



Leaderonomics

The Science of Building Leaders



Forged in Fire

Emerging from
hardships stronger
than before

Editor's Note

"Never be afraid to fall apart because it is an opportunity to rebuild yourself the way you wish you had been all along."
– Rae Smith

WE all experience it at some point in our lives – life-changing events that throw our world into chaos, making us feel like we will never be the same again. That may be true, but it can be in a good way.

These crucible moments can pave the way for the transformation of our self identity and purpose if we choose to view them as opportunities to grow instead of obstacles that we cannot overcome.

Crucible moments are typically negative events, but they can be positive as well, for example, experiencing a situation that leads to an eye-opening realisation. While the actual experience may differ greatly among individuals, most would identify such a moment as a key turning point in their lives.

Organisations and even nations are not exempt from going through crucible moments. In this issue, Carolyne Njogu illustrates how these moments have the power to transform individuals and entire nations for generations to come, while Roshan Thiran writes about lessons learnt from a

critical period in Roman history.

In his appearance on *The Leaderonomics Show*, Scott Deming reveals that his granddaughter's death is what compelled him to focus his energy on what truly matters, which then led him to write his second book, *Powered by Purpose*.

The events themselves are secondary to the lessons they teach us – how do we rise from a period of intense adversity and what do we learn about ourselves? What impact does this have on our beliefs, values and future decisions?

We invite you to spend some time in self-reflection and if you would like to share your story with us, write to editor@leaderonomics.com – we would love to hear from you.

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By **ROSHAN THIRAN**
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Leadership Lessons from the Roman Empire

WHILE few people are experts on the Roman Empire, many of us have an awareness of its historical importance in shaping the world as we know it today. From culture to religion, technology to language, the Roman legacy still thrives to this day and there are many lessons to be learnt from them.

The Roman Empire became one of the biggest in the ancient world, spanning to 20 per cent of the world's population, all ruled within the boundaries of one city. At the height of its power in AD117, the Empire covered a colossal five million square kilometres.

The politics of the Empire was such that leaders would rise and fall on the strength of their decisions, connections and character. From the first emperor, Augustus Caesar, to the Empire's last, Romulus Augustulus, it can be difficult to visualise how the leadership demands of the ancient world could resonate with us today.

Still, there are many lessons today's leaders can take away from a world that seems so far removed from our own, and yet reflects much of our desires, goals and objectives today. The often bloody and brutal Empire called on leaders to be brave in their vision, stand firm in their values, and be present to the challenges of the day.

Thankfully, modern-day leadership is much more civil and collaborative. Nevertheless, there are different challenges we face today that demand the same level of focus, foresight, and strategic thinking that was required of the ancient leaders.

Reading from time to time about Roman history, I often think of the great triumphs and advances made by the Empire. I also think of its great generals and emperors who led with robust confidence and self-belief, and of each Roman who did their part in creating an enriched society that stands as a powerful example of what can be achieved by a well-organised collective.

But I also consider the reasons behind the Empire's downfall. The conceited leadership, the vast expansions, the greed, deceit and betrayals that ultimately led to the Empire's end have as much to teach us about the perils of leadership that can arise when we aren't paying attention.

No matter how grand a leader or an organisation might be, success – to paraphrase Winston Churchill – is never a final result.

In leadership, we need to have the courage to develop a bold vision, but we also require the humility to recognise that tomorrow doesn't care about yesterday's successes.

That said, there are several lessons we can take from the ancient world of the Roman Empire. Here are just some of those which stood out for me:

1 Know that good fortune doesn't last forever

In Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, he writes about his mortality and the certainty of death; and, in Augustine's works, we read his grief-stricken account of his mother's death. Great leaders use profound realisations of impermanence to consider how to best prepare for the future.

Just as Nokia and Kodak ruled their respective empires before their demise, in the midst of success, leaders need to ask themselves, "What can be done next? How can I be innovative and continue to evolve within my industry?"

Never rest on the satisfaction of brief successes – always look for ways to keep the momentum moving forward. Don't make the mistake made by the Roman Empire – nothing lasts forever and you have to be on your toes to keep being ahead of the game. Look at General Electric (GE). They too fell.

The often bloody and brutal Empire called on leaders to be brave in their vision, stand firm in their values, and be present to the challenges of the day.

2 Be bold in your leadership... but keep your feet on the ground

In the examples of Julius Caesar and Caligula, we can see just how easy it is for power to go to a leader's head, making them believe that they have all the answers and their way is unquestionable. Many emperors of the Roman Empire took for granted their power and its continuous nature.

While it's true that leaders need to be bold and take decisions where others fail to see the bigger picture, they also need to stay grounded enough by seeking out and listening to the thoughts of those around them. Leaders need their people – to dismiss their views and contributions is an easy trap to fall into, and it can be a recipe for disaster for an organisation's future.

3 Learn from your competitors

The Romans were an ingenious people, but much of their advances

including technology and engineering was helped by taking in the Celts and the Gauls' approach to developing their own cultures. They would then quickly deploy what they had learnt to enhance their own culture and society, enabling success for the Roman Empire and establishing their leadership.

Learning from their enemies was an integral part of the Romans' development – they were also proactive in quickly acting upon whatever knowledge they gained. In fact, many of the best civilisations learnt from the civilisations of the past.

The study of history and the process of ensuring documents and history is continuously collected was a key reason for their success. Many organisations do not bother to build on their history and learn from others.

4 Invest in building a strong culture

This point is well-worn in leadership circles, but many of today's leaders have yet to learn how to put this valuable idea into practice. The Romans knew the importance of building a culture where everyone knew their role and felt a strong sense of belonging.

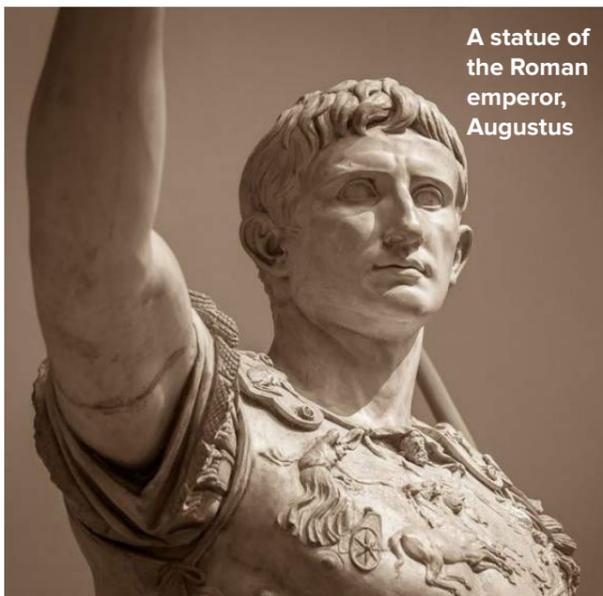
The collective motto of the Roman Empire was *Senātus Populusque Rōmānus* – "For the Senate and the People of Rome". Having a shared identity and a common purpose – which all were clear on – meant that the Romans truly gave themselves to the cause. The culture wasn't simply an idea – it was a lived lifestyle that informed every success of the Empire.

Roshan is the founder and CEO of the Leaderonomics Group. He believes that everyone can be a leader and make a dent in the universe, in their own special ways. Connect with Roshan on Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter for more insights into business, personal development and leadership.

CRITICAL SUCCESS STORIES Identifying and reflecting on success stories can lead to lessons learnt for the future. Take some time to do so. This is part of **Leaderonomics' Science of Building Leaders**, a framework which indicates important elements that need to be developed at each stage of one's life, in order to empower the individual to become an effective leader. Head to bit.ly/SOBLP1 to find out more.



The Colosseum, also known as the Flavian Amphitheatre, in Rome, Italy.



A statue of the Roman emperor, Augustus

How to Use LinkedIn Effectively

By **HANIE RAZAIF-BOHLENDER**
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BASED on my observations, LinkedIn is by far, the best social media platform to use to find a job, look for business, talk to a CEO, and find funding for start-ups. It's a fantastic social tool to talk to almost anyone from almost anywhere.

Look at these mind-blowing statistics:

- LinkedIn had 575 million members as of 2018 – Malaysia alone accounted for more than four million LinkedIn users
- Forty million LinkedIn users are decision-makers. This comes straight from LinkedIn's marketing solutions blog
- More than 30 million companies are represented on LinkedIn
- LinkedIn Jobs lists more than 20 million open jobs

Before you ask, "Why isn't LinkedIn working for me as a job hunter?" here are five tips that will immediately boost the effectiveness of your career search on LinkedIn:

1 Looks matter

Make sure your profile picture does not look as if you just woke up. Worse still is having no profile picture. While it may be tempting to show off your dog, cat, or significant other, people want to know what **you** look like; there shouldn't be any confusion with Tom the Dog. A head and shoulders shot wearing business attire and a warm, genuine smile works best.

2 Just like with newspapers, headlines get attention

Have you ever flipped through the newspaper and found nothing interesting to read? Then you flipped through the pages again and discovered several good stories once you read beyond the boring, unclear headlines.

Your LinkedIn headline is like a newspaper headline: you want the people who matter to be enticed to read your story. So, your headline should be concise, like what readers see in the news.

Sometimes, however, you may see funky headlines such as 'Chief Dreamer', 'The Brilliant Marketeer Who Dances', and the like on the profiles of other members, and you want to do the same. My advice: don't do it. Not until you land a job, at least.

The reason is this: recruiters and hiring managers use keyword searches to look for specific candidates. They are not looking for a 'dreamer' or 'dancer' unless they truly **are** looking for one.

3 Use your career history to tell your career story

Does your career history do a good job of telling your career journey? Be sure to add some job descriptions and success stories in this section of your



profile. Some prefer to keep the name of their past and current companies hidden. This is fine – if you are fine knowing that this is another main reason hiring managers are not looking at your profile.

Don't forget to include a compelling career summary that is worth reading, and check the grammar and spelling before you post. If English is not your strong point, get help from a professional writer, proofreader, or editor.

4 One must give in order to receive

On LinkedIn, establishing your credibility is key to developing a network of professional contacts. You need to allow others to see you and your world by sharing information on your experiences, activities, ideas, and perspectives.

If you share something interesting from another site, be sure to add your thoughts or opinions on it. The idea is to be on your network's usefulness and 'go to' radar by providing your contacts with something of value.

5 Check and optimise your profile settings

Many of those who attend my *Personal Branding with LinkedIn* workshops have never ventured beyond the default settings for their LinkedIn profiles. Optimising your settings means ensuring that enough information of value is available on your profile to entice recruiters and hiring managers to contact you. I call this 'The Teaser'.

LinkedIn provides a variety of settings that allow you to control virtually every aspect of what will be displayed on your profile, as well as how it will be displayed. Experiment with the settings to project the best possible image of yourself.

Here's to your career success!



Hanie is a career doctor, passionate educationist, speaker and co-founder of a management consulting firm, Dragonfire Corporate Solutions and Dragonfire Academy, a lifelong learning centre. Get in touch with her at editor@leaderonomics.com.

Gain a better understanding of yourself

Find out how you can assess your strengths and weaknesses at bit.ly/assesstrait



Building Your Personal Brand

4 questions to ask yourself in the process

By **GEOGYIANA SHAHIRAH**
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“Hey, aren’t you that writer who’s always with the beanie?”
Yikes! How did you know that?
“That beanie gave you away.”

I wasn’t expecting that, but hey, that is personal branding for you. So how should you build a strong brand that sets you apart?

Let me share with you my little secret: get yourself a mentor – or in my case, mentors. We all need to start somewhere and let’s be honest here, at times we can be so unsure of how to go about the hurdles thrown at us. So, by all means, do not be afraid to look up to someone to guide you through.

This someone has ‘been there, done that’ and he or she is the one who can offer you the best advice to shape yourself and realise your full potential. From them, you will not only get experiences, but also change as a person; it is that unique combination of your skills, experience, and personality that you want others to see in you.

Imagine this: your very own personal brand in no time, who doesn’t want that?

For many years, I never even thought that personal branding was an important aspect of my life. Truthfully, if you talked about personal branding, the first thing that popped into my mind was how I would dress. Well, at that point of life, that was my perception of it.

