

THE MAGAZINE FOR MANAGERS / LE JOURNAL DU GESTIONNAIRE

CANADIAN

Manager

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Leaders in Management — A Publication of the Canadian Institute of Management — *La gestion par excellence*



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- The Stress Relieving Ability of Authenticity
- Leadership Insights From Success of the Highest Order
- Workplace Romance
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ABOUT THE CANADIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT

The pace of change is accelerating, and with change comes the challenge to adapt and improve. For over 60 years the Canadian Institute of Management has advanced careers and contributed to the field of management knowledge amidst changing times.

As a non-profit association the Canadian Institute of Management is Canada's senior management organization dedicated to professional development. As a member or a program participant CIM informs and trains management professionals to be better prepared for the challenge of change.

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To be the voice of Canada's professional managers by advancing interest in management excellence through education, certification and professional development.

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1. Provide a National Voice on issues affecting the Management Process
2. Be regarded as the Authority on Canadian Management developments
3. Increase the awareness of Management as a Profession
4. Develop and maintain Educational and other programs consistent with the aspirations of its Membership



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Benjamin Foo

Leadership Insights From Success of the Highest Order

A success that impacts not just a company but a nation.

What greater insights on leadership can there be than those demonstrated by success of the highest order? A success that not only span 50 years of track record, but one that will spill over to the next 50 years! A success that impacts not just a company but a nation. One that is not just country-centric but also influences other nations. And this results from, primarily, the leadership of a man and his team!

When a country's GDP per capita skyrockets in 50 years from USD500 to over USD55,000 a year, surpassing that of the USA – that's a modern day miracle! But it's not a fluke. It's created by great qualities in leadership, vision and commitment. And this offers valuable insights for personal and leadership development.

The circumstances and challenges faced in nation building were such that Singapore could easily have, by some wrong turns, remained a

small town in the backwaters of Asia today.

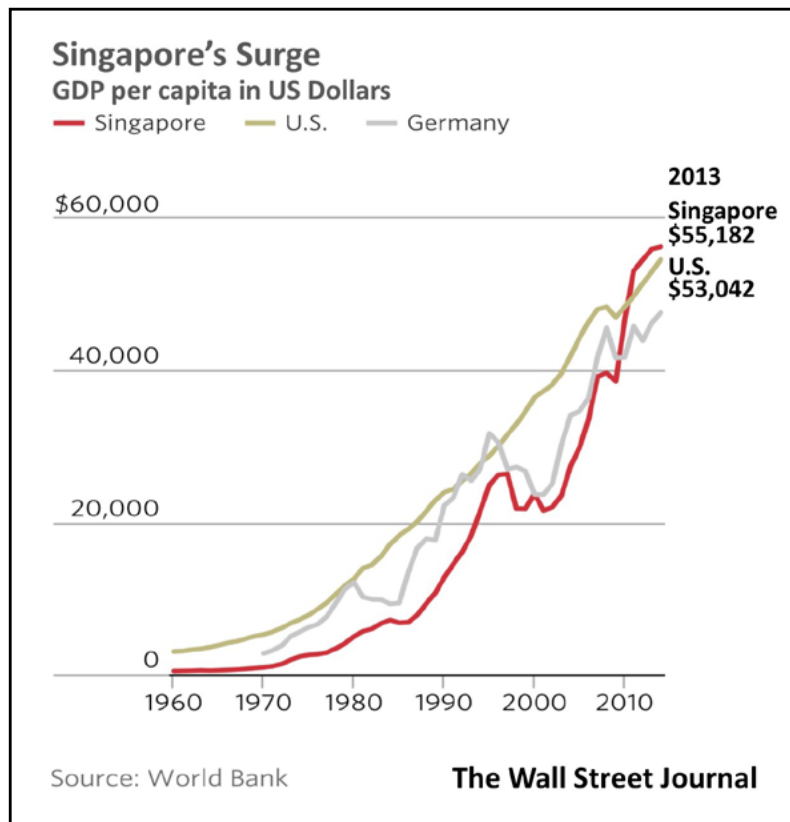
What happened, however, was extraordinary! We experienced history in the making – one that will not recur in the same way because the world will not see another leader quite like Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of modern Singapore.

