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Forgiving Our First Role Models

REACH out to take back control

Emotions. They're antithetical to rationality, representing the disruptive to the ordered. Do emotions, however, deserve to be cast under such an unfavourable light? Check out why it's

important for you to be rational about the emotional when making sound decisions:
bit.ly/ETemotions

Are you afraid of conflict?

Fear of conflict can turn leaders, managers and employees into "psychological hostages" who are paralysed and unable to challenge others. George Kohlrieser shares 6 skills leaders need for managing conflict at:

bit.ly/GKmanagingconflict



By ELAINE FERNANDEZ
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ONE of the many realities in life is that we will be hurt by someone we care about. When this happens, we are faced with a dilemma – do we retaliate, or do we forgive?

Many struggle with the idea of forgiveness, because it is often seen as condoning people's actions, or giving them absolution, which they may not deserve.

This violates our sense of justice, which makes it hard for us to consider even the possibility of forgiveness.

But what if we understood that forgiveness is not about the other person, but ourselves?

What if it is a process of us choosing to let go of the resentment and negative feelings we have toward someone who has hurt us, so that we are no longer consumed by that hurt?

Forgiving is easier said than done, because it involves us getting past the idea that we are allowing the person to 'get away' with hurting us. So why even bother?

Psychological research has consistently shown that holding on to resentment has negative effects on our psychological and physical health.

People who find it difficult to forgive often struggle with depression and anxiety. In the long-term, they put themselves at increased health risks.

Unaddressed feelings of hurt and resentment can also influence how we live our lives. Psychologist Jack Berry and his team suggest that a lack of forgiveness manifests itself in two ways:

- the desire for retaliation, or
- the desire to avoid contact.

In real terms, we shut ourselves off from the people who hurt us, or we seek to hurt them in return, which perpetuates an unhealthy cycle of negativity in our relationships.

It's complicated

It is said that the people closest to

us are the ones who have the power to hurt us the most.

This is often seen in parent-child relationships.

Our parents are typically the first people we love and trust, and when they let us down, the effects can last well into adulthood.

The position our parents hold in our lives can also make us a lot harder to forgive than other family members or peers.

They are our first role models of how to behave and interact with the world.

When they inevitably fail us (being human), we take it harder, because we expect more from them than we do others.

After all, these are the two people who should have our best interests at heart.

So as adults, we become too busy to visit them, or find it difficult to resist snapping back, now that we can.

Our inner vows

We promise ourselves that when we become parents, we will "not be like them", that we will give our children everything that we never had from them.

While this might make us feel better in the short term, there are potential consequences to living a life that is ultimately in reaction to how our parents treated us growing up.

We become too strict or too permissive with our own children. We never really take responsibility for how we feel and behave towards our parents.

Often, we carry tremendous guilt with us that we cannot seem to love our parents like we believe we should.

Types of forgiveness

What does it truly mean to forgive, and what are some of the ways we can practise forgiveness that not only strengthens our existing relationship with our parents, but also increases our overall well-being?

Forgiveness expert and

psychologist, Professor Everett Worthington, suggests that there are two types of forgiveness.

We have to keep making active decisions to forgive, because imperfect human beings will inevitably hurt each other again.

1. Decisional forgiveness

Decisional forgiveness is when we consciously decide to let go of anger and the negative thoughts we have toward someone.

Anger and resentment can narrow our focus, and we then lack the capacity to see beyond the hurt.

This type of forgiveness is a crucial first step toward relationship repair and reconciliation.

Making the decision to actively reject the negative thoughts we have toward our parents can enable us to then attempt to view the situation from a perspective that allows us to make peace with the situation for ourselves.

It also opens the door for us to take on our parents' perspectives, to try and see the situation through their eyes.

This may help us understand their motives better, even if we may not agree with their actions.

This understanding can then be the first step toward reconnecting with our parents, with new and more realistic expectations of them.

2. Emotional forgiveness

Emotional forgiveness takes things further, replacing negative emotions with positive ones by making an

effort to be empathetic and compassionate toward the person who has wronged us.

This type of forgiveness is one that ultimately benefits us in the long run, as it reduces our need to continue ruminating on the hurt.

Research has linked rumination to outcomes such as increased stress, anxiety and depression.

The effort to let go of anger and replace it with compassion will likely bring us more physical and psychological benefits.

Steps to take

The question, therefore, is how do we go about the business of forgiving our parents?

Worthington and his colleagues have developed a five-step process called REACH.

It has been tested in over 20 controlled studies. The REACH approach works like this:

- **Recall:** remember the hurt that was done to you as objectively as you can.
- **Empathise:** try and understand your parents' perspectives and circumstances when they hurt you.
- **Altruism:** think about a time where you received forgiveness, and offer the same to your parents.
- **Committing:** publicly forgive your parents so that you are accountable to more than yourself.
- **Holding on:** remind yourself that you made the choice to forgive, especially at times when the hurt resurfaces.

That being said, forgiveness is not a one-time decision.

In most cases, we have to keep making active decisions to forgive, because imperfect human beings will inevitably hurt each other again.

To be clear, forgiveness does not mean that we keep allowing others, our parents included, to hurt us indefinitely.

One of the benefits of letting go of resentment is that we are now more able to evaluate our options objectively – one of which can legitimately mean walking away.

The difference – if we choose to do so after forgiving – is that we are less consumed by guilt, because we have made a clear choice to act in our best interests.

Bringing into perspectives

The important thing to remember is that the choice to forgive is one that gives us the most freedom to decide how we will move on from the pain caused by our loved ones.

In doing so, we take back control of our situation and how we respond when people hurt us.

Forgiveness is not an easy process; it requires us to be motivated to want to try.

When we try, there is hope that we can have relationships with our parents that will enrich our lives in ways that we would never have known had we not taken that first step and chosen forgiveness.

Elaine Fernandez is head of the Psychology Department at HELP University, and a trained social psychologist. She enjoys figuring out what makes people tick, and believes strongly in the importance of psychology in stimulating personal and social change. To share your experience or some valuable advice on forgiveness, write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

Mastering The Art Of Saying 'No'

'I don't' vs 'I can't'



By **ROSHAN THIRAN**
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IT'S great that we live in a world where giving, sharing and collaboration are encouraged.

As the saying goes, "no man is an island" – where would any of us be without the help of others?

Just as giving to others is an important virtue for many reasons, it's no less important to know when **not** to give, lest we spread ourselves too thin, burn out, and become incapable of sharing the best of ourselves with our families, friends and colleagues.

In business – regardless of the culture – it's a given to be socially obliging, to acquiesce to requests from everyone in a genuine effort to establish and strengthen bonds.

However, overcommitting ourselves and our resources for the sake of short-term ease can result in unexpected challenges.

In my own experience over the years, there have been meetings, lunches, requests for talks and other commitments I've said "Yes" to without giving much thought to the consequences of an overcrowded planner.

At some point of their career, leaders reading this will have found themselves being double or

triple-booked on their calendar.

This experience has come as a result of offering too many well-intentioned yeses instead of offering a polite-yet-firm, "No".

In our intuitive attempts to accommodate as many people as possible, we actually end up diminishing our use to others rather than making our best efforts available to them.

And it all boils down to the language we use.

Stop being nice. Be realistic.

In a study published by the *Journal of Consumer Research*, Professor Vanessa Patrick and Henrik Hagtvedt investigated the "influence of a linguistic element of self-talk, in which a refusal may be framed as 'I don't' (vs 'I can't'), on resisting temptation and motivating goal-directed behaviour."

What they found was interesting: saying "I don't" relieved participants from committing to something as opposed to saying "I can't".

This intriguing find might look obvious at first glance, but if we take a moment to observe our use of language, it becomes clear that a lot of our responses are automatic.

In the present moment of someone making a request, we often say, "Sure, no problem – remind me nearer the time," or "Yes, I can do that for you –

send me a calendar invite and I'll see you there."

All of this is done with the best intentions, but it can sometimes lead to less-than-great outcomes.

An old friend of mine once mentioned that he was having a similar problem in turning people down.