But now as I have been exposed to ‘life and reality’, these invaluable experiences led me to who I have become today, and the trick is to ask yourself these questions:

1 Who am I?

It’s never an easy answer but let’s be frank. If your name is a common one, people would hardly take notice of you unless something sets you apart from others. Start slow, get to know yourself – and I mean it. You probably think you’re the expert on yourself but the hard truth is, someone else is.

So, don’t be afraid to ask them for advice on how

you can quickly get to know and improve yourself. Quality feedback is rare but hey, having it from someone who wants the best for you is definitely a win. Get this right and you can start building your own authority.

2 What do I want to be remembered as?

Now, this is where things get a little hazy. It’s to find that niche that screams ‘you’ and what you personally want to bring to the table; it’s about what will help others recognise and differentiate you.

Honestly speaking, I was lost in this department because I wanted to be a lot of things but in the end, I failed each and every one. It’s not pretty but that’s where my mentor came in and helped me lay a foundation to start.

Keep in mind that your mentor is your friend and will always be there to help shape and inspire you.

If you think your parents are the only staunch supporters of your success, maybe it’s time for you to change that mindset. Your mentor, too, has your best interest at heart. Trust me.

3 Why should I stay consistent and authentic?

Easy peasy. Your lack of consistency in the brand can eventually impact you in a negative way. It may not be noticeable at first, but slowly, it can lead to confusion in others on your brand identity – and you do not want your hard work to get thrown out of the window, do you?

Now, the question is this: what role does a mentor play here?

Well, let’s just say if you decide to derail from your initial objective, they are the ones who become your Waze and bug you to stay on course.

So, let’s just look the part and stay consistent because authenticity is key to a great personal brand – don’t follow the crowd, let the crowd follow you. Be that trendsetter, you get me?

4 Where can I showcase my brand?

Let’s try LinkedIn for starters, shall we? Though at the moment, I’m guessing some of you are already asking this: why LinkedIn? Why not Facebook or Instagram or even Twitter?

You have to admit – LinkedIn is where the professionals hang out and this is their playground. On this platform, your professional network and followers are always keen to get to know you and some even insist on learning from you! How cool is that?

Oh, and did I mention that your mentor can introduce and recommend you too? I remember when my mentors introduced me to some connections via LinkedIn: the notifications just wouldn’t stop coming in and it still does. So, for now, let’s stick with LinkedIn as your playground and be on top of your game, aye?

In closing

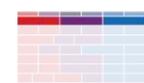
After all these questions, do remember that personal branding takes a little bit of patience and passion. You have to invest your time to slowly break through this ever-crowded industry.

Don’t think twice about having a mentor – make it happen. They are your light when you are lost as they can help you avoid the same mistakes plaguing the people before you. But ultimately, becoming a recognised authority in your niche is definitely not far-fetched... well, as long as you work for it of course.

Be unique. Be different. Be you. Cheers!



Geogyiana Shahirah is the Marketing In Asia editor for Malaysia. As a scribbler, she helps brands and individuals to create great content and solidify ideas as well as thoughts into meaningful stories. Get in touch with her at editor@leaderonomics.com.



SECURE BASE Having someone you can rely on and turn to when in doubt or trouble makes you a more secure individual and confident to try different things. This can be a trusted friend, colleague, manager, peer, or someone in your family. Equally, you may also be a secure base for others around you. This is part of Leaderonomics’ Science of Building Leaders, a framework which indicates important elements that need to be developed at each stage of one’s life, in order to empower the individual to become an effective leader. Head to bit.ly/SOBLPt1 to find out more.

By **MICHELLE GIBBINGS**
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In a world that's in a constant state of busyness, being able to slow down and find time for self-care can be very hard. Leaders worry that if they slow down they will miss something, or simply not have enough time in the day to get everything done that demands their attention. Taking the foot off the accelerator doesn't feel like an option.

Body keeps score

However, there's a downside to this approach. When you are constantly 'on' and rushing, you can easily miss what is happening around you. Your brain gets so focused on the task at hand you ignore other ideas or input that really should be factored in. You become blinkered to alternative perspectives as your attention is on getting the task finished.

At the same time, when you never find time to pause, rest, and reflect, your body eventually succumbs to the pressures of modern life. Burn-out happens when you don't listen to the body's warning signs and take time out.

Rushing is easy

We can all look busy. Finding time for downtime is much harder. It's far harder to not look busy in a world that rewards busyness. As the author Henry David Thoreau said, "It's not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?"

Being able to slow down and finding time for self-care is a habit, and like all habits it can take a while to establish the routine.

Challenge yourself

It starts by challenging your current practices. Ask yourself:

- **Do you have any allocated time for reflection and self-care practices?** If so, is this enough or do you need more time?

Is It Time to Slow Down?



- **If you don't have any allocated time, what's stopped you from doing this to date?** You want to be clear on what's stopped you in the past and how you can remove those roadblocks.

- **How much of your day is spent productively?** The more you know how you spend your time, the easier it is to carve out time for you.

- **What could you stop doing or do less of to create capacity in your day?** This is so you can identify where there are potential opportunities in your day to slow down. If you don't get deliberate about this practice, it won't happen.

- **What are the benefits of having some time for you?** If you want to create a new habit you need to be clear on what the reward or pay-off from the new habit is.

Find your routine

The next step is to find a routine that works for you. Here are some tips that you can put into practice every day:

- Be clear on what you can change and what you can't change. It's easy to spend a lot of time focusing on the things we can't change, rather than directing our energy towards those we can change.
- Take the time to stop, breathe, reflect and then respond to an event – it helps ensure that your actions are more mindful, and less reactive.
- Strive to find purpose and meaning in your life. People with purpose are generally happier and more resilient as they are clear about their goals and where they are heading towards in life.
- Learn to say no and be confident with saying no to things that aren't good for you.
- Maintain strong connections with friends and family. Sharing how you feel, talking to people and being open about experiences is healthy and good for the soul.
- Exercise often, eat well, meditate, and laugh. These are all key ingredients for releasing the pressure valve.
- Practise mindfulness. Taking the time to stop, breathe, reflect and then respond to an event helps ensure that your actions are more mindful and less reactive.
- Learn from your mistakes. View mistakes as an opportunity to experiment, learn and grow, rather than viewing them as a failure.



Michelle Gibbings is a change leadership and career expert and founder of Change Meridian. Michelle works with leaders and teams to help them get fit for the future of work. She is the author of Step Up: How to Build Your Influence at Work and Career Leap: How to Reinvent and Liberate your Career. To get in touch with Michelle, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

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By **EVA CHRISTODOULOU**
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SALLY Helgesen, an internationally acclaimed author, speaker and consultant, is a leadership guru focusing on women leadership, and the author of various books. Among them is her international best-seller, *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership*.

What Helgesen has to say is refreshingly different from the usual conversation about women in leadership. "Women should be equal to men in the workplace and can lead an organisation in the same style," she affirms.

In her research, Helgesen compiled information through a variety of methods, including the study of various books on how women can be successful, and by following men and women in various leadership positions from different fields and environments and observing how they worked.

She felt that rather than solely relying on interviews, following women around in their daily tasks and observing their behaviour would yield more pragmatic, objective and accurate results. Her study yielded a few conclusions about the advantages women have in leading people, and raises some challenges that they may face.

Being female is great

Rather than having to "behave like men", Helgesen shares that women need to embrace their differences. They need to realise that some of the characteristics predominantly found in women place them at an advantageous position when it comes to leading and managing people.

Helgesen has identified five such advantages that are predominantly exhibited by women:

1. Women put high value on the importance of relationships and do their best to build good relationships across organisations.
2. Women prefer direct communication as opposed to emails.
3. Women are comfortable rather than tolerant to diversity.
4. Women do not compartmentalise their lives and are comfortable using their experiences in their personal sphere to draw strengths.
5. Women are comfortable leading from the centre and building webs of influence rather than sticking to a hierarchical model of leadership.

Helgesen argues that every one of these characteristics have become crucial to organisations today. Current writings on leadership seem to agree.

A *Forbes* article entitled *Top 10 Qualities that Make a Great Leader* lists commitment, honesty, good communication, intuition and creativity as key attributes of an effective leader.

The University of Oregon's Holden Leadership Centre says that leaders should be proactive rather than reactive, flexible/adaptable, good communicators, respectful, confident, enthusiastic, open minded, resourceful, rewarding, well-educated, open to change, interested in feedback, evaluative, organised, consistent, delegators, and willing to take initiative.

In this respect, the female disposition to valuing relationships and good communication, being open to diversity and sharing from all experiences – even from personal lives – and their comfort in leading from the centre, gives them a head-start in their leadership journey.

Additionally, at a time when work and home have become harder to separate, women are well-suited to use and manage this inseparability successfully, given their flexibility to intermingle the two areas and let them co-exist in their daily lives.

However, it is unfair to deduce from this that women are inherently better leaders, given their advantages in the above areas. Even though these advantages were identified in Helgesen's research, it is far-fetched to assume that all women inherently possess these attributes. Furthermore, it is false to assume that their male counterparts lack such characteristics.

What the study demonstrates, however, is that in fact, areas that are traditionally thought to impede career progression – for example, mixing work and personal

The Female Advantage?

What distinguishes and hinders women in the workplace



life, caring too much about relationships rather than concentrating on results, and non-hierarchical leadership models – are areas that can immensely help the development of a successful leader.

Challenges ahead

In her research, Helgesen also found that women face common leadership and career challenges that seem to be specific to their gender.

Females face external barriers that differ by culture, be it country or organisation-specific. These may include gender discrimination policies or male-favouring norms. On some occasions, women may not really have to deal with such issues.

Here are three challenges she found to be consistent among working women:

1. Visibility

Women seem to be best at producing high-quality work, but are worst at drawing attention to the work that they do.

Helgesen notes that when some women are asked why they do not want to draw attention to the quality of their work, they say that they expect good work to be noticed without bragging about it, or, that they worry that by drawing attention, they would appear as pushy.

2. Building support

Women tend to be less skillful than men when it comes to using the relationships they develop for progression and help.

Women need to be more proactive at building networks and identifying men who could help them by being champions for them.

Helgesen argues that powerful people want to mentor you based on how visible you are, and how connected you are. Equally, people would prefer a leader who is better connected, because such an individual could help them expand their own contacts and therefore possibilities.

3. Technology management

With the advent of technology, it is harder to separate your work time and life from your personal time. Women seem to have a particular issue with this, finding it difficult to draw the line and manage their time and privacy.

Women need to find a way to interact with technology that serves their needs, but avoid addictive usage.

Even though they are known for their multitasking abilities, women should always remember that "every time we choose to do two things at once, we choose not to do one thing in full," Helgesen argues.

Results of a study conducted by Training Zone in the United Kingdom, looking at the 360-degree feedback

results of almost 14,000 UK leaders, found that men are more strategic, whereas women make better project managers.

Similar to Helgesen's study, women scored high in terms of planning, managing, respect and empathy compared to men, but men scored much higher in terms of strategic vision, commercial focus and personal impact.

The study found that men are better than women at making a strong first impression, expressing their views with confidence, being visible, and making their presence felt.

In conclusion

It is a recurring outcome that women have certain characteristics that are, overall in their favour. However, the list of challenges above seems to impede their progress in leadership development.

What women need to do is overcome the obstacles within; find a way to push themselves to be more visible, build strong networks of support and use them effectively, make their presence felt, and use technology to their advantage.

There is little that can be done overnight to fight gender policies in the workplace; however, addressing these areas can be easily done, and much progress can be made in seeing more women in leadership routes of all organisations.

At the end of the day, "What really distinguishes leadership is the ability to be fully present," concludes Helgesen. It is therefore up to every woman out there to do as much as possible to work on her advantages, put in the time and effort, and fight hard to overcome all challenges, which more often than not, appear to come from the women themselves.



Eva is the head of research and development at Leaderonomics. She believes that everyone can be the leader they would like to be, if they are willing to put in the effort and are curious to learn along the way, as well as with some help from the people around them. Get in touch with her at editor@leaderonomics.com.

BUILD TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES TO SUPPORT VISION

These competencies would be different for various individuals, depending on the needs of their specific roles at any given point in time, as well as working towards one's plans for the future. This is part of Leaderonomics' Science of Building Leaders, a framework which indicates important elements that need to be developed at each stage of one's life, in order to empower the individual to become an effective leader. Head to bit.ly/SOBLPt1 to find out more.

