

Leadership, Humanity's Greatest Weapon Through Time

You feel at ease every day. We have indeed evolved and adapted a life-style where you don't have to worry. Assistants and servers now run on electricity and code; they won't ever contest or question you. Day after day you wake up feeling less bothered, as there is that safety-net idea that whatever you command, they'll do - bathing, cleaning, cooking, buying. What remains to worry you now, is thinking. To make decisions is what's left as your sole task, and frankly any decision won't take you out of your comfort zone.

One day as you are scrolling down the virtual projection screen atop your chair, something catches your eyes - pictures from the universe's most famous fast food chain. With flashy advertisements about the new triple layered BLT burger, you are intrigued to try it. Who knows what juicy flavors you will find at the middle of that burger? You press a button. 2 minutes and 43 seconds later you hear the words, "Your order has arrived." The decision is an ultimate bliss. As you chomp down the burger, dopamine bombards your brain. It's so good.

At this point you continue to scroll, but this time the newest hair-style trend fills the screen. In a heartbeat, with flimsy arms you reach to touch "Try It." The chair starts to fly, taking you to the nearest salon ready for grooming.

This is the pictured life of humans in *Disney Pixar's Wall-E* aboard the *Axiom Ship*. They escaped Earth as it was overwhelmed with garbage and trash due to consumerist behavior. At a glimpse, someone who has watched the movie will see this lifestyle as one with no worries. Everything has been programmed for convenience. Everything works under your command, giving you the sole task of making initial decisions in order to do something. Humans see themselves as masters in this situation simply because they execute orders.

Despite all this, it is interesting enough that Kati Henderson's reflection on the movie has defined it as a time "when robots are humans and humans are robots." Watching *Wall-E* as a child made me focus on the love-life of two robots. Overtime, my view of the movie changed; it was affected by how my eyes opened to the different problems of the world. The movie tackled consumerism, environmental degradation, as well as dilemmas in leadership. It is an alternate future reality that we need to avoid, and in my perception, it can be done through effective leadership. With this, the question that is left for us to ask, how can we utilize effective leadership plus critical thinking to literally change our future?

The Past: What Is Effective Leadership and How did it Evolve?

In one of the online classes that I took, leadership was defined as something we do. It's not innate in just some individuals, for we can all exercise leadership in our own unique ways. This thus termed it as something we can improve and build on. Time itself has proved this true.

During the 1940's if asked about its definition, one might have answered that an effective leader is he or she who is able to direct groups through influence and persuasion. With the world undergoing wartime, leaders were often seen as those forwarding groups to fulfill their purpose. So long as the interest of a certain group is brought forward, you can be coined effective - countries versus countries, military platoon vs another. This slowly changed in the 60's with the world protesting for social change. Leadership looked closer at the wide interest of the people. Influence moved from persuasion to behavioral impact. In this era, what interested me the most, is the tie of decision making to personal behavior, either of the leader or of the people. The world saw how moods and actions directly influenced the course of events, such as the civil rights movement in the US, anti-dictatorship movement in the Philippines, and many more.

As we move on to the present, leadership started to speak volumes. Corporate businesses all over the world emerged on top of previous existing ones. The work nature of executives in these environments, hence came to the forefront, giving a new tinge to the definition of leadership. Yet, in the time span of 70 years, we can see that some aspects remained – the criticality of influence, and the decision-making nature of a leader/executive. Peter Drucker defined an effective leader as one who makes decisions through a systematic scheme, aiming for what's right. He stated that a leader should also be able to properly execute decisions because until then, all of it are just good intentions. Depending on the situation one is in, whether unique or generic, effective executives must find ways to satisfy underlying conditions at the least, or make the right impact at the most. Moreover, in his other work - *Managing Oneself*, Drucker also stated, they who know themselves are those who succeed in executing. Effective leadership will always start from the person; again, it is something we do. This is where I believe the practice of critical thinking comes in.

By truly knowing our potential and limits, as well as having the highest level of conceptual understanding of the situation, only the sky is the limit. Captain McCrea of the *Axiom Ship* used critical thinking in making the decision to go back to Earth and save it. Once he got rid of his skepticism about the planet starting to recover (robot EVE brought a plant to him in the ship as proof), he didn't hesitate to counter AUTO – the ships' AI computer which wanted them to stay in deep space. Captain McCrea believed he could catalyze change, even though suffrage from microgravity and obesity literally stopped him in his tracks to achieve the goal. Like him, we can also make advances in today's society by using critical thinking to understand what humanity is going through, and what it we are truly capable of. Using critical thinking and situational analysis, we can work together to make a change.