"It's not that I can't turn people down," he insisted, "it's just that, before I know it, I say 'yes' and then find out later that I've got two or three commitments lined up at the same time."

Even when we do turn people down, we usually leave ourselves open for future commitments.

Consider someone inviting you to give a talk at a school or conference. You might say, "I'd love to, but I can't this month – I have quite a busy schedule around this time of the year."

On the surface, this looks like a good response, and might well be valid.

However, reading between the lines, it appears to say, "Ask me again next month – I won't be as busy then," when, in all likelihood, you won't be available next month either and will be just as busy, if not more so.

It's how you say it

The language we use in our interactions makes all the difference.

Rather than the ambiguous response to the invitation above, compare the difference to a response such as, "Thank you for your invitation, but unfortunately I don't have time to give any talks at the moment. I'll be happy to let you know when I'm available, and perhaps we can discuss something then."

In this empowered response, we clearly set our boundaries while keeping the possibility open for a future arrangement – but this time, on our terms.

Far from being selfish, this approach of giving a direct "No" instead of an automatic "Yes" or a shaky "Maybe" means that we put ourselves in control of how we can best serve others, without other people being able to influence our agenda.

The belief that always saying 'Yes' keeps you ahead of the game is misguided: while agreeing to fruitful commitments is great, having the ability to say 'No' when needed puts us in the driving seat.

It allows us to set the best course of action for whichever direction we want to go.

In a nutshell

On a final note, using "I don't" rather than "I can't" also works wonders for setting personal boundaries.

A former colleague of mine makes it clear: "I don't look at emails on Sundays because that one day is reserved for family time."

As a result, people know to leave any correspondence for the following Monday, when it will receive undivided attention.

So make yours a firm "No" whenever required, and you'll be impressed by the increase in your productivity, quality of work and time you are able to give others.

Of course, there are some commitments you won't be able to fend off.

Saying "No" is about alleviating excessive demand on your time and resources in a way that allows you to function at your best.

It might initially feel like going against the grain of our "Yes" culture, but it's the one thing that can help us to maintain a focus on spending the majority of our time on the right priorities.


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the go at
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Are you a yes-man or yes-woman? Are you afraid of saying "no"? You probably know that saying "no" all the time can be detrimental to your work performance, but so does saying "yes" all the time. To learn more, check out this article:
bit.ly/2tyFfja

Is your organisation saturated with yes-men or do you have people who aren't afraid of challenging your decisions when needed? How does the yes-man culture affect your organisation? Read here to find out:
bit.ly/LDloseyesmen

To practise saying "No", perhaps it's time to start a not-to-do list. You read that right. Check out this article on how to boost productivity with a not-to-do list:
bit.ly/MZnot-to-do

■ *Roshan Thiran is the founder and CEO of Leaderonomics, a social enterprise working to transform lives through leadership development. Connect with Roshan on Facebook and Twitter for more insights into business, personal development, and leadership. What small steps do you need to take now to see a better change tomorrow? Share your thoughts with us at editor@leaderonomics.com.*

No-man? Yes-man?

What's holding you back from saying 'No'?

By **DAN ROCKWELL**
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ANYONE who can't say "No" is living someone else's life. "No" is necessary for fulfilment and success, as long as leaders are driven by a compelling "Yes".

Who can't say 'No'?

1. Dis-empowered people.

Fear says "Yes" when it should say "No". This may be one reason leaders hoard power, rather than giving it.

2. People-pleasers.

Our need for approval drives us into self-defeating activities and commitments.

3. Dreamers.

Do you love new ideas? Dreamers believe they can make nearly any idea work. Lack of focus drives dreamers to distraction.

4. Ambitious people.

Saying "Yes" earns opportunities – as long as you deliver on your yeses.

4 'No' enablers

1. Self-awareness

Know who you are so you can say "No".

Know your strengths, weaknesses, values, mission and aspirations to set yourself up for success.

Don't use self-awareness as an excuse to play it safe. Expressions like, "That's just not me," may be a

smokescreen for fear, love of ease, or self-indulgence.

2. Mission

Letting go of one project or responsibility has meaning when it's an expression of saying "Yes" to compelling mission.

Commit yourself to a noble path so you can turn from all others.

3. Trustworthy team members

Unreliable team members are like chewing gravel.

Slacker team members double stress and strangle progress.

First, you have to do your own work. Second, you live with the constant dripping of potential disappointment.

One slacker stalls the entire team. Everyone waits when one person

doesn't follow through.

4. Priorities

Choose activities that best take you where you want to go with the middle-term in view.

Short-term is short-sighted. Long-term has little urgency.

Reject activities that seem like distractions.

3 questions to ask before saying 'Yes'

1. Does saying "Yes" deliver value to others and yourself?
2. How does saying "Yes" express mission and aspiration?
3. What strengths do you possess that provide confidence you will succeed?

How might leaders say "No" with wisdom and grace?

Ever found yourself overburdened with work, only to have more things piled onto your plate? Struggling to say "No" at work for fear of it affecting your performance? Check out this infographic on how you can say "No" at work – and still keep your job:
bit.ly/LDRsayNo

■ *Dan Rockwell is a coach, speaker and is freakishly interested in leadership. He is a author of the world-renowned, most socially-shared leadership blog, Leadership Freak. Not sure when to bring it up or when to let go, write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com.*



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In today's era where even YouTube can be a teacher (it's true, there are enough self-made tutorials online for you to master anything), leaders sometimes question the relevance of teaching in their portfolio. So why should leaders teach? Check out this article at bit.ly/DSleadandteach

As a leader, part of the process is creating a new breed of leaders after you. Roshan Thiran delves into understanding why great leaders go to great lengths to teach others. Read about it at bit.ly/LDRldrsteachers

■ Mike is the founder and managing director of thoughtLEADERS, LLC. He is also the author of *One Piece of Paper: The Simple Approach to Powerful, Personal Leadership*. To learn about the psychology of people management, email us at info@leaderonomics.com.

What Would You Do?

When your people make mistakes...



By MIKE FIGLIUOLO
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WHEN people in your team make mistakes, you can either berate them or use it as a learning opportunity. Doing the latter builds skills and improves team morale.

For many of us, screwing up is in our DNA. It happens. Call it Murphy's law if you like, but it happens.

When this happens to someone in your team and you're in a leadership role, however, the implications of a mistake can be far-reaching.

The most important aspect of these kinds of events, however, isn't the incident itself.

As a leader, the most important part is your response to these events. Those responses are what end up defining you in the eyes of your team.

Allow me to illustrate.

Scenario 1: Unexpected response

In my younger days as a tank platoon leader, I was prone to take some pretty bold risks.

On one occasion, I decided it was a good idea to abandon the plan my commander had written and lead my platoon down a different route.

That route happened to go through what the map said was a swamp. It didn't look like a swamp to me though.

I was wrong. It was a swamp. (Note: when the map says "swamp" it is a swamp).

Imagine a 68-tonne vehicle stuck in mud 3-5 inches deep. Now imagine me standing on top the said tank waiting to get chewed out by my commander. Can you say "awkward"?

When he showed up, he smirked

and said something that caught me by surprise.

"That's a good stuck."

It felt like he was a bear playing with a bunny before it mauls it.

"Yes sir. It is."

"Okay. Help your crew get it out. Tell me if you need anything."

A wave of befuddlement washed over me.

"You're not mad? Aren't you going to rip my head off?"

"Why? It was a dumb mistake but it's not worth ripping you. Did you learn something about your vehicle's capabilities? Are you ever going to drive through a swamp again?"

"Yes sir. No sir."

"Lesson learnt. Get it un-stuck."

He strode off leaving me in awe of how he transformed what could have been a significant emotional event into a positive learning experience.

Needless to say, my (and my team's) esteem for him rose dramatically that day.

He knew we knew we had made a mistake – no reason to rub it in. Instead, he **taught**.

Scenario 2: Chained reaction

Contrast that event with another one of my infamous platoon leader screw-ups (I made a bunch of "oopsies" as a young lieutenant).