By **ROUBEENI MOHAN**
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Your Brain on Music

Three genres to boost productivity



MUSIC has been the cornerstone of every civilisation, great and small, past and present. Rhythm, melody, tone, and tempo have been woven into the tapestry of cultures across the world, each one unique and possessing magic within it to stir the soul.

An otolaryngologist from Johns Hopkins says, “There are few things that stimulate the brain the way music does. If you want to keep your brain engaged throughout the aging process, listening to or playing music is a great tool. It provides a total brain workout.”

Studies carried out by experts at Johns Hopkins have revealed insights into how music not only lifts your spirits, but can stimulate the brain to reduce anxiety, blood pressure and pain, as well as improve sleep quality, mental alertness, and memory.

How can we use this brain-music connection to improve our lives? Here are three ways:

1. Recall a memory from long ago

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

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

2. Jump start your creativity

We all vibe differently – that is, we all react differently to music. Identify the type of music that works for you. What may seem therapeutic to someone may have the opposite effect on you.

Some people work best with music that has lyrics to it, whereas others prefer instrumentals or naturalistic sounds. The right music will help clear your mind and allow you to think clearly, therefore awakening your creative senses.

3. Boost productivity

Several studies have been conducted on how music can improve efficiency and make you more productive at work. However, it's important to note that not all types of music are suitable for the office! Some can hinder your progress while others will help you move along faster.

Melissa Chu, writer at JumpstartYourDreamLife.com, explores some tried-and-tested genres that have been explicitly designed with productivity in mind.

1 Classical music

When we think of classical music, composers such as Bach, Vivaldi, and Mozart come to mind.

Classical music in itself can be divided into many styles, but what makes it work-suitable is that a lot of it is instrumental and has a balance of harmonious themes and complex ideas – making it both relaxing and stimulating at the same time.

2 Soundscapes/Music from nature

Background sounds are used mostly to drown out distractions. Listening to the

sounds of nature can improve cognitive function and attentiveness, but again, this comes down to personal taste.

Do you prefer the sound of flowing water, gentle waves, rainfall, and the rustling of leaves? Some forms even include instruments such as flutes or pianos. These work well to create a calm and soothing environment.

3 Video game music

You read that right. Video game music. It actually makes sense – video game sound developers realise that players play for long hours on end and will want to stay engaged and entertained at all times. Their music is aimed at sharpening concentration and increasing focus.

Perfect for that looming deadline.

What's Your Jam?

TO see how varied people's music choices are and how it influenced their productivity at work, seven people were asked this question: “What music do you listen to when you need to ‘get into the zone’ for work?” Here are their answers.

Hui Yi-Wen, 33

“Music kills my productivity. It's because I have a background in music, so my mind goes straight to the music and starts to follow and analyse it. If I do listen to music while I work, I'll have one song on repeat the entire day, so that my mind just registers it as background noise after a while.”

Nik Najihah, 26

“I usually listen to indie and classic rock because it's very engaging – it keeps me feeling awake and productive, and also cuts out noise from my surroundings. I don't normally get distracted by the lyrics because I focus more on the tune, beat, guitar, and the solo parts. An example of indie music would be Arctic Monkeys and for classic rock, Led Zeppelin.”

Ummi Amira, 23

“I do not have a fixed favourite music genre. As long as the song has good lyrics in it – I'm sold!” says Ummi Amira, a graphic designer. She adds, “What the song conveys appeals more to me, but yes, the music is also a contributing factor.”

One of her favourites for now is Hamilton. She finds the music liberating and hums the tune when she's alone or sitting idle.

However, when she wants to be productive, she turns to upbeat pop songs. “It helps me cancel out all the noise surrounding me and allows me to create an ‘invisible shield’ – that way I get to give my undivided attention to the work I am doing at that particular moment.”

Bob Lim, 24

“I like listening to anything that is upbeat or has a strong beat in the mornings because the music puts me in the, ‘Hey, let's start the day right and get things done’ mood. Music inspires me to be myself. The way that musicians express themselves through their songs...it inspires me to be myself through my words and actions.” Some of the music Bob listens to are by Paramore, Linkin Park, Jack Garratt, and Fall Out Boy.

Sarah Lim, 32

“When I'm really rushing something and need to concentrate, I usually listen to music by Banks, Ella Vos, Lana Del Rey, Bon Iver, Lights & Motion, and Explosions in the Sky. The beat gets me into the momentum and helps me zoom in on the work.”

Ikhwan Tharwan, 30

“I listen to all genres of music. It can go as old as Gregorian chants to as bold as Lana Del Rey.” He says that it depends on his mood and what triggers his need for that particular kind of music. For example, if he was speaking to someone about Korean food, there's a high chance of him wanting to listen to Korean music immediately after.

He does have his favourite genres: rock and classical. Anything from Muse or Tchaikovsky won't go wrong with him. To increase his productivity at work, he listens to game-themed music, metal, and rock. He also says that this music brings him into a happy place and gives him the solace needed to be productive. In his own words, “Doing so blocks out my surroundings and allows me to go into ‘my special bubble.’”

■ This article was previously published in print.

Roubeeni is a former writer and content curator at Leaderonomics. She believes in making an impact with written words. If you have more insights or different ideas on how music helps increase productivity, do share it with us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

Enhancing Creativity

4 scientific studies that give us clues to improve this skill

By **WILL BURNS**

editor@leaderonomics.com

I have an obsession and it is human creativity. It's why I'm in the advertising business. It's why I started an idea-generating company. And it's why I crave scientific studies that may give us clues as to how we can improve our creativity.

Since 2013, I've been reporting on *Forbes.com* the most interesting of those scientific studies and let's just say those scientists have been busy.

Check out the following four fascinating studies.

1 Coffee + Nap = Creativity

You may already know about the power of a short nap in the afternoon – that it can provide you with more energy and clearer thinking.

Sleep does that by flushing out a brain chemical called adenosine that builds up after lots of brain activity. Adenosine makes you feel tired, so the nap makes you feel refreshed – but get this.

A study was done where subjects drank a cup of coffee just prior to taking a 20-minute nap. It takes our bodies about 20 minutes to process caffeine, so it really doesn't kick in until right when you wake up. The sleep flushes out the adenosine and the caffeine increases the brain's alertness.

While the study didn't measure creativity levels, *per se*, one showed significant improvement in memory tests for those who drank coffee and took a nap versus those who just drank coffee or took a nap. And memory is critical in the creative process.

2 Black tea increases creativity

First it was alcohol, then coffee, and now another liquid has been shown to increase creativity: black tea.

Researchers at China's Peking University conducted a study with 50 subjects where all of the subjects completed two creativity tasks. However, one group was given a glass of water just prior to the studies and the other group was given a cup of hot black tea.

The group who drank the hot tea performed significantly better than the water-drinking group on both creativity tests.

Was it the caffeine? Well, what's especially interesting about this study is that the creativity tests were quite short, taking 20 minutes in total – and caffeine takes at least 20 minutes to kick in. So, it's not the caffeine.

The researchers suggest that it's the mental state that a 'cup of tea' puts people in – a relaxed state – which they believe is an optimum state for creativity.

I'm not so sure about that – there are other variables here like hot vs cold, other ingredients in the tea, etc – but whatever it is, I'm drinking more tea.

3 Mindfulness meditation may be at odds with creativity

Art Markman, professor of psychology and marketing at the University of Texas, recently sug-



gested in an article in *Inc. Magazine* that mindfulness meditation may actually work against our creativity.

I don't know about you, but I always assumed that meditation and a relaxed mind would only be beneficial to the creative process. However, if you think about it against everything else we know about creativity, Markman's claim makes sense.

What is mindfulness meditation if not being mindful of the now, this moment, this breath?

Well, the result is that all the busy 'thought traffic' we typically experience day-to-day is quelled, if not eliminated entirely. That's great for healthy living, less stress, etc., but it's the opposite of creativity.

Creative thinking demands lots of thought traffic. Divergent thinking requires random thoughts to collide with other random thoughts. Mindfulness meditation might just eliminate these critical ingredients of creativity.

I'm not saying you shouldn't practise meditation for all the other health benefits, but maybe not just prior to a big brainstorm session.

4 The placebo effect: It's all in your head

Okay, this study is almost embarrassing, but is wildly interesting. It's from Lior Noy and Liron Rozenkrantz at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel and it suggests that the placebo effect not only works for physical ailments, but as a way to increase our creativity.

The study recruited two groups of people who went through a typical form of creativity test. Prior to each test, one group was asked to smell a pungent smell (like cinnamon) and told that this smell would increase their creativity. The other group was also asked to smell it, but were not told it would increase their creativity.

Turns out the group who were told that the smell would improve their creativity performed significantly better at the creativity test.

I know, it's nuts, right? But think about that. If we believe we will be creative, then we are more likely to be. This speaks to the positive attitude that is so necessary for generating great ideas.

Bringing it all together

So, there you have it. Four scientific studies that prove – yet again – that creativity is more of a skill than a talent. Or is at least something we can meddle with, prod, and improve.

I'll keep my eye out for more. Time for some tea.

■ This article was previously published in print.



Will Burns is the chief executive officer of virtual idea-generation firm, Ideasicle. To share your thoughts on these studies to improve creativity, write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

BURGERNOMICS

WHEN THE GOING GETS HOT, THE TOUGH MAKE PATTIES

Can your team handle the pressure?

A Teambuilding Programme like no other, come find out in a myBurgerLab kitchen as you and your teammates make real myBurgerLab burgers under pressure!



By **CAROLYNE NJOGU**
editor@leaderonomics.com

Why are some people gritty, more resilient, and more attuned to coping in a crisis more than others?

COULD it be that these individuals have already had their training during some crucible moments in their past and are thus mentally trained to navigate hard times?

The reality is that crucible moments are inevitable for us all. It is part of life, and all are subject to experience them at some point in the course of living.

How we choose to cope with what comes upon us is what makes or breaks us. In essence, crucible moments test our capacity for leadership. Often, the stakes demand one to take up new responsibilities, make critical decisions, deal with pressure, and a host of other uncertainties.

For those who choose to make the best of these crucible moments, they seem to share Epictetus' belief that "it is not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters".

What is it?

Crucible moments are times in our lives when we experience circumstances that forever transform us. They challenge us to question our beliefs and values, and leave us with a completely new identity – hence the term crucible: a place of testing.

A *Harvard Business Review* study titled *Crucible Leadership* reported that, "The crucible experience was a trial and a test, a point of deep self-reflection that forced leaders to question who they were and what mattered to them. It required them to examine their values, question their assumptions, and hone their judgment."

Crucible moments are unwelcomed, unplanned, and seem to impact one's personal and professional life deeply, but there is wisdom and strength to draw from them if one is willing to look within. When in the crucible, one often does not realise what's happening until later, during introspection, and this exemplifies the saying 'what does not kill you, will make you stronger'.

A test of character

Much like the alchemist refines his metal through fire in a crucible, one's leadership is called upon during such times.

In the leadership context, crucible moments transform the leader's experience from, say, gross pain to pleasure and from obstacles to opportunities – much of which is discerned from the lessons learnt.

For example, former South African president Nelson Mandela didn't know that his convictions expressed in his famous statement during the Rivonia Trial in 1964 would be a pivotal moment, not just for him but also for many generations after him.

"It is an ideal for which I hope to live for and to see realised. But my Lord, if it needs to be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

– Nelson Mandela

Consequently, Mandela spent almost 28 years in prison. His biographer, Rick Stengel said, "Mandela's imprisonment was a crucible that steeled him. He was a tempestuous, compassionate man who went into prison and prison just moulded him and forced him not to show any of that emotion. And the man who emerged was a different man."

Today, Mandela is dubbed as one of the most inspiring leaders in the 21st century.

A nation in trying times

Nations – like individuals – do go through crucible moments as well. For example, the United States (US) experienced such trying times on Sep 11, 2001, which is also commonly referred to as 9/11.

Since the fatal attacks, many families were forever transformed by the trauma and loss of loved ones. Similarly, the nation as a collective was greatly impacted too since then; life is no longer the same. There is the US before 9/11 and the US after 9/11, and the two are quite different.

As the nation coped with the aftermath of these attacks, fear and the distrust of some groups rose to

Crucible Moments and How They Transform Us



levels of stressful wartime. According to one online observer, "It was not only the rise of 'McCarthyism' that moved me, but the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far right was capable of creating not only terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance.