US President Barack Obama said after meeting Lee Kuan Yew at the White House in October 2009 that *“this is one of the*

legendary figures of Asia in the 20th and 21st centuries”. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair described Lee as one of the most significant leaders of the late 20th century. Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed high praise for the socioeconomic advances and progress in science and technology that Singapore achieved under Lee, who had *“won the highest international influence.”*

With the passing of Lee Kuan Yew in 2015, surprisingly, members of both

the Australian and New Zealand Parliaments immediately paid special tributes to him during their parliamentary sessions. The Australian



government also passed a motion to record its “*deep regret*” on the passing of Lee and “*placed on record its acknowledgement of his role as founding father of the modern Singapore.*” And the New Zealand government ordered its country’s flag to be flown at half-mast as a mark of respect. What an honor!

In Singapore, hundreds of thousands had spontaneously showed their love and respect, queueing round the clock like never before, on the days following the passing of Lee Kuan Yew on 23 March 2015. That many were from the much younger generation, who never knew him in his prime, is astounding and moving – young adults, youth, teens and pre-teens! It was a natural, un-orchestrated, heart-felt outpouring of appreciation and gratefulness. He had influence even on those who never quite saw him in the thick of action! Yet they were deeply touched and thankful to be beneficiaries in a land of plenty with great prospects. And so they wept for the man who played the most critical role in creating it, whilst living so simply and frugally to the end. He even wanted his old, un-renovated house to be demolished when he passed on and not be turned into a memorial. He was self-effacing when his job was done.

This, however, is not an article to extol the man, as much as I highly respect him. But it is to

set the stage and context for us to see and learn the good from him, as we seek to live our best and make a difference in our world. Surely, we can gain some transformational insights from a man so extraordinary, can’t we?

Many words come to mind when people think of this double-starred first class honors, law graduate from Cambridge University. Lee was a visionary, a leader, and a fighter for what he believed. Not only, by western and eastern standards, was he highly passionate, persuasive and eloquent, he was effectively multilingual and a man of action and results who influence others to act right. He was honest, committed, courageous, consistent, tenacious and more. Hence, he was highly respected for what he represented.

What can we discover behind the external display of these characteristics that drove his actions? If we must narrow it down, what would they be? Please allow me to simplify and share just five key insights that, when applied, can help

us enhance the quality of our leadership and, hence, the extent of our influence and impact.

MAN OF INFLUENCE

Leadership, ultimately, is influence. It is an influence over others that imparts a shared understanding and motivation to effect the desired changes, actions and results. Clearly,

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He enjoys adding value to young adults, those at the cross-roads of life, senior executives, business owners and organizations in areas of leadership, organization development, communication, team building, entrepreneurship, and the peak performance of businesses and individuals.

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as shown above, Lee was a man of great influence over a very wide circle: world leaders, nations and, most of all, his own people. He had incredible influence. And so he was a leader extraordinaire.

While, like most men, he was not perfect, he does display one of the highest forms of leadership – one of influence where, over time, people willingly follow because of who he is and what he represents. How did he get there?

Getting to this point in leadership required him to have contributed to and cared for the nation, its people and its survival. People must see how you have consistently and persistently produced results, helped and cared before they can trust, respect and follow what you represent. And when they do, they are also more willing to make sacrifices for your cause, mission or vision.

On the other hand, a low form of leadership is one that is primarily positional – that is, *“I am a ‘leader’ because I have a position.”* These are ‘leaders’ that people have to, but not necessarily want to, follow. People *‘follow’* such *‘leaders’* because they control the *‘carrots’* and pay cheques.

This is, to varying extent, leadership by compulsion. And this seems to be a prevalent form of leadership, especially for people who are new in positions. Perhaps it is so because many don’t know any better. Many rise to a position because of their competency, performance and/or seniority and not necessarily their leadership. They may be managers but not necessarily real leaders. Often, by no fault of theirs, they have not acquired leadership skills nor had leadership development.

They, however, can still get good results. But there may be issues created with regards to stress, trust, engagement and teamwork. However, when people practice a higher form of leadership, trust, engagement, morale and results will rise optimally to its best.

CLARITY OF VISION

Western experts had concluded, from experience elsewhere, that the high-rise public

housing program in the early days of Singapore would create urban slums. How did anyone dare risk social and political catastrophe by going against proven experience and conventional wisdom? ***The clarity of why, what and how, among other things, produces a deep belief and its accompanying courage.*** Lee was very clear on why it was needed and how to make it work unconventionally. This naturally gave him the guts to drive it hard to unprecedented success. Instead of the urban slums predicted by experts, it became the model for others. This is but one example.