At tank gunnery, we had a flash fire on my vehicle during a live fire training. The fire suppression system went off (which was loud and scary).

We thought our ammunition had caught fire too. We evacuated the vehicle. Our procedure for doing so

was less than textbook.

Fortunately, everyone was okay. Unfortunately, a reasonably seasoned officer witnessed the event. In that moment, he chose to **berate** instead of teach.

He ripped me for the awkward evacuation. He ripped me for some hydraulic fluid leaking from the bottom of my tank (FYI, all tanks leak). He did all of this in front of my soldiers and my peers.

Not once did he stop to ask if we were okay. Never did it enter his mind to find something to teach me about. Nope. His sole intent was to excoriate.

Sure, he got his point across but he lost exponentially more points in respect than the single point in "rightness" he scored.

Putting it to context

Screw-ups will happen.

As a leader, people will judge you by your response to these mistakes. Don't take it lightly.

Both of these incidents happened over 15 years ago and I remember them so vividly. As do many of my friends who were there.

Both of these men formed their image as leaders – one favourable, one not so much.

How will you show up as a leader during the next screw-up? How will you take that opportunity to teach instead of torture?

It might seem small but that event will be larger than you can imagine. Make sure you create that positive learning event.

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

//Nelson Mandela

We thank you teachers, for dedicating your lives to raise our future leaders. Happy Teacher's Day! Keep inspired and keep on inspiring!



Choose Forgiveness

How it unlocks the path to subsequent success



By CELESTE GIORDANO
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FINDING an entrepreneur who hasn't been hurt or wronged somewhere, somehow along the way is next to impossible.

This shouldn't come as a surprise. Pain and disappointment are inevitable parts of the journey we call life.

We have a choice: to hold on to hurt and resentment or to let go and move forward.

By choosing not to forgive past hurts and offenses, we end up consumed with anger. We find it difficult to trust others.

Anger and resentment sap our energy and keep us living in the past, rather than looking toward the future.

On the contrary, choosing to let go can be incredibly freeing. Forgiving someone who has wronged you is a powerful character-building exercise.

Forgiveness isn't easy. In fact, it can be incredibly difficult.

The strength, humility and personal growth it requires will serve you as you face challenging obstacles in the future.

The most successful entrepreneurs choose to forgive.

Their ability to forgive is often what opens doors and opportunities that they would have been closed off to otherwise!

Learn to forgive these four people to open your own gateways to success:

1. Forgive your parents

Like us, our parents are imperfect beings who sometimes make poor, hurtful choices.

For your own emotional well-being, it's important to forgive your

parents for all the mistakes they have made, both in your childhood and adulthood.

This is true whether they are living or have passed on.

At a minimum, your parents gave you the precious gift of life. If you value this gift, forgive them for their wrongdoings.

Forgiving your parents is one of the most liberating choices you'll ever make. The very act requires maturity, acceptance and great character.

If your parents are living, articulating your forgiveness can open a door for mutual respect and even friendship.

At a minimum, it can help diminish feelings of insecurity and anger that may have been lingering inside you for years or even decades.

2. Forgive your loved ones

You should challenge yourself to forgive your spouse, friends and past relationship partners.

These relationships can be intense.

Because they require trust, loyalty, open communication and vulnerability, the pain involved can cut deeply and leave lasting scars.

Pain caused by loved ones can leave anger, resentment and insecurity to fester for years. This not only holds you back but is toxic to your physical and mental health.

Oftentimes, two parties hold some responsibility when relationships hit bumps or take a turn for the worst.

Dig deep and ask yourself, "Do I bear a culpability?" Take ownership of any mistakes you made.

Have the personal integrity and strength to articulate your forgiveness and wish them well.

This is the only way to counteract painful memories, open your heart and move forward with peace and a positive outlook.

This is especially important if the person who has wronged you is an active part of your life, but it's equally liberating to forgive past relationship partners and people with whom friendships have been severed.

Forgiving someone who has wronged you is a powerful character-building exercise.

3. Forgive people in your professional life

Entrepreneurs can be wronged in a multitude of ways by clients, business partners, employees, competitors, service providers, and even clients.

Sometimes the wrongdoing is the result of an honest mistake – one that set you back or lost you money – but a mistake that caused you or your business harm nonetheless.

Other times, you may be intentionally wronged by someone you trusted.

Maybe they didn't honour a commitment, abandoned ship when you needed them, or spread negative

comments about you to people you respect or hope to do business with.

Whatever the case may be, these hurts are real and can distract you from pursuing your goals.

Don't let holding onto resentment hold you back from building the business you're capable of building.

Open your heart, offer forgiveness and do your best to associate yourself with people of integrity in the future.

4. Forgive yourself

Sometimes, the most important person you need to forgive is yourself.

Forgive yourself for the thoughtless, silly things you've said or done, but also the intentional, hurtful things.

Do you regret the damage or pain you have caused?

Did you take responsibility, apologise and try to right the wrong?

Do you intend to try your best to avoid making the same mistakes in the future?

If the answer to these questions are "yes", it's time to forgive yourself and move forward with a clean slate.

You are a different person today than you were when you made those mistakes.

For that reason, you don't deserve – and can't afford – to carry these mistakes around with you forever.

Spend your time and energy looking to the future, not the past.

Forgiving yourself will set you free to explore new opportunities with a clear head and open heart.

In a nutshell

Dear entrepreneurs, is there someone in your personal or professional life whom you haven't forgiven?

Choosing forgiveness will be one of the most difficult but rewarding decisions you ever make.


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insight on
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Imagine what your life would be like if someone murdered one of your immediate family members. What if it was your son or daughter? Think about the anger and bitterness you would feel towards that person. Surely it would consume both your personal and professional life. Would you ever be able to move on? Check out this amazing story of Azim Khamisa, and how forgiveness relate to high performance business leadership: bit.ly/LDRforgiveness

What is dialogue? According to Professor George Kohlrieser, it's about thinking together. In this episode, 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 out this short video on Leaderonomics Media YouTube channel: bit.ly/LNYTdialogue

■ Celeste is the owner and founder of Celeste Giordano Consulting. She has 40 years of experience working in direct sales and is a highly effective leader and communicator with talent for promoting new business. To send your thoughts or tips on forgiveness in the workplace, write to editor@leaderonomics.com.