"It was as though the whole country had been born anew, without a memory even of certain elemental decencies which a year or two earlier no one would have imagined could be altered, let alone forgotten."

From children being born without the other parent present, to others instantly becoming orphans, 9/11 epitomises tragic memories ingrained in many of us till today.

Nevertheless, people's resolve prevailed and the nation's will to defend freedom and resilience remains. Since then, sacrifice, courage, service and love of country became the values by which Americans rallied around.

Crucibles demand adaptation. The US as a whole has been forced to adapt to and drill for unknowns, thus developing skills and the will to prepare for such precarious times.

Mining your gold

We all experience crucible moments at one point or another in our lives. Thus, our best bet is for us to build the capacity to face the crucible.

In the book, *Finding Your True North: A Personal Guide*, the authors suggest documenting your crucible experiences so as to make sense of them.

Making sense of your crucible can have great gains if you are willing to step back and self-reflect. Here, you challenge your views, assumptions, beliefs and values, therefore gaining a deeper sense of what the crucible brought forth and emerging from it with your new identity.

Here are some questions to ask yourself following a crucible moment:

1. Could I have done anything differently to avoid the experience and if so, what would that be?
2. Why was this experience such a challenge to me?
3. In hindsight, how would I confront this challenge today?

Try this: Write a letter to your younger self, addressing the statement, "If I knew then what I know now, I would have..." Remember to be detailed in your response.

4. What is the most important lesson learnt from this crucible moment?

In a nutshell

There is no way of escaping crucible moments, at least not for the living – they are part of being alive and human. They are bound to happen to all of us regardless of age, religion, gender, or status.

Crucible leaders emerge in all their glory because they have already confronted their worst fears, assumptions, beliefs, and values in the crucible.

The choice to seek meaning from the experience leads one to be more teachable, open-minded, adaptable, and possibly transformed – where humility, curiosity, resilience, and willingness to learn become one's new identity and the epitome of crucible leadership effectiveness.



Carolyn is the founding principal at VPF Strategies and helps professionals and organisations gain clarity around building better brands for better results. She is a speaker, the author of *Being Grounded: 21 Days To Come Alive and Love Your Life*, and a contributing writer for various publications. To connect with her, email editor@leaderonomics.com.

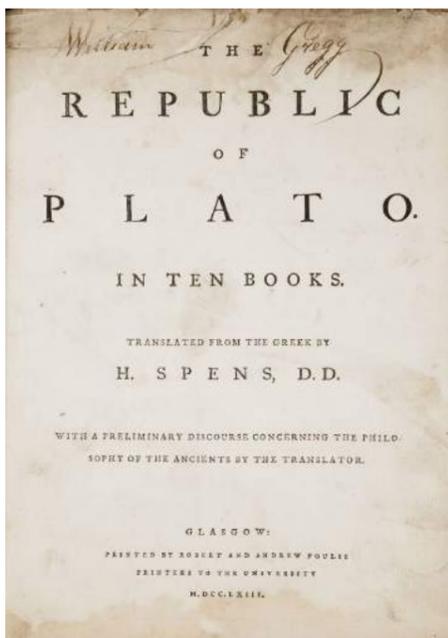
CRUCIBLE MOMENTS Key events in one's life – positive or negative, that change one's perception and goals. Crucible moments are usually negative events, and differ significantly among individuals. These could also be positive events – moments that lead to a ground-breaking realisation that skews the individual and causes a shift in the way they view the world. The important thing to look for here is not so much the event itself, but what the event taught us – what did we get out of it, how did we overcome it, and what was it that allowed us to do so? How would it change us in the future? This is part of **Leaderonomics' Science of Building Leaders**, a framework which indicates important elements that need to be developed at each stage of one's life, in order to empower the individual to become an effective leader. Head to bit.ly/SOBLPt1 to find out more.

5 Non-Business Books to Help You Succeed In Business

By **BRAD SHORR**
editor@leaderonomics.com

SUCCESS in business is largely a matter of standing out from the crowd, of being memorable and creative, and able to find opportunities where others see only problems. Standing out requires a well-rounded education because it enables you to see issues from numerous perspectives, analyse them in inventive ways, and develop responses that others miss.

The five books recommended in the following will help you develop these skills. All but the first book are rather obscure. Nevertheless, these will help you advance in your business career.



1 Republic
Successful business people know how to ask the right questions. They know how to dissect complex situations, break them down into their basic components, and put them back together in a more solid form.

For example, if your marketing campaign is failing, how is it failing? Where is it failing? How do marketing processes 1–10 affect processes 11–20?

Plato's *Republic* teaches the skills of asking questions and analysing complexity; it teaches you how to think.

The book is a dialog, in which the character of Socrates guides his companions through a discussion of political systems to determine which is best and most just – issues that are a bit more complicated than marketing processes!

This is good, though, because if you can fathom the political analysis, your business issues may seem simple by comparison.

Socrates is a brilliant question-asker in the book, as he was in life (the Socratic Method is still used today, 2,500 years after his death). If you learn to ask questions with the skill of Socrates, you will not only improve your effectiveness in business, you will make others smarter and more insightful – another important attribute of successful business people.

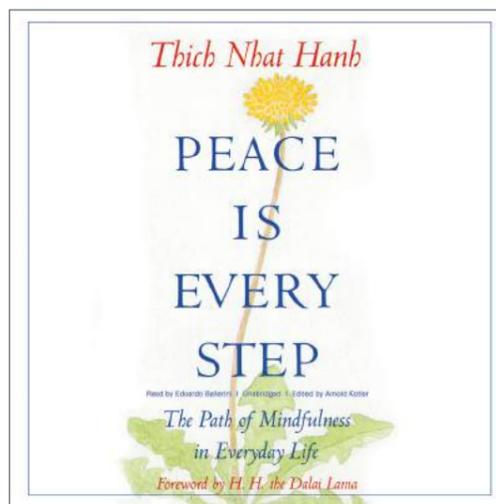
2 The Retreat from Moscow
Successful business people are resilient. They don't let failure bring them down.

The Retreat from Moscow is a true story based on the memoirs of a French soldier, Adrien-Jean-Baptiste-Francois Bourgogne, who survived Napoleon's catastrophic Russian campaign in 1812–1813.

The French army, trying to make its way out of Russia in the bitterest depths of winter, without supplies, starving, under constant attack from the Russian army, suffered enormous losses – more than 400,000 men overall.

The book is nevertheless inspiring. Sergeant Bourgogne calmly describes his experiences, diligently reporting what happened and letting the facts speak for themselves, facts that expose the best and worst qualities in human beings.

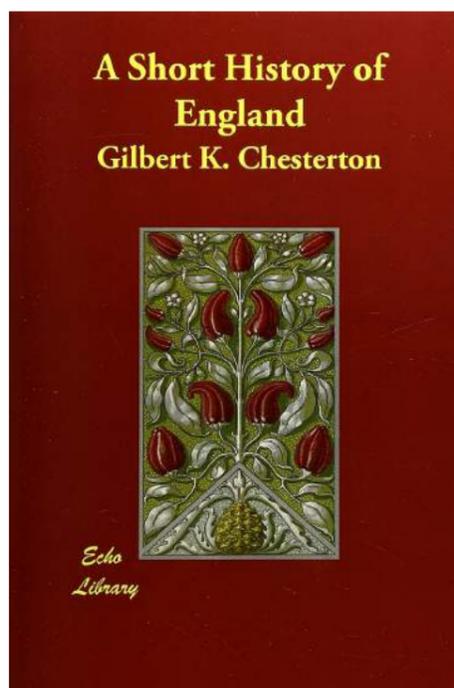
If you're in business and ever fall into a 'woe is me' mindset, recalling these memoirs should snap you out of your funk. If a man could survive the Moscow retreat, you can survive too.



3 Peace Is Every Step
In business, people face a multitude of tasks that sometimes need to be taken care of all at once. Although multitasking is often considered a great skill to have, a person is liable to make critical errors if he/she is tackling one serious problem while thinking about five other ones.

Peace Is Every Step by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, is a short and simple book that teaches mindfulness, i.e. how to live in the moment. The book is tremendously helpful as a way to find spiritual harmony and peace in all phases of your life. What's more, it is quite applicable to business life as its teachings will help you learn how to do many tasks one thing at a time.

Great business people have great focus. We've probably experienced the way it feels when your boss talks to you while continually looking at his/her cellphone. It makes you feel insignificant. This book will show you how to make every person you interact with feel like the most important person in the world.



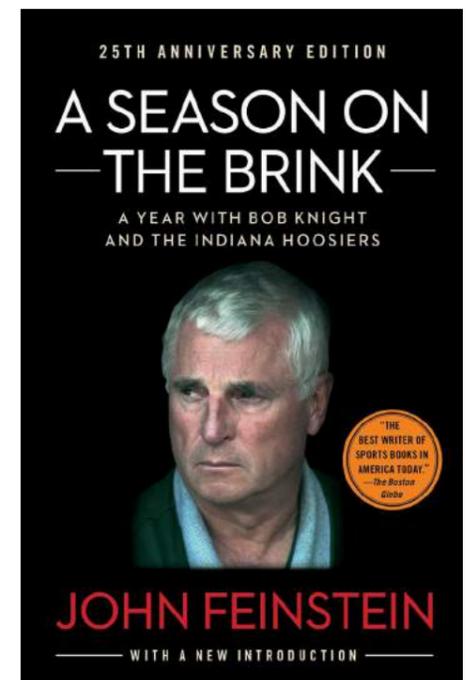
4 A Short History of England
GK Chesterton was a British journalist of the mid-20th century who wrote voluminously about history, current affairs, theology and a thousand

other topics. He wrote essays, novels, poems, biographies – the most talented and engaging writer I've ever encountered.

In Chestertonian fashion, his book, *A Short History of England* describes the key events and characters throughout the country's rich history, all without mentioning a single date!

In my opinion, any book by Chesterton will have business value, and this one in particular, because Chesterton's writing teaches these incredibly vital points:

- He was a master of the paradox, of seeing things and relationships between things in a creative and unexpected way. He stimulates creative thinking.
- His style is engaging and humorous. He was able to tackle controversial subjects without insulting or alienating people who disagreed with him. In our day and age, this is a very important skill; one that is sorely lacking today. Being able to agreeably disagree will take you far in any business endeavour.



5 A Season on the Brink: A Year with Bob Knight and the Indiana Hoosiers
It's easy to be successful when everything is rosy – but it's terribly difficult to be successful when the stock market is crashing and business conditions stink. The ability to overcome adversity is a skill every successful business professional must have.

A Season on the Brink is sports journalist John Feinstein's chronicle of the relatively lacklustre 1985–1986 basketball season of Bobby Knight and the Indiana Hoosiers.

It's fascinating to know that at this time, Knight was an established winner, but the 1985 team struggled and was an underperformer. Knight tried everything to get his team on track, sometimes using unorthodox approaches for which he had no idea what to expect.

What stands out in the book, besides Knight's volatile and unpredictable personality, is his relentless pursuit of excellence, his willingness to try anything and everything, and his absolute refusal to give up or go through the motions.

Learn those skills, and you will succeed when everyone around you is failing.

 Brad Shorr is director of content strategy at Straight North, an Internet marketing agency in the US. With more than 25 years of sales and marketing experience, Brad has been featured in leading online publications including Moz, Forbes and Entrepreneur. To share your thoughts with us on some of your recommended non-business books that will help people succeed in business, write to us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

The Leaderonomics Show



This video is available at bit.ly/ScottDemingTLS. For more The Leaderonomics Show videos, head to bit.ly/TheLDRShow.

Making Purposeful Decisions

Changing just for the sake of it won't make your business successful

By **SANDY CLARKE**
 editor@leaderonomics.com

"People were wasting their money through my advertising agency if they weren't willing to work on their culture."

IN his appearance on *The Leaderonomics Show* with host Roshan Thiran, renowned speaker and branding expert, Scott Deming, was quick off the block in pinpointing the problem with companies who fail to sustain their growth.

Deming – who has spent more than 30 years in advertising and branding – has been running his own consultancy firm for the past 15 years, through which he and his team serve international clients and help them align their vision with the leadership and culture.

Failing to communicate

According to Deming, the fundamental problem with businesses that struggle to grow is that they don't communicate effectively enough to achieve the goals they strive towards.

He said, "The few at the top don't push it down and translate it and transfer it to all the levels and layers below them. There's a real communication problem between leaders and their followers.

