objective which was to put an end to Loki’s plans despite Hawkeye, whom she shares an emotional bond with, being under Loki’s control.

Instead of giving in to her emotions and seeing herself as a pawn to the situation at hand, she utilises her emotions to outwit Loki into divulging his intentions.

It is not uncommon for life to throw us a curveball when we least expect it. This is especially evident in today’s business world where we are all linked to each other in one way or another.

Indeed, within an organisation, your team may feel the ripple effects of an unforeseen event that has occurred halfway across the world.

Those of us who are so familiar with normalcy would most

likely be overwhelmed and fumble around in a feeble attempt to get our bearings.

However, a Black Widow in our team would put emotions aside and immediately take the necessary actions to remedy the situation.

In short, it is the ability to keep a cool head and strategise in times of peril that makes a Black Widow an invaluable asset to an organisation.

2 PLAYING TO ONE’S STRENGTHS

Hawkeye is noted for his impressive marksmanship skills, particularly with his bow and unique set of customised arrows.

In *Thor* (2011) and *The Avengers*, he is seen to be perched on higher ground. This is because he is aware that it is only on higher ground that he is able to utilise his marksmanship and acute observation skills to the fullest, thus providing his team with better support.

It is always good to have a self-aware individual in an organisation. Self-awareness can turn good into great.

By being aware of his strengths and weaknesses, the Hawkeye in your team can leverage on his strengths by choosing his moves more wisely and deliberately.

This would allow him to hold his own even if he is amongst people

who, at a first glance, seem to out-class him in all aspects.

So, always ensure that your team comprises people from various backgrounds to allow for better solutions to any given issue.

3 KNOWING WHEN TO PULL THE PLUG

In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), it was revealed that S.H.I.E.L.D. had been compromised, in which its ranks were infiltrated by Hydra personnel.

Black Widow, being a loyal agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. for many years, had to make the difficult decision to help Captain America bring down the organisation that was intent on doing harm to the people of Earth.

At times, the organisation which we serve may deviate from its original purpose. Even worse, it may tread on the slippery slope of moral compromise to achieve its objective, even if it means that others would be negatively affected.

The case of Enron comes to mind where the company, in the pursuit of its objectives, was willing to engage in fraudulent activities to the detriment of others.

If not for the efforts of Sherron Watkins who stood up as a whistleblower, the wrongdoings could have gone undetected.

With a Black Widow in your organisation, you can be assured that your team will not engage in any activities that go against good values and integrity, for she will be willing to expose the team even if it comes at a personal cost.

4 FOCUSING ON THE END GOAL

Hawkeye, in the latest instalment of the Avengers, utters a memorable line, “... if you step out that door, you are an Avenger.”

Later, he is shown to be willing to sacrifice himself in an attempt to protect a child though it meant that he would be unable to return to his own family. This shows that he truly believes in what the Avengers stand for.

In an organisational context, there are moments in which we are tempted to take the easy path instead of the right path as the latter would surely be a long and arduous journey.

A Hawkeye in your team would not see his actions as being that of an individual.

Instead, he would see the bigger picture of his actions to be one that represents the ideals of the team and the organisation.

Regardless of the work at hand, he will only give it his best and nothing less.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Although it is unlikely that any of us would ever have the capabilities of the Avengers, it is possible for us to relate to Black Widow and Hawkeye, who are the only two mere mortals in the team.

Perhaps this is why they were included in the team in the first place, to remind us that even ordinary individuals have the potential to shape the world for the better.



■ Dinesh believes that everyone is a potential game-changer, if only we have the courage to keep to our path and persevere through adversity. To engage with Dinesh, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com. Visit www.leaderonomics.com for more leadership content.