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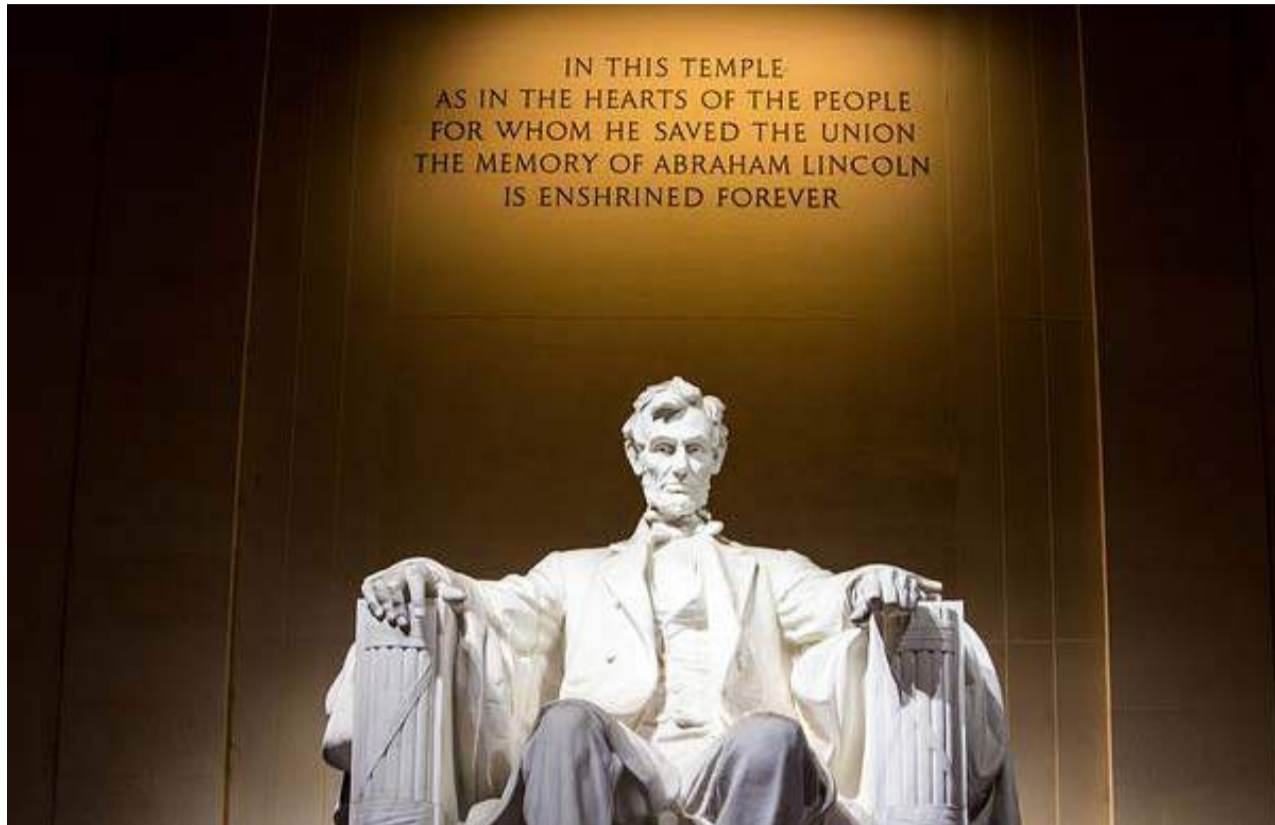
It's a new dawn for Malaysians as a people. It's not because Malaysia will immediately become a perfect nation. It's not because all of our economic, educational, social and national safety issues will magically disappear. It's because we have stood together for a change, and we are prepared to embrace this change, no matter how long it will take to see a better Malaysia. Read this as a reflection: bit.ly/MYreflectionsGE14

To learn more about Lee Kuan Yew's leadership, check out this exclusive Leadership Nuggets video on Leaderonomics Media YouTube channel: bit.ly/LNKuanYew

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

Building A Team Of Rivals

Timeless lessons from Abraham Lincoln



By SANDY CLARKE
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In recent years, we've experienced one of the most divisive periods in the world of politics.

From the Brexit vote to the United States (US) elections in 2016, debate has sparked intense conflict on all sides of the argument.

At the time of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, I was a political journalist who saw firsthand the futility of modern political "debate".

It was sad to see many people professing love for their country and yet uninterested in listening to those with different views.

While it's understandable that people should have strong opinions on important issues, it's often the case that people spend much of their time focusing on what's wrong in their eyes and who is to blame. Invariably, this approach makes for little progress.

As I was reporting on the Scottish referendum campaigns, one thought kept coming to mind: If all of these people truly love their country, why are they fighting among themselves instead of working together to find the best way forward?

After all, aren't we all part of the same nation?

Having people who aren't afraid to question your motives, or your assumptions, can ultimately lead to greater outcomes as ideas are explored freely.

Turning critics into allies

One great leader who knew the transformative power of collaboration was Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the US.

In her Pulitzer-winning book, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, historian Doris Kearns Goodwin describes the complexity of Lincoln's presidency, the tumultuous relationships that existed within it, and how he brought it together for the good of the nation.

On Nov 6, 1860, Lincoln was elected the President of the US.

During the Republican nomination campaign, some of his fiercest critics ran against him, including Edward Bates, Salmon P Chase and William H Seward.

In a remarkable example of leadership, Lincoln enrolled these men in his cabinet as Attorney-General, Secretary of the Treasury and Secretary of State respectively.

Lincoln's leadership was so effective that he was able, as Goodwin describes it, to "bring disgruntled opponents together to create the most unusual cabinet in history".

Lincoln was someone who was intent on bringing the best people together to govern the country.

As a leader, he paid no attention to personal differences or past slights that he received. He loathed to hold a grudge.

One notable inclusion to his cabinet was Edwin Stanton who became Lincoln's Secretary of War.

In their legal careers, the two men had locked horns and Stanton was initially disdainful of his new boss. Nevertheless, Lincoln knew that Stanton had the relentless, disciplined mindset that was needed to balance out the President's openness and leniency.

This was one of the key leadership qualities explored in *Team of Rivals* – Lincoln wasn't afraid to include people in his cabinet who were ambitious and egotistic. In fact, these were the kinds of people whom he surrounded himself with.

As a leader, it can be tempting to have an inner circle of 'Yes' men.

However, having people who aren't afraid to question your motives, or your assumptions, can ultimately lead to greater outcomes as ideas are explored freely.

Collaborate, not cross swords

When people within the world of politics (and business) are focused on criticising each other and their respective ideas, no one makes any progress at all.

In some of the meetings I've attended in the past, they soon turned into squabbles.

They lost sight of their original purpose to benefit the many whose numbers were greater than the group of people gathered.

It's the simplest thing in the world to criticise decision-makers such as chief executive officers, senior managers, politicians and other authorities.

We can be the 'best manager' from a safe distance – so long as we're not faced with the challenges and dilemmas of a leader, it's an easy life being a critic.

Certainly, it's less challenging to say what we're **against** than to say what we're **for**, and how exactly we'd bring about whatever solutions we propose.

When Lincoln brought his unusual cabinet together, it was a statement of intent that his presidency would be one that put the needs and interests of the country ahead of his own personal feelings and ambitions.

He knew, for example, that he needed strong cabinet members to help him pass the 13th Amendment of the Constitution, which would see slavery abolished in America.

For months, Lincoln's cabinet debated whether abolition was the right thing to do.

In the end, he made his decision to issue the historic Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 – the precursor to the 13th Amendment.

Despite some of his cabinet disagreeing with his decision, Lincoln knew the buck stopped with him as president to make the final decision.

Regardless of their views, Lincoln's team felt that their views had been heard and considered before he made his decision. This tendency was one that garnered a lot of respect for the President.

Lincoln's preference for collaboration over competition was a

trait that would win over his former rivals who ran against him in 1860.

Seward was deeply critical of Lincoln's views prior to joining his cabinet and yet, in a letter written to his wife two months after his appointment, Seward described Lincoln as being like someone he had never known.

Like many of the cabinet members, Seward started off thinking Lincoln was unimpressive before concluding that he was in the presence of a truly great leader.

Understand their point of view

One of the most poignant lessons I took from reading *Team of Rivals* was that it's easy to criticise our opponents mainly because we never take the trouble to know them and to genuinely understand their views.

According to our own minds, we seem to know the "right way" to do things, but doing the right thing is seldom without the kind of complexity and nuance that requires team effort and hard work.

Lincoln once wrote, "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"

He also observed that a country is rarely torn apart from the outside, but rather by the conflicts and divisions that exist between a nation's people.

As a leader, Lincoln paid no attention to personal differences or past slights that he received. He loathed to hold a grudge.

It takes a diverse set of capabilities

In *Team of Rivals*, Goodwin elaborates on these qualities of Lincoln, "(He) understood the importance, as one delegate put it, of integrating 'all the elements of the Republican party – including the impracticable, the Pharisees, the better-than-thou declaimers, the long-haired men and the short-haired women.'"

In other words, Lincoln was a man who believed that it took no less than everyone coming together and striving together if the nation was to have any hope of thriving socially and economically.

When we disregard our opponents, we rob ourselves of valuable perspectives that can highlight the flaws in our own thinking and reveal insights that we never previously considered.

As to why we ignore the merits of those who disagree with us, we do it because it's easy to distance ourselves from "the other".

It takes enormous courage to consider different views to our own, but it's from here that real progress and growth can begin to turn everyone's fortunes around for the greater good.

■ Sandy Clarke is a freelance writer who previously spent 10 years as a journalist and broadcaster in the UK. He loves to read accounts of historic leadership and the lessons that can be applied to today's world. To connect with Sandy, find him on LinkedIn or on Twitter @RealsClarke

Let It Go!