"What I help them to do is to figure out what it is they want to be, what they want to do, and then how they're going to impact the market, your people, in a way that's completely different to anyone else."

When communication fails from the top-down, this is where problems begin to fester – an avoidable outcome which research suggests occurs more often than business leaders would like to think. As the communication fails, employees become demoralised and disengaged.

Deming said, "You've got to let people feel like they're part of something meaningful. People will leave an organisation for less money if they feel they're going to a place that actually has meaning and a place that they can break the ceiling."

Finding your niche

If businesses are struggling to grow or sustain their growth, what can leaders do to ensure that their organisation moves forward in a productive way that stays the course?

"Everybody should focus on being disruptive," advised Deming. "McKinsey, the consulting company, came out with a paper a year or two ago which said that every company – if you're going to stay not on the curve but ahead of the curve – has to dedicate 70 per cent of resources and talent to defending their core business. That means you look at the competition and you make sure they're not stepping on your toes.

"Then you have to spend 20 per cent of your resources on growing that core business. But what very few companies do, they say you need to spend 10 per cent on transformative growth. That's how people become disruptive – but they don't change for change's sake. They do it because the change is actually important."

Deming, who is the author of two books – *The Brand Who Cried Wolf* and *Powered by Purpose* – revealed that he wrote his first book simply because he felt he needed to write one in order to enhance his credibility. His second book – *Powered by Purpose* – was written following the death of his granddaughter. The sad occasion compelled Deming to re-focus his mind on delivering a message that truly mattered.

He said, "There was so much in the leadership world that needs to change, and I decided to focus a lot more of my energies on not just the branding but on the leadership that creates the culture that creates the branding."

Creating a successful brand

With that in mind, how do businesses go about creating a brand that reflects who they really are, in an authentic manner that resonates with existing and potential customers?

Deming said, "They have to make sure that whatever their brand says they are, it's real. Secondly, a really powerful brand completely understands how the customers perceive them.

"Many brands that fail look at their business from their own perspective, so much so that they can't see things from a different viewpoint. You have to engage with your customers and ask them, 'What do you really think of us?'"

A successful brand is one that creates an emotional resonance with its customers. Rather than being concerned with the bottom line through selling a product, a great brand offers an experience that has the customer at the heart of what the business is all about.

Using Starbucks as an example, Deming believes it has the perfect approach to building and maintaining brand loyalty that few other companies manage to achieve.

He said, "Howard Schultz, the founder, trained his baristas to make every customer feel like they're the most important person in the world. He had baristas memorise regular customers and their orders and they had the orders ready for them before they walked in the door. So, when you go to Starbucks you feel like, 'Man, I'm home'. That's how you create the loyalty."

Taking risks

But what about failure? What advice does the renowned branding expert have for leaders who might be afraid to take risks to grow for fear of taking too many steps back rather than moving forward?

For Deming, it's all about being prepared. He advised, "You have to have a level of paranoia, but it has to be healthy. You also have to have the confidence to take risks – but you have to do your homework. A lot of companies fail because they believe in something, but they just weren't prepared to launch it. So, they chase something that might have worked if only they'd put a bit more preparation and process into it."



Sandy Clarke is a freelance writer from the UK who worked for more than 10 years in journalism and PR before moving to Malaysia. He believes that effective branding is the gateway for success, and agrees with Deming that it all begins with leadership and culture. To connect with Sandy, email editor@leaderonomics.com.

"THE WAY WE
THINK IS
ACTUALLY AN
INTERNAL Q&A."

- Marilee Adams



Watch this video at bit.ly/MarileeAdamsTLS. For more Leadership Nuggets, check out our playlist on YouTube: bit.ly/TheLDRShow.

The Power of Question Thinking

Understanding the impact of the questions you ask

By **CINDY YAP**

editor@leaderonomics.com

*The important thing is to not stop questioning.
Curiosity has its own reason for existing.*

– Albert Einstein

NO one expounds the significance of questions more effectively than Dr Marilee Adams, president and founder of the Inquiry Institute.

Adams, author of three books that focus on questions and mindsets, is also an executive coach, professional speaker and adjunct professor of leadership at the American University, teaching leadership in the School of Public Affairs.

With a degree in psychology, Adams was a therapist for many years during which she learnt a lot about thinking and relationships. She subsequently wrote her first book entitled *The Art of the Question*, a cognitive-behavioural psychology textbook.

"I then decided to take what I had learnt beyond psychology into the world of organisations, businesses, and teaching and coaching. My decision worked out very well," she recalls.

Her second book *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life*, is an international best-selling leadership coaching business book which also made its way into education and is touted as a must-read for anyone wanting a path approach to crafting their present and future.

Subsequent to writing this book, Marilee started getting requests from colleges and universities to do work with teachers and contribute ideas to the school systems. "I had a lot of fun!" she quips.

Her latest book, *Teaching That Changes Lives*, is about cultivating a learner mindset for breakthroughs in schools.

Questions that change your life

According to Adams, question thinking is a theory which suggests that thinking occurs as an internal question and answer process. It is a way of conceptualising and operationalising thinking, speaking, and listening.

"You realise that you're asking yourselves questions all the time and the questions you ask yourself pretty much shape how you feel, think, behave and relate,"

she points out on *The Leaderonomics Show*.

She adds: "It therefore becomes very motivating to learn how to identify the questions that are already there. Then you can decide whether those are the ones that you would want to shape the future."

Giving an example on why answers don't change the world, questions do, she continues: "Right now, while we're having a conversation, I'm guessing that you're asking yourself questions such as 'What would be of interest to viewers? What do they want to learn? What questions should I ask that would bring out the most interesting and useful advice from Marilee?'"

"And the way you answer those questions dictates the way you communicate with me," she says.

When people understand the question-driven nature of their thinking and are able to alter their questions accordingly, it becomes a skill that anyone can learn and use. Not just in leadership, but in all aspects of your life, she comments.

Importance of managing thinking and mindset in leadership

There is a difference between 'asking' and 'using' questions. Very few people understand the impact of questions they ask, and the importance of the structure and mindset from which the questions are asked, she says.

"The questions come alive with their impact. Questions are inherently relational, so when I understand all that, I will pay a lot of attention to the structure and impact of my questions and how that makes a relationship work," she explains.

Adams elaborates that the definition of leaders does not only encompass senior leaders, and the whole concept of leadership should not only be by position, but also by influence.

Stressing the important role of leaders in empowering those around them, she says that the more leaders can manage their thinking and mindset, the better they're going to be.

On how being a therapist for 30 years has influenced her work and moulded her to be who she is today, Adams said it gave her a very deep understanding of how people think, what motivates them, what is required for real change to happen, and the superficial changes.

"The life lessons were easily imported into the business or organisational space. I believe that what I'm able to do and see today is richer because of what I've been taught by so many people during my days in practice," she ponders.

In her book *Teaching That Changes Lives*, Adams' focus is on the mindset of teachers instead of students. "So much of the work in the world of education focuses on students. I'm reversing that," she says.

Acknowledging the role of teachers as noble, incredibly important and difficult, Marilee feels that teachers need the relevant tools to manage their own mindsets and maintain their own equilibrium in the classroom, not only for their own benefit but also in preparing themselves as role models for students.

"Teachers are models of patience, good thinking and collaboration. Research shows that professional development for teachers is one of the biggest factors that make a difference in the development of students. That's the purpose I planned to achieve by writing this book," she says, adding that the book also caters to parents in their role as teachers to their children.

Nuggets of wisdom

Adams' advice to young leaders is to ask themselves these questions over and over again:

- What can I learn from this?
- What assumptions am I making?
- How am I empowering the people around me?
- How can I listen better?
- What do people and circumstances have to teach me?
- What is the best that I can offer to give my team the future that they want and deserve?

When asked about tips to craft, ask or think about questions, she admits that it would take a long time to speak on this, but closes with two interesting quotes:

"Great results begin with great questions" and "every question missed is a potential crisis waiting to happen".



Cindy Yap is a corporate professional who believes in seeking new ways to learn in this journey of life. To engage with her, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

How to Build a Fearless Culture

By **CORINNE ARMOUR**
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WHAT is a fearless culture? When people come together; conversations are focused, lively and creative. The things that matter are surfaced and resolved. This environment promotes positive risk-taking that comes from safety to try things and fail.

People feel empowered in their roles and confident to speak out. This lifts the performance bar, promotes curiosity and leads to individual and team development and accountability.

Fearless cultures get results.

The challenges for leaders

1. Being a leader can feel like hard work

The responsibility of having to 'know' everything keeps us stuck in the day-to-day and prevents us from being strategic. It's tough to run engaging meetings, and we put off crucial performance conversations.

2. Staff engagement is patchy

Maybe your organisation is growing rapidly, and is experiencing risk and growing pains. Or maybe your organisation isn't growing and the legacy of history is slowing things down; staff engagement is low and people are stuck and lacking in purpose. Problems may be simmering, and it's hard to identify the real issues. When challenges arise, you're fighting fires rather than building culture.

3. Leadership bench-strength is lacking

A key responsibility of leadership is developing others. While we might have the right intentions, we get busy and development conversations don't happen. Regular feedback discussions don't seem to have much impact.

4. The results are questionable

Performance across the organisation is inconsistent with some divisions not delivering on expectations, and there is a lack of accountability. Perhaps key performance indicators (KPIs) are being achieved, but you are concerned about the approaches being taken.

5. You see that more is possible

The organisation is performing well; there is a healthy culture and targets are being met – yet you believe more is possible.

Leaders who ask are brave and skilled enough to connect deeply, lead fearlessly and achieve transformational results. Leaders who ask create fearless cultures by telling less and asking more.

Cultivating the culture

A fearless culture is the result of a cumulative focus of leaders across the organisation, led and modelled by those at the top. Drawing on questioning techniques and a coaching approach, leaders who ask build fearless cultures.

Three critical competencies leaders utilise to build fearless cultures are:

Questions – Ask more and tell less

Purpose – Vision for what we want to achieve

Courage – Leadership is not taking the easy way

1 Ask more questions

Leaders who ask leverage what they know about brain science by asking questions to build engagement and accountability. The 'generation effect' – replicated in a number of behavioural and neuroscience studies – shows that people are more likely to remember an idea they generate themselves.

When you tell people the answers, the rational brain may be listening but this won't help with recall or ownership. Conversely, when you ask questions that lead people to a new understanding, insight is involved. Insight is that light bulb moment where the brain pulls



seemingly unrelated ideas together and connects them in new ways.

Insights are valuable; they engage the brain's reward system and trigger a release of dopamine: a neurotransmitter known as a 'happy chemical'. The simple act of searching for and finding our own answers is rewarding to the brain.

Insight also activates the hippocampus: the area of the brain responsible for long-term memories. Our memory is augmented by insight – we construct rich neural connections to things we already know and can then apply the solution more broadly in the future. So, one insight can address multiple challenges.

If you notice that your people repeatedly bring the same problems, or that your previous solutions aren't being implemented, it might be time for you to tell less and ask more.

2 Get clear on purpose

In a fearless culture, leaders understand the broad vision. They are clear on individual, team and organisational purpose.

The leader who asks has a clear purpose for every conversation and facilitates discussion in that direction. Having purpose gives form and leads to an outcome, whether it be a casual chat in the lift, a semi-formal fortnightly catch-up with a direct report, or a team meeting.

Broad types of purpose in conversation might include building awareness, developing new behaviours, extending skills, correcting poor performance, challenging norms, problem solving, generating new ideas, leading a team meeting or connecting a group around a common cause.

Regardless of the location and occasion, we need to know why we are having a conversation. Questions are the best way to clarify the purpose, keeping in mind that shared ownership of and commitment to the conversational purpose is more likely to achieve outcomes.

3 Show courage

A coaching approach isn't for the faint hearted – the leader who asks needs courage.

It takes courage to consider your own stuff, put it aside and focus on another person. It takes courage not to have the answers, and ask the questions anyway. It takes courage to ask rather than tell and to

abdicate from the role of 'leader with all the answers'.

Perhaps we need the most courage when we challenge peers and senior leaders. Consider the situations uncovered by the Finance Sector Royal Commission in Australia. I believe there were some senior leaders who were not comfortable with things that were happening but where were the dissenting voices? Did people speak up? Were they heard? These were not fearless cultures.