The Present: How Should We Use It Now?

Humanity always proved triumphant over our problems through time. Mr. Drucker categorized our problems into four: truly generic, one that's unique for an institution but actually generic, truly exceptional, and an early manifestation of a generic problem. Each day we find new solutions to these, but in my opinion we could do better.

The greatest challenges we face in making right decisions were stated in *The Effective Decision* as: thinking through the right conditions, and converting the decision into action. Taking the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into example, all nations are trying to accomplish 17 goals - 17 goals that would change the world. Coming from a developing nation, the problems being tackled by the SDGs are heartfelt. The citizens of my country are engraved in poverty, inequality, human rights violations, and much more. Having deep-rooted dilemmas give my countrymen the thrill upon seeing aspiring leaders take different platforms, formulating new ways on how to tackle said dilemmas. From observation, there is always a commonality among these effective leaders who step up. They are usually the ones integrated to the people. They are the ones who either share the same problems, or experience them with the masses.

Drucker discussed that effective executives can properly test a decision's validity by going and looking at the situation directly. Whether in a business organization, non-profit, or even a movement, to be effective decision makers, we indeed need to be integrated first into the situation at hand. Nowadays, in the confusing maze of fake news, media, and data analytics we can all get lost easily; that is, unless we ourselves possess the map of knowledge and immersion.

Humanity has enough technology and experience to get one step closer to the SDGs. More on, the problems and difficulties we face, are what makes us all common. We all strive to grasp a better future. I firmly believe that by embracing our differences across businesses or even cultures, we can discover right decisions in pursuit of our much larger goals. With partnerships and the irrevocable reality that we are ever more tied by technology, it is possible to approach the problems of the world effectively. It is important that we follow the 6 sequential steps formulated by Drucker, but also as important to look at the problem from different perspectives. The wide array of culture and experience the world possesses is the best weapon humanity has.

I believe that a problem is not solely ours. Another human somewhere across the nation or even the world, sees the same hurdle as we do. Critical leaders will hence explore every human resource to make the right decisions – preferably those with experience or directly affected by the problem, and turn them into efficient actions. In my organization and university for example, people would often participate in Basic Mass Integrations (BMIs) to immerse into the livelihood of certain communities. They would experience firsthand the situation which stunts the growth of these communities. Ultimately, by forging partnerships with them, and having a deeper understanding of the situation at hand, effective decision making materializes.

The world at its present form is in itself giving enough preparation for the emerging generation of leaders to exercise critical thinking. Being bombarded by issues such as the current Covid-19 pandemic, racism, rampant natural disasters, and much more, give enough ground for this generation to ask themselves – what should we do to make things right? In businesses, younger employees are starting to cover positions that gives them opportunities to work with CEOs and senior officers.

At the hind of all these opportunities, the only obstruction to move forward, is not all individuals are given the opportunity to shine. Proper leadership should allow a possibility for others to grow and find their own voices.

The Future: What We Should Aim for and What We Shouldn't

The pace at which the world is operating is continuously accelerating as we move forward using technology and innovation. Our next 10 years could advance greater than our last 100. Assistive robots, AIs, lightning speed connections, would be readily accessible in the future. With numerous data and information being the pillar of such technologies, tackling problems would indeed be easier. But this is a threat to critical thinking and leadership as well if used wrongly.

Going back to the humans in *Wall-E*, they behaved robot-like. Technology overwhelmed humanity and made it very dependent upon it. Critical thinking should thus still lie on the people, and in no way should leadership be based on just data and information. Peter Drucker emphasized how critical it is to be able to define and categorize problems, specify the answers, and build them into action. We should not use technology to initiate these, more importantly we should not rely on it to do our bidding; they should only be assistive.

The SDGs and respective organizational goals should thus be achieved by exploring links and partnerships – ties between the east and west. We should also encourage ourselves to integrate into different cultures, explore new solutions by looking at problems from different perspectives, and being critical thinkers using the accelerating technology within our reach. Lastly, we should establish avenues for others to materialize and improve their leadership and critical thinking skills. Through these we could indeed avoid a future of sloppy BLTs and haircut trends enveloping us as if we are robots.

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