How to release a grudge in 6 steps



By DR TRAVIS BRADBERRY
editor@leaderonomics.com

THINK about the last time someone really did you wrong. Maybe a family member forgot your birthday, or your boss passed you up for a promotion.

Now, take a moment to notice what you're feeling.

Does thinking about the event make your heart beat faster or your breathing become shallow? Does it leave a bad taste in your mouth?

If so, you're holding a grudge, which can be bad for your health.

The negative emotions that come with holding on to a grudge are actually a stress response. Just thinking about the event sends your body into fight or flight mode.

When a threat is imminent, this reaction is essential to your survival. When a threat is ancient history, holding on to that stress wreaks havoc on your body and can have devastating health consequences over time.

Holding on to a grudge means you're holding on to stress, and researchers at Emory University have shown that holding on to stress contributes to high blood pressure and heart disease.

Learning to let go of a grudge will not only make you feel better now but can also improve your health over time.

There are six steps to letting

go. Follow them closely and watch your grudges disappear (and your emotional intelligence improve).

Step 1: Take control

You need to take control of your life and decide that you are ready to let go of the grudge.

This means no more waiting for the other person to apologise or somehow make it right. When you're waiting for someone else to act, you're giving him or her control over you.

Letting go of the grudge is about your own health and well-being. It's essential you do it on your own terms.

Step 2: Make it for you

The process of forgiveness and letting go is for you, not the person you're forgiving.

Forgiving can be hard to do when the person you're forgiving doesn't deserve it.

You're choosing to let go for your own health and happiness, and the other person doesn't need to know that you've forgiven him or her.

You're not letting the person off the hook or inviting him or her to repeat the offence – you're just letting the past be the past.

Step 3: Step into his or her shoes

Take a moment to think about the situation from the other person's

perspective. This will help you understand why he or she acted that way.

Sometimes, you'll discover extraneous circumstances that make the other person's actions easier to take.

Other times, you'll find zero justification for his or her actions, and that's okay.

Either way, you'll improve your perspective and possibly develop some empathy to assist you in letting go.

Step 4: Acknowledge your feelings

You cannot let go of a grudge until you acknowledge how bad the offence made and makes you feel.

If you ignore or deny your feelings, you won't process them, and they will resurface when you least expect it.

The more honest you are with yourself about exactly what you felt and feel, the easier it is to prevent these feelings from having a hold on you.

Step 5: Don't do it alone

This simple step is the most difficult one for many people.

When you've been wronged, it can be embarrassing to reveal to another person exactly what happened and admit how sore you are about it.

The simple act of talking it out with a friend is a great way to acknowledge your feelings (thus

taking away their power). It's also a great way to get some new insight into your situation.

You aren't the only person who has been treated poorly by others, nor are you alone in being bitter or hurt about it.

This happens to everyone, and you'll be surprised how quickly a good friend will admit he or she has experienced the same thing.

Step 6: Verbally forgive

You don't have to say it to the person (there are many instances when doing so is a bad idea), but you must say it out loud.

Literally verbalise your forgiveness, and the fact that you are letting the wrongdoing go.

Just as writing something down makes it easier to remember even if you never revisit what you wrote, verbalising your forgiveness is an action (not just a thought), which makes it "real" to your brain.

Bringing it all together

Grudges can be tough, especially when it's hard to justify the other person's actions or your own inability to let it go.

Since even a small grudge can be detrimental to your health, do yourself a favour and give these six steps a try.



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Bosses. They are human too. And to err is human! But just because the person is your boss, that doesn't mean you cannot correct his/her mistakes. You can, but try a more subtle or diplomatic approach. After all, your boss is still the boss! Check out this original video on our YouTube channel: bit.ly/T10vidcorrectboss

We have heard of the saying that children are like white canvases and parents are responsible for creating a masterpiece. Human mind and souls are terrible things to waste. Leaderonomics offers parenting courses to help you balance work, life and home matters while raising children with the right values. We have Smart Parenting workshop particularly designed for busy parents in their quest to create a happy home and successful kids. This course is a timely intervention that provides a well-balanced formula for parents to manage their work and home front. It also provides newer perspectives to parenting and re-emphasises value-based parenting, an aspect that has been long ignored due to our over-ambitious objectives in bringing up children. For details on this programme and other parenting programme, email info@leaderonomics.com

■ Dr Travis Bradberry is the award-winning co-author of the #1 bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, and the cofounder of *TalentSmart*, the world's leading provider of emotional intelligence tests and training. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries. What did you think of this article? Let us know at editor@leaderonomics.com.

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Self-control may seem like a difficult trait to exercise but it can be second nature for leaders who practise a healthy dose of restraint and discipline. Here are five ways to practise self-control:
bit.ly/LDRpractisefselfcontrol

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

The "grass is greener" syndrome is torturous. It keeps us wondering if we missed out on the next big thing, leading to us wasting our time and productivity. Here are our top 5 reasons why you should stop comparing yourself to others. Check out this infographic only on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/IGstopcomparing

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



Do You Have Self-Control?

The oft neglected but essential trait of a good leader

By PRUDY GOURGUECHON
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BOILED down to its essence, self-control is the ability to think before acting.

Self-control, or discipline, is an essential character trait that every leader must possess.

Nevertheless, self-control rarely shows up on any list of the essential traits that make a good leader (with a notable exception of Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence).

Vision, passion, communication skills, decisiveness, confidence, clarity, and even empathy pop up regularly on popular lists, but not self-control.

The explanation for the neglect of self-control and discipline?

Consideration of leadership qualities tends to look at behaviour and results rather than character or fundamental psychological capacities.

Lacking self-control is detrimental

While the corporate world tends to ignore self-control, professional investors study and value it.

Seasoned investors know they are prone to mistakes in judgment when emotion overrides rational decision-making.

They also know this can and will happen to them. They remain vigilant and search for ways to prevent emotion-driven mistakes, including reacting out of fear or excessive caution or being influenced by greed or envy.

I am a fan of the American television series *Billions*, which in one way can be seen as one long meditation on self-control.

For the show's protagonists, Bobby Axelrod and Chuck Rhoades, self-control is their greatest asset. And losing control leads to their ultimate undoing.

Lack of self-control: Reading the signs

The second place where great attention is given to self-control as a leadership capacity is in the leadership model described in the

United States Army Field Manual on Leader Development.

The Army (which prefers the term discipline when talking about self-control) usefully lays out observable signs that self-control is deficient:

- Difficulty adapting (emotionally or cognitively) to unforeseen problems, bad news, or conflicting information
- Reacting viscerally or angrily when receiving bad news
- Offering the first response that comes to mind
- Emotional outbursts

Conversely, a leader who shows strength in the dimension of self-control displays composure and confidence, staying task-focused in a stressful situation.

A lesson from General Grant

Ron Chernow's biography, *Grant*, is a fascinating study of one exceptional man's life-long struggle with self-control.

In early adulthood, Grant's lack of discipline – most notably binge-drinking, but also an inability to apply himself in work situations that didn't interest him – led him to the edge of self-destruction on many occasions.

However, as a successful general in his early 40s, while in the throes of battle with tens of thousands of lives and the fate of the nation at stake, he displayed exceptional calm, confidence, and utter composure that astonished observers.

The inner chaos of decision-making

It's a false dichotomy to think of humans as being either emotional or rational. In fact, we're both and more at all times.

Think about it as a regulatory system. Fears, desires, impulses, needs, wishes, convictions and values are constantly pushing upward within us.

These are necessary to create a sense of meaning and fuel motivation and action. After all, why do anything if we don't feel anything about it?

Meanwhile, a host of other emotions crop up in reaction to our decisions and activities – anxiety about failure, pride, longing for

affirmation, impatience and many others – bombarding us further as we try to make a decision or take an action.

This noise from the parts of our brain driving emotion has pressure behind it, and will lead to impulsive action if not regulated.

A bunch of higher mental functions that psychologists call "executive functions" – self-control being a fundamental one – are responsible for preventing chaos in the face of this pressure.

These allow us to wait to make a decision rather than acting on our first impulse.