Courage is not the absence of fear. In fact, the only time you will ever feel a complete lack of fear is when you are dead or dead drunk. Neither are useful states for leadership. Courage is pushing through despite the fear, using the fear as data, fearing less.

Over to you

Governance leaders have the dual role of leading and building a fearless culture in their own teams as well as influencing the organisation.

Culture is the sum of everything we do, each day, and the leader who asks creates culture-change momentum through telling less and asking more, being clear on purpose, and showing courage.

What steps can you take today to move towards a fearless culture?

It takes courage to ask rather than tell and to abdicate from the role of 'leader with all the answers'.

Corrinne Armour is a leadership expert who helps leaders and organisations develop Fearless Leadership and deliver transformational results. She is the author of Leaders Who Ask: Building Fearless Cultures by Telling Less and Asking More. She is co-author of Developing Direct Reports: Taking the Guesswork Out of Leading Leaders and two specialist texts on human behaviour. To connect with Corrinne, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

DEVELOP VISION FOR ORGANISATION
Ability to go beyond a vision for self, combining it with a collective in order to come up with a common vision. This is part of Leaderonomics' **Science of Building Leaders**, a framework which indicates important elements that need to be developed at each stage of one's life, in order to empower the individual to become an effective leader. Head to bit.ly/SOBLP1 to find out more.

Are You a Natural Leader?

The key to raising tomorrow's leaders

By **LISA ARIE**

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I was recently asked why it's important to teach our children leadership and innovation. My response: You don't have to.

Every person is wired with the instincts to lead and innovate. All you have to do is hone and develop these natural instincts.

Our best recourse to having great leaders is to provide environments where people of all ages can discover and fine-tune their natural tendencies to innovate and lead.

It begins with curiosity

Curiosity is central to innovation. It is also a primal instinct. Curiosity is hardwired into us to enhance our survival. Can you imagine a world where children are encouraged to develop this natural instinct? Can you imagine what levels of innovation could be reached?

Children are natural learners full of natural curiosity. And there is no limit to a child's ability to imagine. When imagination is combined with curiosity, anything can be created. Albert Einstein said it wonderfully well: "Knowledge is limited. Imagination circles the world."

What stimulates your curiosity? When was the last time you created a place and a space to imagine? If you want a litmus test for how imaginative and innovative you truly are, spend several hours with children and see if you can hold their interest.

Uncertainty on a primal level is meant to evoke curiosity, not fear. Consortium for Ocean Leadership president and chief executive officer Robert Gagorian suggests that curiosity is thinking beyond what you normally think about: "... you are climbing a mountain and you see a ridge. Curiosity to me is, what is beyond that ridge and how am I going to get to it? And what does it look like? And is it going to be something that is going to be scary? Is it going to be something interesting?"

In order to understand where you are in your own interaction with your instincts, discern whether uncertainty evokes curiosity or fear in you. Before we started to control our environments instead of adapting to them, as we did when we were cave dwellers, everything had an element of uncertainty – which stimulated curiosity and motivated us to go see whether something was safe.

We had to be curious to finally emerge from living

in caves. And we had to be curious to become hunters and gatherers. If you doubt that curiosity remains part of our natural hard-wiring, watch children and listen to their endless questions.

Encouraging innovation

Right now, companies are fascinated with innovation. What will make them emerge from the metaphorical cave so they can grow and prosper? What can push them ahead of the curve once and for all?

Filling companies with curious people invested in and engaged with their vision would be one answer.

When you're exploring, you're learning. This is the value of curiosity. It invokes a natural learning state. And when you're learning, you're leading. You have stepped out of the cave, and others can then follow. One of my favourite definitions of leading is the ability to inspire following.

Who is responsible for teaching children to thrive and grow up to be curious, engaged citizens? Every one of us is responsible for teaching this. And every one of us is responsible for becoming a curious, engaged citizen so that we can teach our children – our future leaders – how to be one.

Curiosity emerges when we feel safe. When we don't feel safe, our survival skills kick in and we focus on getting ourselves to an empowered environment. Instincts are the internal mechanism wired into us so we can first survive and then thrive.

That's the natural order. Where are you in that order? Are you surviving or thriving? Increasing your level of curiosity will have an immediate impact on changing surviving to thriving.

There is a fine line between the constructive tension that can activate curiosity and the anxiety that derives from too much tension.

In an empowered environment, where curiosity flourishes, we feel the tension and can use it. In a fear-based environment, tension turns to anxiety, effectively shutting down curiosity and creativity.

Nurturing the bottom line

Companies, communities and families have an eye on the bottom line and how to keep it growing and healthy. In an empowered environment, you are encouraged to be curious about the bottom line.

In a fear-based environment, there are so many control mechanisms in place that creativity and curiosity are stifled, effectively snuffing out the very devices wired into us to figure out how to keep ourselves healthy and growing. As with any bottom line,

the level of negative fallout indicates just how sustainable it is.

The answer is curiosity

A few years ago, I had the honour of being granted five minutes during a silent retreat with a Zen Buddhist monk master. We were told we could ask one question. I wanted to be smart and ask something meaningful, something that would save the world and be helpful to everyone.

Instead, the pain and rage of having recently lost my horse in an incomprehensible way boiled to the surface, and when I was ushered through the door, the pain and anguish erupted from me.

I poured out the grief, railed against the injustice, and in the end, exhausted, I stared up at the figure that was swimming in my tears and said, "How do I get past my pain and my anger?"

He did not hesitate in his answer. With kindness and certainty, he said: "The answer to every question is found in curiosity."

Perhaps I may have inadvertently asked a question, the answer for which could indeed help others and our world. What if, for example, we became curious as to what was important to others, including plants and animals, and discovered it was the same thing that was important to us?

Looking to the future

I have found that simple questions keep curiosity fresh and at hand. Ask yourself on a regular basis: What is important to me, and why? Or as you interact with others, ask them: What is important to you, and why?

A child sees things with clarity because a child hasn't developed the filters that often prevent us from seeing possibilities and truths. Curiosity enables us to take the blinders off and see things fully and clearly and perhaps even to regain some of that child-like wonder we once had. Curiosity enables us to be – and develop – great leaders.

What question can you ask yourself today that will stimulate your curiosity for tomorrow?



Lisa Arie has launched two multi-multimillion dollar companies, and was a creative all-star, growing up in Singapore, South Africa, and London. She is the author of Crossing the Silly Bridge and co-founder of Vista Caballo. Fast Company has dubbed her 'the CEO whisperer'. To connect with her, email editor@leaderonomics.com.

Is Your Child Self-Aware?

How parents can develop this skill in their children

By **KRYSTAL CLARE**

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It was just another Thursday and I had finished a lunch meeting. I drove over to pick my son up from playschool and as he was coming down the stairs, I overheard a teacher assistant asking him, “Are you going to tell your mummy that you scribbled on the wall?”

My initial instinct was that it’s probably a tiny scribble. At the same time, the principal’s room door opened and she asked if she could have a word with me. As she narrated and scrolled through the pictures, I was shocked.

It was worse than just a scribble. My son and a classmate had gone to town with the class teacher’s permanent marker. It was all over the tables, chairs, floor and white board. It was obvious they had the time of their lives for those few minutes.

This was something out of character seeing that both my son and his classmate have never drawn on the walls at home and are usually very well-behaved in school.

I was quite bewildered as two days before the incident I was over the moon when my son shared that they had their weekly morale talk at school and it was about picking up after yourself.

I felt like the luckiest mum in the world because he was practising what he had learnt. That evening, I was beaming with joy. I saw him as the perfect child.

My son is three going on four years old and after the scribbling incident, I had to take a step back to reflect. It was important to remember that he is now developing his sense of self.

Having self-awareness allows a person to take control of their emotions and behaviour and enables one to change their thoughts and mindsets. Every day is a learning process about boundaries and testing limits. Figuring out what is acceptable and not acceptable. That day, I gave him time to reflect too.

With some reflection, I hoped he would develop a higher sense of self-awareness and understanding that all his actions have repercussions.

Do as I say, not as I do

I remember the first time I heard this saying and wondered if it could really work. Children listen, observe, soak up information and mimic actions which in turn, often take after the behaviour, attitudes and beliefs of the people who surround them the most.

Self-awareness is listed as one of the 10 core life skills by the World Health Organisation and is defined as having a clear understanding of ‘self’.

The process of self-awareness starts from a very young age when children begin discovering their likes and dislikes. This is the point where they start exploring and learning about themselves.

Having self-awareness allows a person to take control of their emotions and behaviour and enables one to change their thoughts and mindsets.

When your child has good self-awareness skills, they will know their strengths and weaknesses, be in tune with their emotions as well as likes and dislikes. They will be able to express their feelings and at the same time, be mindful of the feelings of others.

Over time they will also understand that their actions and words can impact other people. While this might be a lot to ask of a child, it is important to understand that such skills will develop over time, mostly with the help of role models.

At the moment, my son is at a stage where sharing is a problem. While I thoroughly enjoy having his cous-



ins over, at the end of the dinners and playdates, I am emotionally exhausted and a little frazzled sometimes.

Being the only child, he has had monopoly over the television. So, to practise what we preach, we have decided to make him understand that sometimes he must be considerate and that, we all get our turns.

As parents, we can impart self-awareness to our children in different ways. Learning self-awareness requires more than just reading self-development books. Learning brings change but the environment needs to be cohesive. It is important for us to:

“**Learning self-awareness requires more than just reading self-development books. Learning brings change but the environment needs to be cohesive.**”

1 Express appreciation

It’s priceless to see the twinkle in their eyes. A child who feels appreciated will learn how to express appreciation for others.

2 Self-reflect

Ask them questions, encourage them to take a moment to reflect if they did the correct thing or even if they could have done something better. Ask them if they would change how they reacted or behaved.

3 Have patience

Learning – and practising – patience is a lot tougher now than it used to be. Information is at our fingertips and we are no longer appreciative of the value of delayed gratification, but learning to be patient is vital.

4 Have consideration and respect for others

Showing consideration for other people by doing simple things like giving way to another driver is a good example. Understanding that everyone is

different and should be treated respectfully is important. This especially holds true in situations where they would like to be treated in kind.

5 Appreciate feedback

Learning to receive feedback – under any circumstances – can’t be underestimated. Receiving feedback constructively will result in heightened self-awareness which will then evolve into self-development. Receiving feedback should not be confused with seeking validation.

6 Learn to forgive

My son learnt another valuable lesson after his permanent marker episode. As I walked into class the next day, his class teacher called him over, gave him a hug and said, “Don’t worry about it. Just don’t do it again.”

He has now learnt another tool for self-awareness which is forgiveness. Forgiving fully is a powerful tool in moving forward and it just makes one a better person.

In a nutshell

As our children grow, parts of their self-awareness will unfold. We must nurture them to fulfil their biggest potential along the way.

In the words of Nelson Mandela, “May your choices reflect your hopes, and not your fears.” As mothers, we do the best we can with what we have. I encourage you to lift yourself up and other mothers in any way you can. We are all in this together.

■ This article was previously published in print.



Krystal Clare is a certified image consultant who draws experience from her background in fashion, branding and customer service to help her clients create a personal brand presence. To connect with Krystal, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

Parents, How **Involved** Are You?

By **JEAN SELVAM**
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If growing up to be a leader is so important, why do we leave the teaching of our children to others?

DOES the level of parental involvement in a child's life affect their ability to become leaders? Let's take a step back and consider this: does parenting and leadership go hand-in-hand?

It is a known fact that being a parent is one of the toughest jobs in the world. Every parent wants their child to be happy and grow into an intelligent and successful person. That's a lot of pressure for anyone to handle.

At the same time, being a good leader at work is difficult as well because he or she also wants their employees to be happy and grow into responsible people who contribute towards the success of the organisation.

Can you see the similarity?

Vision

Parenting and leadership certainly go together because there are many overlapping qualities to these two aspects. First and most importantly, parenting and leadership require a vision.

Having a vision of success is pertinent to the development of your child or employees, because they will ultimately look up to you as the parent or leader for guidance and support. They will pick up on your beliefs and level of energy, particularly in overcoming challenges in order to achieve their success.



Passion

Additionally, being a parent and a leader requires passion, determination and commitment. These three qualities are meant to be the driving force when dealing with your children or your people.

As a parent and a leader, you are already determined and committed to the growth and progress of your children and your people. Having the passion to be great at this gives you the heart and the motivation to continue on.