As we celebrate Singapore’s year of the jubilee, I drove from 12 am to 2 am on the eve of our 50th National Day on 9th August 2015 to various parts of the city and housing areas that were known to be poorer. I had bags of gifts for the poor and homeless but failed to find enough people to give them all out. And of the 10 bags given out, only 2 recipients clearly slept out in public regularly. I was actually thankful because this is a far cry from many cities I know where homelessness and begging is pervasive.

Clarity of vision and direction is a key driver. *“The whole ground can be against me,”* he said, *“but if I know it is right, I’ll do it”*. That’s the business of a leader.” The outcome, we see in this case, was courageous and visionary leadership that led to Singapore’s high level of home ownership of 90%!

DOING THE BEST

“I did my best,” were Lee’s own words. But don’t we all do that? Standards of best do vary widely. Some people’s best carry little weight. Some *“try”* their best, which is a nice way of saying they may or may not do it. He did his best with a significant difference. His best meant execution to its extremities! Now such commitment and capacity is very rare. *“I did my best,”* he said, *“and I could not have done more in the circumstances.”* Hence, his best comes with a quality of also being an unrivaled best.

Doing the best means unreservedly putting all that one’s got – passion,

capabilities, resources, effort and time – into action. “I’m very determined,” he said. “If I decide what something is worth doing,” he explained, “then I’ll put my heart and soul to it.” One’s best coupled with one’s clarity creates a high probability for peak outcomes and success.

NAVIGATION OF UNCHARTED COURSE

Independence was thrust upon one of the world’s smallest country with no natural resources, hinterland, modern industries and military to protect itself. In the darkest period after Singapore was separated from Malaysia in 1965, Lee wept and had to take a moment to regain his composure in front of the Press on national TV. He was devastated. This was not what he envisioned.

Yet Lee was immediately able to muster his courage and his crew to alter and chart the course to a new destination. Some people can be stuck to a vision that has hollowed out. They can’t recognize and accept the need to change and act fast enough to chart a new course to survive. **Anyone can steer a ship, but Lee charted a new course to success.**

TENACITY OF PURSUIT

In the midst of doom, Lee didn’t take long to assure the nation and forcefully say, “Never fear!” He was tenacious with a singularity of focus on what he needed to do for the country’s survival and success. Plan B kicked in. He gave his all to make it, as the outcome now shows, exponentially far greater than what he could have imagined under his original plan.

When we are clear what must be done, willing to give our unrivaled best and able to chart the course to a worthwhile destination, it gives us the power of focus that creates tenacity of pursuit and execution. We cannot give up or let go till we reach the finishing line. So, when you feel like throwing in the towel, you know what to do – re-examine your clarity and your willingness to give the best till it’s finished. Don’t let circumstances discourage you. Ask

yourselves if what you are doing is the right, important and must-have thing. And so, make the sacrifice of re-committing your best and doing what it takes to achieve it.

APPLICATION

Some of these things will resonate with what you see from your own school of experience.

The big difference is the degree, intensity and persistency to which we apply them.

For instance, I have always wanted to improve my Mandarin. But my few attempts pale in comparison because it was just a nice-to-have thing. I didn’t really see and feel that it was critical. So, I didn’t give my best.

Lee, on the other hand, had a long-term clarity that Mandarin for him was an absolute must-have and a do-or-die means for political survival and nation-building! He knew that if he could not speak the language that connected with the Chinese constituents, he would have lost to the pro-communist leaders. These were highly capable, linguistically and politically, of moving the Chinese mass. They would have “fix” him if he had lost, and Singapore would not be what it is today.

Lee gave his utmost tenaciously till his last days to something seemingly minor like Mandarin that many would not see as critical. That’s an extremely vast difference in the degree of clarity and pursuit. Without his multi-linguistic ability to communicate, he could have failed! And the consequences would be unimaginable!

May these insights inspire us to increase the quality our leadership, our clarity, our best, our navigation and our tenacity. A difference in degree, intensity, and persistency in these areas can alter the course of our journey to take us to an even better outcome and destination in life.



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