To see the potential consequences of actions.

To bargain with ourselves, offering greater rewards if gratification of wishes is delayed.

Look for ways to release tension and give your emotions free rein – exercise, doing something creative and absorbing, or even something repetitive and mindless.

Self-control is a limited resource

Interesting research by a team of social psychologists led by Roy F Baumeister suggests that self-control is a limited resource.

If we spend too much of it in one place, we won't have any reserves left to use in another area.

Diminished self-control does not always show itself dramatically in an angry outburst or major meltdown. Subtle upticks in a sense of vulnerability or irritability can also be signs that this resource is depleted.

Like any basic human trait or capacity, some of us innately have a harder time controlling ourselves than others do.

People also vary in how much time and effort it takes to regain control once it is lost. It's worth knowing your

own vulnerability to loss of self-control and what you need to do to restore it when it slips.

This is not to say that you can't express emotions at work – but you shouldn't put raw emotion into action.

It's fine to say "I am angry about..."

But once you raise your voice, or repeat yourself endlessly, talk over someone or swear, you're using language as an action, not for communication.

What diminishes self-control?

It's anything that throws off ongoing regulation of your mind and body. Alcohol and other substances are obvious culprits.

One of alcohol's first effects is to disinhibit the brain, meaning that impulses strengthen and normal brakes on them weaken.

Insufficient sleep, too long hours and too few breaks from work can deplete self-control. Low blood sugar can affect some people quite dramatically.

Mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder can lead to intermittent difficulties with self-control.

Executive function disorders like ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) can also cause challenges.

The Army manual emphasises a key contributor to loss of self-control – keeping emotions overly contained and not finding opportunities for appropriate release.

Running low on self-control?

Check in with your physical self – are you getting enough sleep? Do you take breaks from working? Are you skipping meals? Do you ever go outside during daylight? Are you drinking enough water?

If you find yourself losing it, drink a bottle of water, eat a protein/complex carb snack, get outside.

Look for ways to release tension and give your emotions free rein – exercise, doing something creative and absorbing, or even something repetitive and mindless.

Spend some time thinking about why your emotions are getting the best of you.

Do you need to tackle a problem in your life that is lowering the threshold where emotions take over?

Consider the implications of the theory that self-control is a limited resource.

How can you make sure you don't use it up in one part of your day or segment of your life and have nothing left in reserve?

The art of delaying

Develop a habit of waiting.

Never send an email in anger. Don't confront a colleague or tackle a loaded issue if you're not feeling settled.

Make sure you take your time when making decisions and ask yourself if you've gathered all possible sources of information.

Don't take on a challenge you find very difficult if you're struggling with an illness, depression or preoccupying problem.

It's not that you shouldn't work – just do things that are routine rather than demanding.

Repeated loss of self-control that manifests itself as aggressive behaviour or demeaning language has no place in the workplace, whether it's the chief executive officer, a manager or any employee.

Any one of us can slip once. But a pattern of behaviour that betrays a lack of self-control should always be seen as a serious problem with significant personal and business consequences.

■ Prudy is the founder of *Invantage Advising*. She has 35 years of experience as a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst and advises leaders in business and finance on the underlying psychology of critical decisions. She can be found on Twitter @ [invantageadv](https://twitter.com/invantageadv). Feel free to share your tips for self-control with us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

Fear Of Conflict?

Here's what you can do to manage it in your team

By JEFF BOSS
editor@leaderonomics.com

WHEN you shake a carbonated beverage and then open it, pressure gets released.

It'll be ugly and messy but eventually that messiness will be cleaned up and you can enjoy what you have – a nice tasty beverage.

Teams work the same way. Tensions build over time because that's the nature of relationships.

Conversations in teams often create emotional tolls – a “deposit” that positively resonates with people and a “withdrawal” that conflicts with the values and beliefs of others, therefore creating conflict.

Neither one is bad. In fact, you need both deposits and withdrawals to keep the team's bank account (i.e. performance) healthy and flowing.

Conflict is healthy. It's just not comfortable.

However, not everybody sees conflict as an opportunity, yet that's exactly what it is.

When there's misunderstanding, there's conflict. When competing interests collide, there's conflict.

When there's a lack of information, there's conflict. And most importantly, when there's low trust, there's conflict because people don't trust each other's intentions.

The beauty of conflict is that it serves as a compass to point you in the right direction. When something feels uncomfortable, it's probably “right”.

To better manage conflict in your team, try these three strategies.

1. Name it

When somebody brings up a touchy subject or pinpoints a problem area, one of two things typically happen:

- The room fills with an uncomfortable silence.
- The floodgates of conversation open.

Funny how it's either on one side of the spectrum or the other.

If it's silence that fills the room, keep in mind that it's only silence for the moment because once you get into the hallway, that's when the floodgates of private conversation open up.

Either way, communicating a concern leads to more communication and the last I checked, more communication isn't a bad thing.

You can either **over-communicate** or you can **under-deliver**.

One strategy that I've used with clients to help them eliminate the fear of team conflict is to name the fear, its associated emotion and their bodily reaction.

Here's an example: “I'm afraid of talking to my boss (naming the fear) and I feel uneasy (naming the emotion) – my palms sweat and my breathing increases (naming the bodily reaction).”

The reason I ask them to listen to their bodies is because it serves as another trigger to heighten self-awareness.

With a process, you root out the human element by adhering to agreed-upon steps to explore rather than opining on individual objections.

The more self-aware you are about the events that activate your fear state, the better you can:

- manage those situations.
- manage yourself.

Another reason why I ask them to verbalise their fear is because hearing themselves say it aloud makes a once “rational” fear sound irrational.

They realise that, “Hmmm, this wasn't really worth fearing after all.”

They learn to quell their own fear.

2. Identify the priority

Many people dislike addressing conflict because they fear social judgment. They fear what others will think of them or if they'll still be “liked”.

When you place yourself ahead of the company or the team's mission, you actually invite more conflict.

Let's say, for example, there are two fictitious characters in a team, Joe and Bob.

Joe is a problem child. He constantly shows up late and doesn't pull his weight.

Bob is the project team's leader, except he's new to the team and new to leading a team and worries too much about what others think of him as a new leader, so he avoids confronting Joe.

By placing himself before the needs of the company and the needs of the team, Bob allows that conflict to build.

He (unintentionally) contributes to more conflict because he put his own needs (to avoid conflict) first and lets the conflict fester.

Conflict avoidance only creates more conflict.

3. Have a process

Another way to tackle the fear of conflict is to have a process.

With a process, you root out the human element by adhering to agreed-upon steps to explore rather than opining on individual objections.

For example, let's say your team has a delicate issue to address but nobody brings it up because it's a big fat pink elephant in the room and nobody wants to be “that guy” or “that girl” (again, fear of social judgment).

Instead of hoping the issue will resolve itself, you can use a process to:

1. Review what the team is doing right.
2. Identify where the team could improve.
3. Explore the team's blind spots.

An after action review (AAR) is a great example.

AARs follow a process that identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) that would otherwise remain unnoticed by asking three questions:

- What did we intend to happen?
- What actually happened?
- What caused the difference?

The very process of cycling through these questions removes the “individual factor” which is the sense that somebody only raises their hand or addresses an issue when they have an agenda.

With an AAR, you remove that fear because addressing concerns is just part of the process.

In conclusion

Let fear be a compass.

Whatever you're fearful of, that's the path you want to take because addressing it is the only way to quell that fear.



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What compounds our ability to listen effectively is that we speak at the rate of 150–200 words a minute but we can listen much faster than that – at the rate of 400–600 words a minute. That means it takes real discipline to listen intently. Check out this article on listening effectively at: bit.ly/LDRlisten

Are you afraid of conflict? Fear of conflict can turn leaders, managers and employees into “psychological hostages” who are paralysed and unable to challenge others. George Kohlrieser shares six skills leaders need for managing conflict at: bit.ly/GKmanagingconflict

■ Jeff 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 did you think of this article? Let us know at editor@leaderonomics.com

Did You Get The Message?