Communication skills

Last but not least, being a good parent and a leader means having great communication skills. It is such a cliché thing to say, isn't it?

But the question is, what is required to have clear, consistent, two-way communication?

People often miss the importance of having good rapport with someone, listening and providing feedback, and ultimately taking accountability and dropping the blame game. You need to learn and practise these basic skills before having great communication with your children and your employees. How else would you as a parent and a leader be able to build trust, instil confidence and inspire your children and your employees to accomplish their goals?

Concluding thoughts

So, going back to the question at hand, does the level of parental involvement in a child's life affect their ability to become leaders? Yes, it certainly does.

A report by the Council of Economic Advisers in the United States states that, "Teenagers are most successful at meeting today's challenges if they have close bonds with their parents. Young people are most likely to avoid dangerous or destructive behaviour when they are closer to their parents. Similarly, teens who are closer to their parents are more likely to be successful in school".

Ultimately, children are most likely to be successful and great leaders when parents are able to remain connected and develop a strong family bond.

■ This article was previously published in print.



Jean is a qualified family therapist and is passionate about working with parents, children and youths from diverse backgrounds. She was previously a part of the Leaderonomics Youth team. To connect with Jean, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

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The Fleeting Moments

Your children will be grown up before you know it

By **ZAID MOHAMAD**
 editor@leaderonomics.com

WHEN was the last time you really spent time with your children? Did you know that many older parents miss taking care of their children? Are you aware of how much time is left for you to do just that?

The answers to these questions can provide a new perspective in balancing your life. Let me highlight this with a personal story.

This happened when I took my youngest son, Adam, for a haircut. He was nine years old and disliked going to a barber as he preferred his mother to do it. I persuaded him to join me for the trip by saying that he was now a big boy and besides, a professional haircut would make him look more handsome.

He reluctantly agreed but went through the process without any problem. After the cut, I was impressed at how neat and nice he looked. So, I gave him a spontaneous compliment, "Wow Adam. You look so cute!"

His response was not what I expected.

He wasn't very happy with that comment. I asked him, "Why? Are you not cute anymore?" His candid reply was unexpected: "I know I'm still cute, but please don't call me that anymore! I'm a big boy now."

That comment left me smiling.

But it also reminded me of how fast he had grown up. Being the youngest, he had always been 'the baby' in our family. Apparently, he had begun to feel uncomfortable with that status and was trying to move on to another phase of life.

Time and tide wait for no man

It is quite common for kids at that age to start being independent. They may also begin to feel uncomfortable when treated like a little person.

Parents may find them reluctant to be hugged and kissed, especially in public. However, this does not mean that they love us less than before. It just means that they want to be treated like an older boy or girl.

This is a great reminder to all of us working parents. First of all, it is normal to wish that our kids will never grow up. Many parents want their little angels to stay cute forever.

This is because the little ones provide an endless source of entertainment. They gave us lots of funny and memorable moments during their growing years. They never resisted us when we wanted to give that quick hug or a peck on the cheek.



It is because of this that parents can sometimes feel that they have all the time in the world. They postpone spending time with the kids because they will do it some other time. Many spend a disproportionate amount of time at work thinking that there will be a break coming soon.

But guess what! The days turn into weeks and months, but the break never comes. On the contrary, we are getting busier than ever as our careers or businesses flourish and grow.

In the meantime, our children at home are also growing at a faster rate. They no longer like to be hugged, cuddled or called 'cute'. When that happens, parents lose a significant amount of parenting joy. There's no amount of money that can buy back the lost time.

Let's not become one of those parents. Looking back, there really isn't that much time. Try to look back at your children's photo albums, and you will know what I mean.

Once our young ones go to school, we will miss the days when they fell asleep on our chest. We will wish that we had just one more night to bathe them, dress them up and read them a bedtime story.

Now that they are busy with their school work and activities, we will be wishing for some quiet time just to have a decent meal together.

Talk to any parents with grown up kids; they will tell you a thousand more memorable stories. Chances are, they would no longer complain about the hardship; in fact, many would not want to do it any other way.

Value the moments

This hindsight forms the valuable learning we can fast forward to our situation today. Stop complaining about our children's antics because it will be for only a short time.

Never miss another dinner together because many necessary distractions will be coming soon. Stop pondering about whether to take that holiday; just pack and go instead.

We only have about five years to hold and cuddle them before they politely push us away. The next seven years will be spent in primary schools. The teenage years will be even worse. Many teenagers would prefer to spend time on their own or with friends instead.

As it is, time does fly indeed. One of the best measures of how much our kids have grown is to see how easy it is now to hug and kiss them, as their height is catching up fast!

Time is shorter than we think

Now that you are aware of the limited time, let's start doing more things together as a family. Stop holding back on life and love because things will never be the same once today is gone.

Take that break and go on that vacation. Read that book and play that game with them. Laugh at their jokes and feel the stress melt away while the bond is renewed. Don't worry about putting work on

hold once in a while because time with the family is much more limited. It will be time well spent because we don't really have much of it.

■ *This article was previously published in print.*



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Accountability Isn't That Hard

By **SHELLEY FLETT**
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IN the absence of clearly defined objectives and standards, many employees are left to make assumptions and guess what is expected of them in their role.

Even when employees are given a job description, it often doesn't align well with what they're expected to do day-to-day. One Gallup survey indicated that only 41 per cent of employees strongly agree that their job description aligns well with the work they do.

Not only is there a lack of role clarity, less than 50 per cent of employees are then held accountable for their performance. What this represents to leaders and organisations more broadly is a missed opportunity.

The challenge, without assuming a command-and-control style of leadership (which is direct and impersonal – and widely frowned upon), is that many leaders don't know how to effectively set expectations and manage the performance of their employees. As a result, accountability conversations become hard and challenging and often just don't happen.

For human resource (HR) professionals, this is experienced when supporting leaders through Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) processes with their employees. Often the PIP process is the only time a leader explicitly holds their employees accountable, but at this point, the relationship often deteriorates rapidly, and trust is eroded.

There is an opportunity, prior to the PIP stage, where leaders could be coached to develop their own style of leadership that balances the focus on people with a focus on results and holds employees accountable to their commitments.

Set expectations

The first step for a leader to hold their team accountable is to set expectations upfront. They are responsible for being clear on objectives or expected outcomes from the very beginning.

If leaders haven't set expectations, they can't give feedback on something they simply 'assume' others should know. Setting expectations includes outlining the desired outcome, the rules of engagement and the level of empowerment and authority they have.

Agree on a time frame for completion and gain commitment

Along with setting expectations on what is required, a leader should give employees a time frame for completion. Without a time frame, nothing is ever 'not done' – it's simply 'not done yet'. The time frame must be mutually agreeable, and leaders need to differentiate a solid 'Yes' from a hesitant 'Yeah, that should be okay' or 'I'll try' or 'Okay, I'll see what I can do'.

A hesitant commitment may indicate concerns about



other priorities, the time frame, or the task itself so leaders would benefit, at this stage, from asking questions to understand any deeper challenges employees may have.

Openly discuss 'why'

It helps for employees to know why they need to complete a task, not only for context but also to understand the impact on the broader business if it's not done. Where an employee hasn't followed through on their commitments in the past, their leader could focus on consequences at this point. They might ask, "What might happen if you miss this deadline?", which empowers employees to take responsibility and consider downstream impacts.

The accountability conversation

It may help to look at accountability from the perspective of commitment. Peter Bregman, in his *Harvard Business Review* article sees accountability as "not simply taking the blame when something goes wrong. It's not a confession. Accountability is about delivering on a commitment. It's responsibility to an outcome, not just a set of tasks."

The conversation itself is then just a discussion around what was committed to and what was delivered. A leader would refer to the initial conversation where the expectations were set, and the agreement made. Then they would ask, "What happened?", "What needs to happen now?" and "What support do you need from me?"

It's important to make the conversation as open and

supportive as possible. The key intention for having this conversation is to get employees to come to their own realisations about how they approached the task.

Repeat often

Consistency is key with accountability! Often leaders will 'let things slide' because they see it as being insignificant – this couldn't be further from the truth. Mike Ditka, an ex-American footballer, coach, and commentator famously said "in life, you get what you tolerate".

Every time they excuse behaviour or inaction, they're accepting it; therefore, it will continue. By having 'accountability conversations' regularly, employees will learn very quickly the importance of managing expectations and accountability conversations will be less frequent.

Holding others accountable doesn't have to be hard or challenging. Like the HR function, accountability is like the glue that holds a business together. It's a way to calibrate on what is being said and done and adjust – where necessary. Setting it up right from the beginning makes a difference.



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The 'E' Effect in Leadership

Three traits of successful leaders

By **PRAKASH SANTHANAM**
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EXPLORE, engage and empower are the 3Es or magic words that create successful leadership in organisations. With most organisations jumping on the bandwagon of talent engagement, this practice has become an essential component of leadership.

In line with the current trend, merging employee engagement with leadership is seen as a good recipe for success in business. Often, we look for role models who demonstrate good leadership and lead by example, yet we fail to see the leader within us.

At work, we are always trained to see our weaknesses and areas that need improvement instead of capitalising on our strengths. At school, we are taught to always look for the missing part in us so that we can become 'perfect' by hitting a score of 100 in all subjects.

This exercise gets carried over when we enter the workforce and we tend to exhibit similar behaviour at work. Many fail to focus on and explore their strengths which will lead to better engagement, satisfaction and happiness at work.

Let's explore these three components of successful leadership and how you can be a better leader.

1 Explore

A good leader is a talent spotter and has the skill to identify talent and uplift them to become leaders or successors. How can we be confident that there is a leader in us? Here are a few indications:

- We tend to create a positive and conducive working environment and empower those around us
- Everyone feels safe, secure and engaged in the presence of the potential leader
- A leader backs up and supports team members, gives them confidence and encouragement, prioritises the development of the members, and believes in them (maybe even more than they believe in themselves)

A written rule says, coaching, mentoring, job delegation, and many more traits are needed in order to be a good leader.

In my opinion, the capacity to be a good leader lies within us and to be one, we have to touch the hearts of those around us by empowering them and leading them towards success – be it on a personal or professional level.

At the explore stage, an experienced leader may be able to identify the leadership skills and potential in you. Otherwise, you have to take charge by doing a

self-review and thorough analysis to see where you are in leading yourself towards becoming future leaders. Start exploring the leader in you and capitalise on your strengths.

2 Engage

A leader can be spotted in a crowd because of their uniqueness, charisma, leadership traits and most importantly, the followers. Often, if we form a group for an activity and get them to select a leader, we tend to choose someone who we see as outstanding or exhibits unique features.

Engaging employees, keeping them motivated and retaining them in the organisation is a daunting task for many. A good leader has the ability to champion this and manage it tactfully.

In other words, engaging talents fuels leadership skills, leading towards empowerment and retention at the workplace. Involve your staff and make them feel part of the team.

Two key aspects of engaging employees are communication and bonding. These two factors can make or break working relationships and play an important role in bringing employees under one umbrella, with aligned core values and unified goals.

An essential challenge is to determine and measure the engagement level, and even though methods such as engagement or organisation climate surveys and Net Promoter Score (NPS) are available, there is a stronger need for a more tangible measurement unit in championing engagement efforts.

3 Empower

Employees need to be empowered to keep them going in the organisation. Empowerment means energising and enlightening employees at the workplace, making them feel at home, and creating a sense of belonging in the organisation – be it an emotional or rational commitment or discretionary effort at work.

Empowering them can also be in the form of encouragement and giving authority, freedom and transparency at workplace – yet again, this may strongly relate to the work culture and core values of the organisation.

Each company may have a different way and understanding of empowering employees. At times, motivation is seen as a key factor of empowerment for employees on an on-going basis.

A measuring unit for this comes as burning questions: Can we continuously empower employees at work? What are the key metrics and indicators for one to say "Yes, my team and my employees are empow-

ered and we see them being with us for a long time"?

Empowerment can carry different meanings to different employees depending on their employee life-cycle and other various reasons, yet the bottom line is for employees to take ownership, be committed, and enjoy what they do at the workplace.

A good leader needs to be equipped with the right knowledge, skills and traits to empower the workforce – be it at personal level or across the organisation. Empowerment has become a key requirement among employees as they want to work for leaders who encourage, guide and motivate them, and they want to perceive their leaders as role models.