Ask them to repeat what you said to avoid miscommunication

By KARIN HURT
editor@leaderonomics.com

As a leader, how do you foster better communication in your team?

How do you ensure they're picking up what you're putting down?

How do you help them get it?

It had been a long night... and morning... and afternoon at the airport.

The kind where cancellations and delays compound into a complex verb of frustration that includes four letters.

The kind where you start to notice the characters around you and make up their stories.

I had pegged the guy next to me for a Baptist preacher.

Among other signs, it was how he earnestly offered to watch my things

as I went to the bathroom: “Ma'am I've been watching ladies' purses for decades. I watch my wife's purse. I watch my girl's purses. I watch my wife's friend's friends' purses. So whatever you need. I'm your purse-watching man.”

And I trusted him.

He was on the phone when I came back from the bathroom.

He silently nodded and grinned toward my big red purse, which also serves as a computer bag, dongle carrier, journal holder, with nooks and crannies for light snacks and kombucha.

Nope, definitely not a Baptist preacher – he's a bankruptcy lawyer.

Now I'm intrigued and can't help but overhear his conversation occurring in such a beautiful Southern drawl it would have been fun to hear, even if I couldn't understand the words.

“Now my wife says I hear okay, but I don't listen too good. Let me repeat what I'm hearing you say you want to do.”

Silence as the caller responds. Then...

“You see sir, my wife is right. That is just not one of the options. Let me be clear. You can't do that. How about this? Let me share with you your three options again.”

He gives three options. Then...

“You sleep on it. Call your Momma or talk to your wife... and then we'll talk again tomorrow.”

Check for understanding

I'm beside myself. This is the most remarkable *Winning Well* check for understanding I've ever heard. Full-on confident humility.

“Sir, thank you so much for watching my bag, and indeed you are a remarkable purse-watcher. And I couldn't help but to overhear... What you did there was brilliant.”

“You see I wrote this book... and my co-author (now fiancé), but that's another story) and I had this remarkable disagreement about whether the ‘check for understanding’ should be included.

“I thought it was too simple.

“He swore it was a vital concept. As we've been doing workshops, guess

what's one of the top 10 takeaways?

“The funny part is, the higher the managers are in the organisation, the more they love it.

“It's so easy.

“Do a simple check to understand... are they picking up what you're putting down?”

“Instead of ‘Any questions?’ or ‘Are you with me?’

“You ask... ‘Okay, so I just want to check to ensure we're all on the same page...’ and then get them to repeat. ‘What are we going to do first? And then? By when?’”

Conclusion

His pearl of wisdom: “Karin, I've been doing this for years. When people are going through bankruptcy or periods of change and uncertainty they hear what they want to – not necessarily what's true. I give them a way to hear it again.”

There's real power in hearing what your team hears. That's a great start for fostering better communication.

■ Karin Hurt is a keynote speaker, leadership consultant, and MBA professor. She has decades of experience in sales, customer service, and HR which she uses to help clients turn around results through deeper engagement. She knows the stillness of a yogi, the reflection of a marathoner, and the joy of being a mom raising emerging leaders. To engage with Karin, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.



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In leadership, few things are more destructive to an organisation than low morale among employees, and research by Gallup shows that between 70–80% of people consider themselves to be disengaged at work. Go to this link here: bit.ly/RTyourwhy

Everyone is in a crazy, busy mode almost all the time but how does one go through the day with a sense of "anchoring" and not be "all-over-the-place"? Life has got to be more than just getting things done, right? Essentially, being busy is not a sign of productivity. Listen to this podcast here on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/productiveleadership

While we might start off in life with curious minds and creative imaginations, the rigidity of conventional education often stifles our natural tendency to explore and experiment as we grow older. Here's why we, especially the adults, should play more. Read it here on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/RTplaymore

■ Dr Loo is group HR manager at an international specialist medical centre. He has great passion on employee engagement, talent spotlight, HR intervention programme and people development subject matters. To engage with us on HR matters, please email us at info@leaderonomics.com. This article first appeared on Leaderonomics.com.

The Heart Of HR Matters

The marriage between strategic human resource management and business performance



By DR LOO LEAP HAN
editor@leaderonomics.com

A very common scenario most managers encounter day in, day out is this: "Another resignation? What's going on? I need people to run this organisation. Anything wrong with our HR (human resources)? Please get the HR manager to look into it immediately. I need to show figures to our shareholders. Time is money."

Every problem is a HR problem. And I believe all HR managers are trying their very best to overcome and meet the business leader's expectations. I am no exception to it.

One of my key HR performance target is to design a strategic HR management (HRM) system that strikes a balance between the organisation, employer and employee, which will then enhance business performance.

It's a huge expectation, and sometimes I wonder if it's achievable.

Few questions came to my mind. How it is structured? What do we include in designing HR processes/practices? How can HR services be delivered to meet the leader's expectations?

HR reality check

Looking into the different social demographics and practical realities, I find there is no distinct style of HRM practice that can be clearly identified as a one-stop "HRM solution" to people management and business success.

It is increasingly acknowledged that human capital is a valuable resource for business success and a source of competitive advantage.

Firms employing strategic HRM practices that are internally consistent, strategically aligned and compatible with business strategies are believed to result in superior performance.

Thus, to evaluate the effects of strategic HRM practices on business performance, it is vital to capture these interactive effects by treating an organisation's strategic HRM practices as a holistic system.

By doing so, the role of strategic HRM in maximising its performance will become increasingly important, challenging and cost effective to most organisations.

However, the designing of effective strategic HRM practices is a complicated task. There is little consensus among HR practitioners as to what constitutes "best practice" in such a system.

In reality, there is no single agreed, or fixed list of strategic HRM practices or systems that are used to define or measure HRM effectiveness.

Besides meeting organisational goals, the main role of strategic HRM is also to serve employees, their team, their department, and their organisation to perform better.

Strategies to counter challenges

Globalisation, competition and mobilisation of talents have given great challenges to most HR practitioners in determining the most effective combination set of strategic HRM practices that will lead to greater business performance.

The ideal composition of strategic HRM practices must meet the following criteria to support business performance and achieve competitive advantage:

These practices must complement each other.

These practices must be cost effective, and resources must be available in the organisation.

The design of strategic HRM

system must be aligned with the organisational mission, vision and culture.

The business leaders have considerably emphasise on the importance of integrating strategic HRM practices and business strategy for cost reduction, innovation, and quality enhancement that lead to business sustainability and success.

It is likely that senior management team recognises the business leaders' HR philosophy and the importance of strategic HRM practices.

However, many ignore the implementation of these practices due to constraint of resources and talent to execute them.

While acknowledging that these practices serve as a value-creating function on business performance, there are unresolved issues on how we treat strategic HRM-performance link and how the two are paired.

The big question is how HR practitioner counteract this dilemma?

Can the 'marriage' between strategic HRM and performance be realised? Will the marriage last? This is a quest to all HR practitioners to solve this mystery.

In my personal view, HR practitioners need to understand the role of strategic HRM practices in the organisation and its link with business performance.

By doing so, HR practitioners can design strategic intervention that will bring closer collaboration and better HR knowledge sharing among people in the organisation.

Besides meeting organisational goals, the main role of strategic HRM is also to serve employees, their team, their department, and their organisation to perform better.

That means HR practitioners must ensure there is a direct connection between the strategic HRM policies, practices and services in meeting business needs.

HR department should champion superior performance philosophy. Instead of helping and serving employees, HR should be developing, supporting, empowering, engaging, encouraging, and enabling employees.

By doing so, HR department will earn a "seat" at the table and be a strategic partner to business planning and growth.

HR department must also drive HR initiatives that are aligned with other general strategies in the organisation that is feasible in attaining the business goals.

What now?

It is clearly time for a quantum leap in the HR field, and HR practitioners can support these transitions by showing strong HR leadership, HR future-oriented thinking, flexibility and creativity of strategic HRM practices, and delivering HR value in tomorrow's organisations.

Is the HR profession moving fast enough to acquire such roles? Yes.

Business leaders recognise the "people are important and business needs people" notion.