In conclusion

With such high expectations, it creates more pressure on leaders to start working on these skills and leadership traits. Most current leadership styles dwell more on number of followers than being a role model.

As leadership is becoming an essential element in business sustainability and innovation, the 3Es are key elements of leadership.

An admired leader has the competencies mentioned above: explore (ability to spot talent and leaders in organisation), engage (get commitment and full involvement) and empower (ensure employees have the value of being respected and valued by leaders and organisation).

Can you recall the best leader you came across in your life and do they have the 3Es? Such competencies torch leaders and lead them towards professional growth, team empowerment and business success.

We've often heard this question, "Are leaders born or developed?" I am a strong believer of the latter and this is the first step in developing high potential, robust, and resilient leaders who can be role models in demonstrating the above competencies.

Start equipping yourself as leaders with the 3Es and benefits would pour in from all angles, combined with a noteworthy increase in the number of followers.

Begin to lead!



Prakash Santhanam is a highly passionate certified talent management/HR professional. He helps organisations move towards global excellence through executive coaching, talent attraction, selection, development and retention. He was the past president of the International Association of Coaching (IAC) Malaysia Chapter. To get in touch with him, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.



Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover

By **RICHARD NEWTON**
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A number of years ago, I went back to the town I grew up in and met up with some friends I had been to school with (a long time ago).

When I met my friends, they were sitting with an old man whom I vaguely recognised. It turned out he had been a teacher at my school. We had a very pleasant evening reminiscing over old times. I enjoyed his company very much.

What was surprising is that when I was at school, I strongly disliked this teacher. I never enjoyed being taught by him. Now, he seemed like a nice person. I was learning that my school boy judgements of someone might not be that accurate after all.

Anyone familiar with the *Harry Potter* series will be familiar with a more dramatic example of making the wrong judgement about someone – in the character of Severus Snape.

Throughout the story, many of the other individuals in the book, as well as most readers, got the wrong impression of Snape. At the end of the story, Snape turned out not to be the monster we thought he was, but instead one of the heroes of the story.

These are instances of a pretty universal phenomenon – the phenomenon where we find out that our judgements of someone else turned out to be wrong.

We have heard their words and seen their behaviours and come, usually very quickly, to a judgement about them. We have limited information on which we have based this impression, and often ignored anything which might lead to a different judgement.

The common reality is that our judgements about people, like most people's assessment of Snape, are often wrong.

The biasness of first impressions

There is an old expression 'first impressions count' and the associated follow-up that 'there's no second chance to create a first impression'. This is worth remembering because many people will judge us on first impressions.

For instance, it is thought that most people make up their minds about a candidate in the first few min-

utes of a job interview. This is prior to asking the most important questions on which the judgement should really be based upon.

Imagine you are going for an interview. Now, consider that you are going to be judged by first impressions. Obviously, you should try hard to create the best possible first impression, but when you think you are going to be judged on first impressions you probably consider that as unfair. There is so much more to you than that first impression.

However, let's turn the table around. Rather than imagining you are the one being judged, you are the person doing the judging. The sad truth is that you almost certainly judge some people only on a first impression basis.

This is not just unfair – it means you miss out on all sorts of opportunities from people who could be great to work with. You ignore them because of your probably poor first impression.

First impressions can create an overly bad or an overly good judgement about someone. I am not advising you not to form first impressions. That is impossible. We automatically make judgements about people based on first impressions. I am asking you not to be fixated on this first impression.

As you interact and observe the person over a longer period of time, even if this is as short as an interview, keep yourself conscious of the judgements you are forming.

Try to moderate them as you find out more about them. Challenge yourself – does the judgement you have formed really stand up to all the information you have?

What you see is not necessarily who they are

The problem lies not only with first impressions. Snape did not just create a bad first impression – he continued to reinforce this with ongoing unpleasant behaviour.

Some people adopt a certain persona or way of interacting at work which is not a reflection of who they truly are. Often, we judge such people on how they make us feel, rather than what they achieve. What they achieve is a much more relevant judgement in a professional situation.

When you judge someone as difficult, unlikeable or demanding, try to work out if the person you see is the real person. Might it be a role or persona adopted in specific situations?

At school, how many of us had poor impressions of teachers we did not like, but upon reflection in later life, we had to admit did a good job of educating us.

Some of us have to work with people as difficult as Snape. You would have to be a saint to have given him the benefit of the doubt. But there are many people whom we form bad impressions of unnecessarily.

If we take the time to get to know these people a bit better, or if we judge them on what they achieve rather than how they make us feel, we may create a much more positive image.

Concluding thoughts

Avoid getting fixated on your first impressions. First impressions rarely give the rounded picture on what we should really judge people on.

When you find yourself developing negative impressions of someone, take the time to work out if that is who they really are, or if it is just a way of interacting. Give people a bit more time and take the effort to get to know them and you will find they are really much better than you thought.

Of course, there will be some people you will never like. Even then, don't be hasty to judge them harshly.

It's great when we like the people we work with, but professional relationships are not always about making friends. They are about getting work done, achieving outcomes and delivering results. Judge the people you work with on how well they do these things.

■ This article was previously published in print.



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The Four Lenses of Communication

How to effectively convey a message to those who don't share your perspective

By SHANE MICHAEL HATTON
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DO you like a good story, or would you rather talk numbers? Do you enjoy grappling with abstract thoughts and ideas or do you prefer to hear about their concrete and practical applications?

The scientific research may have long since busted the myth of left-brain vs right-brain thinking, but when it comes to communicating a message or idea, we all still typically lean toward one of these as our preferred communication style. The problem is that our preference won't always resonate with everyone in the room.

If you prefer to focus on detailed analysis, you may disengage the people in the room who want to hear context. If you love telling stories, you may end up losing people who are interested only in the facts. If you spend all your time sharing your abstract ideas, you will frustrate people crying out for practical learning.

We also communicate a message from our own perspective. That perspective is generally framed by our knowledge and expertise, and this raises another key challenge.

The curse of knowledge

In their book *Made to Stick*, Chip and Dan Heath describe the Stanford University 'Tappers and Listeners' experiment of the early 1990s. Researcher Elizabeth Newton divided her test subjects into two groups. The tappers were given a list of 120 popular songs and tasked with tapping the melody to each song on the desk, while the listeners had to guess the song.

But the key to the experiment was in asking the tappers to predict what percentage of listeners they believed would guess the song correctly. The tappers predicted they would guess the song 50 per cent of the time. Of course, they would, when the songs were so easy to guess. As it turned out, just 2.5 per cent of listeners guessed the song correctly.

I've personally tried this activity a few times when speaking at conferences, tapping out the simplest, most familiar tunes, such as the national anthem or

happy birthday – with similarly disappointing results.

Why couldn't the listeners guess the song? The Heath brothers attribute this to a cognitive bias called the curse of knowledge. When a tapper taps out a melody, they sing along to it in their head, but all the listener can hear is a series of disconnected taps.

The insight here is that with the curse of knowledge it becomes impossible either to unlearn what we know or to know what it is like not to know it. The longer we are immersed in an area of knowledge, the more difficult it becomes to understand the perspective of those who don't share it.

I see this regularly when leaders try to communicate a message. They approach the topic through the lens of their own preferences and perspective – a leader who is deeply immersed in the strategic plan assumes that everyone understands the strategic goals. Technical experts who spend all their time immersed in a product can't understand why some people's eyes glaze over in the face of obscure technical jargon.

The solution? I have trained leaders to think about each idea they share through four different lenses. Thinking intentionally through different lenses helps leaders to appreciate different preferences and perspectives.

1 Text

The first lens focuses directly on the subject matter or key piece of information. It provides part of the context for the idea you want to share. Concrete and often analytical, it may comprise compelling data, research findings, a case study, a historical account, or a process or model.

In every room you walk into there will be people who are (perhaps unconsciously) waiting for material, measurable evidence to support what you say. This is about finding that evidence, demonstrating to these people that you have done the work and understand your subject.

2 Translation

How can you share your key information in a new way to make it comprehensible to people who think differently? What picture might help people to visualise your message? What story does the data tell?

Do you have a personal story with which to illustrate the research findings? If you are talking about a historical event, what might that look like today? How would you explain this information to a child or a person with no technical expertise?

3 Thoughts

Why are you sharing this information? This lens focuses on unpacking your personal thoughts and reflections on the subject matter. People don't just want to know what others have said; they want to know what you think.

There's a reason you have been given the opportunity to present your message or idea, and this is your opportunity to share it. What should people think or feel about this information?

4 Takeaway

Now you have shared your thoughts, what do you want people to do with the information? Once your message is distilled to its essentials, what can people take away and use?

Everything you share should build towards practical application. What would you like people to do when they walk away with the information you have given them?

Taking time to think about your message through these four lenses will force you outside your own preferences and perspective. While that may be uncomfortable for you, it will be unforgettable for your audience.



Shane Michael Hatton is a leadership and communication expert committed to helping leaders build and leverage their platform to lead, inspire and mobilise their people. Shane is the author of *Lead the Room – Communicate a Message That Counts in Moments That Matter*. To connect with Shane, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.



By **KIERAN FLANAGAN** and **DAN GREGORY**
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IN 2015, The World Economic Forum identified a predicted shift in desired work skills in the five years from 2015 to 2020. The future capability needs they observed moved from what might be thought of as technical or role-based skills towards what are usually considered to be soft skills – things like communication and empathy.

Today, such an observation scarcely raises an eyebrow as we've all become terribly familiar with the predictions of futurists who constantly remind us that artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, algorithms, outsourcing and off-shoring are poised to take over routine, repetitive or dangerous jobs. This renders the retraining and reskilling of our workforces the new normal.

Yet despite these constant warnings, change still seems to take us by surprise and sends the parents of school-aged children, human resource (HR) directors and executive trainers into a mild panic.

In 2018, Merlijn Venus, Daan Stam and Daan van Knippenberg, from the Universities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Drexel University, published the results of their research in the *Harvard Business Review*.

Essentially, they made the case that if you want people to embrace change, emphasise what will remain the same. In other words, familiarity creates a sense of confidence and competence when it comes to change strategies. So how might this apply to change and future-proofing your skills?

Our own research – interviewing hundreds of leaders, educators, futurists, economists and thought leaders around the world – has led us to similar conclusions. What we came to realise is that most of us view change in a very limited way.

We tend to focus on what is changing, or what needs changing, but few of us spend nearly enough time looking at what is unchanging. To fully future-proof ourselves, we need to be conscious of all these three spheres of change.

It turns out that the unchanging is critical to future-

3 Timeless Skills to Have



proofing our skills. Of course, certain technical skills, things like coding for instance, will be useful and in demand for a period, but as AI learns how to code itself more quickly and more efficiently than any human being is capable of, these skills too will fade like fashion.

So rather than focusing only on current trends or trying to predict the future, we chose in our research to compare these skills, roles, traits and characteristics with those that have always been necessary and make an assessment on which skills, if any, might be ever-green.

As much as possible, we looked across different epochs, cultures, industries and fields of expertise and discovered that there are certain functions that are universally identified as always being necessary, useful or at least a pleasant investment of our time. These skills clustered into three key areas: creativity, communication and control.

1 Creativity

Creativity skills include capabilities such as meaning making, insight generation, problem solving, cognitive agility, and a capacity to transform a raw resource, such as time or knowledge, into a more valuable format.

2 Communication

Communication skills were described as the ability to generate influence, to engender trust, to translate information from one context to another, and a facility to build collaborative teams across diverse areas of expertise and cultures.

3 Control

Control skills include things such as self-control, resource management and allocation, prioritisation, social order and an ability to implement – in other words, to execute and be decisive independent of preparedness or what might generally be considered adequate information.

The big picture

Of course, as technology continues to evolve, new technical skill sets and capabilities will demand our short-term attention; however, if we're to invest a significant amount of time, money and workforce into training for the future and want to truly future-proof our skills, it makes sense that we should invest in what will be forever.



Kieran Flanagan and Dan Gregory are experts in leading change and are the co-authors of Forever Skills and co-founders of The Impossible Institute. To connect with them, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.



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"If we helped grow one person into a leader, he or she would then be able to transform their community and if we kept repeating this over and over, nations will be transformed. And thus the vision of Leaderonomics began."

- Roshan Thiran, Group CEO and Founder of Leaderonomics