Therefore, business leaders give much attention to HRM knowing that HR department represents the discovery of people and is an integral part of the organisation value chain.

Parting thoughts

I can very much conclude that a proper employment of strategic HRM practices will be useful to improve business performance.

It is thus crucial for the HR manager to remain committed to the development of effective strategic HRM systems by focusing on the implementation of configuration of these practices within the firm's resources.

Senior management team also needs to assume responsibility of the increasing array of available practices that are essential to make better HR business decisions.

To achieve the desired blend of a happy marriage between strategic HRM and business performance, the relationship has to be sincere, unique, personal, and romantic for the 'couple' to achieve everlasting love.



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A theft incident in Singapore over the Chinese New Year holiday has led Roshan Thiran to think about the "grass is greener" syndrome. For all you know, the grass may be greener on your side when it comes to the organisation you are in. Read this article for an interesting perspective: bit.ly/RTgreenergrass

■ Peter Economy has written more than 80 books on a variety of business and leadership topics. Do you see these signs in yourself? Share your thoughts with us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

Too Driven In Your Work?

Don't put your physical and mental health at risk



By PETER ECONOMY
editor@leaderonomics.com

PEOPLE who consistently go above and beyond when they're on the job are usually the ones who are extraordinarily motivated.

They're engaged in their work, and they get tremendous satisfaction from contributing to the success of their business, its positive impact on the customers who buy their products, and the communities in which they work.

But while there is much to be said for going above and beyond to provide your co-workers and

customers with your very best, if we don't take time to find a balance in our lives – to rest and recharge our batteries from time to time – then the outcomes to us and to those around us can turn quite negative.

In fact, if we are too driven, this can actually become an obstacle that stands in the way of our success.

So, how can you tell if you are being too driven in your work?

Here are three signs that your extreme motivation may actually be putting your personal health and well-being – both physical and mental – at risk:

1. You have very little time to rest and relax

Many of us think we can fit everything into our busy work and personal life – with room for more.

As a result, we may bite off more than we can chew.

If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed more often than usual, it may be that your drive for success is actually leading you toward a life of long-term anxiety.

Not only that, when you put your work and goals before all else in your life, you may put off the restorative vacation or much-needed time away from the office that enables you to rest and recharge.

Remember: taking time off from work is not a sign of weakness – it can actually help you succeed in the long run.

2. You're constantly comparing yourself to others

When we have mentors and successful co-workers and bosses we look up to, it is tempting to want to copy everything they do in order to reach their level of accomplishment.

You may even consistently keep your eye on what your peers are

doing, just to make sure you're staying a step or two ahead of them.

However, focusing on others and not on yourself can damage your own self-esteem and happiness.

Always remember to concentrate on doing your own personal best, lest you fall victim to jealousy or envy.

3. You find yourself compromising your values

What are you willing to do to get to the top?

If you find yourself answering, "Anything and everything", then you may need to take a step back and reassess where you're at in your career and in your life.

Pause and get clear on what your goals are, and what you are and are not willing to do. Cross off those things you are not willing to do from your list.

Stating these things to yourself out loud can prevent any unnecessary and corrupt moral compromises.

Ambition, willpower, and drive are not always bad things to have, but always be cautious and make sure they are not doing you more harm than good.

QUOTES

When you forgive, you in no way change the past – but you sure do change the future.

Bernard Meltzer (1916-1998), US radio host



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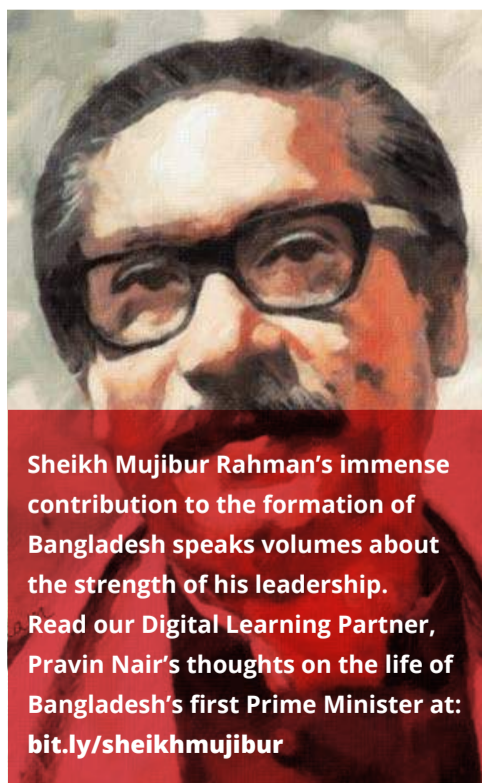
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Who doesn't enjoy playing a game or two? It's even better when you can learn as you play! This week, Leaderonomer Jayson Chik discusses learning simulations and its potential as an optimal learning design for adult learners. Listen to the podcast here: bit.ly/RYGsimulations



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All of us typically get frustrated or end up in tough situations from time to time. We naturally look for answers and solutions but in doing so, we unwittingly create blocks instead of openings. In fact, we end up recycling the same over-used, unhelpful answers. To overcome this, we need to ask new questions. Results are driven by questions. Check out this article here on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/Ldrquestion

■ *Evette Cordy is an innovation expert, registered psychologist, chief investigator and co-founder at Agents of Spring. She is also author of the book Cultivating Curiosity: How to unearth your most valuable problem to inspire growth. Do you know if you are solving the right issues in your organisations? If you are up for it, share with us your organisational challenges at editor@leaderonomics.com.*

'What's Your Problem?'

Take time to dig deep and figure out what's the real, valuable 'customer' issue for optimal impact.



By **EVETTE CORDY**
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BUSINESSES are under incredible pressure from constant deadlines and the need to deliver short-term results.

Business leaders want immediate outcomes, which creates a culture of 'doing'.

So, when a problem arises, we quickly jump to solution finding, without isolating what the real problem is.

If we don't take the time to dig deep, observe and figure out what's really going on, then we'll most likely waste time, money and resources on a solution with minimal impact.

In a recent innovation project, a cross-functional team had been given a challenge by their general manager of the business, which was to deliver a significant innovation to market within 12 months.

The team was immediately caught

up in the solution they needed to create.

They became focused on the outcome rather than spending time identifying the most valuable problem to solve – those that represent the biggest growth drivers.

Instead of asking each team member to first gather facts about the challenge and pinpoint the most valuable problem to solve, they were instructed to go out and find ideas.

This idea-led approach is like gathering darts without first working whether darts is the game you're going to play.

Just like this business, you may be investing resources, effort and money coming up with innovative ideas for 'business problems' you don't really have.

Look before you leap

The answer is to first 'problem-find', not 'problem-solve'.

The real problem is often that leaders are not spending enough time understanding what their 'customer problem' is.

Motivation to find and solve customers' biggest problems (those they often don't even realise they have) is at the heart of value-creation and innovation.

You need to flip your thinking, your approach to problems, to step into the shoes of your customers.

For example, Uber found some glaringly obvious customer problems to solve in the taxi industry – customers never knew how long a taxi would take to show up, and many hated wasting time paying with cash or credit card at the end of the ride.

You need to not only be able to articulate your own business problems, such as falling revenues or portfolio declines, but also your biggest customer problems.

The best commercial opportunities

often arise at the intersection of a business problem and a customer problem.

Getting curious about finding these inter-related problems is the key to growth and innovation.

Get curious

Curiosity arises when there is a gap between what someone knows, or thinks they know, and what they want to know.

That is, when you are curious you are intrinsically motivated to seek out information.

Curiosity can be cultivated. It is the fuel for inquiry, learning and discovery – which is why it's critical for organisational growth and innovation.

When business leaders are curious, they consider how customer needs could change over the coming few years.

They assess how all of the current disruptions in the market could feed into one another. They also think about the biggest problems or pressures their organisation is likely to face over the next few years.

Albert Einstein was once asked, "If you have one hour to save the world, how would you spend that hour?"

He replied, "I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and then five minutes solving it."

Every organisation is busy, but ask yourself are you busy solving the **right** problems, the **most valuable** ones?



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