I am writing this Winter column on a day when the thermometer has reached over 90 degrees in New York City. I arrived in New York from my real home in Easton, Pennsylvania, where the thermometer was trying to challenge the big city’s heat.

All of my family archives are in Easton. The family belongings I treasure: a notebook filled with late 1800s, early 1900s sermons of my grandfather, the Rev. Orphanus Quincy Adams Richards, a Disciples of Christ–Christian Church minister. His language soars.

I love to keep them close—a reminder that my grandfather graduated from high school at fifteen, from Hiram College at nineteen, and was then ordained, at nineteen, as a minister in the Christian Church. The beautiful girl he would marry, Serena Harmon, graduated from an Ohio high school at fifteen, from Willoughby Seminary for Females at nineteen. Her seminary is now named Lake Erie College, a 155-year-old institution in Painesville, Ohio. When I spoke there recently, it was a moving moment when I could say, “My grandmother was a graduate of this school.”

And consider how impressive the school’s mission is, as stated on its website: “Lake Erie College provides an environment that stimulates intellectual curiosity, personal development and community involvement to prepare students to succeed as practitioners, professionals and responsible citizens in a contemporary world.”
So, the two bright young people married and were charged to go to the wilderness areas of Wisconsin that had no churches. Their job: go to a community that had no church, build a congregation, a church, and then move on to another wilderness area, repeat the building of a congregation, a church. I love to think about this newly married couple, “called to serve,” and called to the wilderness of Wisconsin in those early days.

Today, I have a strong feeling that if we challenged some of our nineteen-year-old “millennials” with similar opportunities, they would be on their way. A 2014 study, ‘The College Student Mindset for Career Preparation and Success’ by Barnes and Noble and Why Millennials Matter notes that more than 96% of students plan to travel or volunteer in addition to beginning a job, internship or grad school. More than 92% of that same cohort stated that they want to feel personally fulfilled with their work—‘fulfillment’ was ranked the top indicator of how they define success. Lowest ranking were ‘public recognition’, ‘achieving desired title’, and ‘achieving financial goals.’ The study stays with me.

The Five Most Important Questions: A New Edition

Currently, we are updating Peter Drucker’s book, *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*, for a new generation of leaders. It is no surprise that the book became a bestseller, given the compelling and concise chapters written by Peter and others, built around the five critical self-assessment questions:

1. What is our mission?
2. Who is our customer?
3. What does the customer value?
4. What are our results?
5. What is our plan?

Our new edition of the book—titled *Peter Drucker’s Five Most Important Questions: Enduring Wisdom for Today’s Leaders*—is targeted to both millennial leaders (the largest generational cohort yet) and tenured business leaders who are eager to bring onboard, develop, and promote young leaders in the midst of the looming mass retirement of baby boomers.

We hope to inspire a new generation of Peter Drucker followers, and have gathered a unique group of emerging and experienced Leaders of the Future, whose new contributions share new perspectives and insights on how today’s lenders are using Peter Drucker’s time-honored blueprint.

In addition to the original contributors, including bestselling author Jim Collins, Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, and author Philip Kotler, one of the world’s leading experts on marketing; new contributors include Adam Braun, founder, Pencils of Promise (and author of the bestseller *The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change*); Caroline Ghosn, Founder & CEO, Levo League; Raghu Krishnamoorthy, vice president, head of Executive Development and chief learning officer, General Electric; Joan Snyder Kuhl, founder of Why Millennials Matter; and Mike and Kass Lazerow, founders of Buddy Media, and 2012 Hesselbein Institute Leader of the Future Award recipients. The book is now available on our website: www.HesselbeinInstitute.org.

Remembering Warren Bennis

Warren Bennis was one of our most generous thought leaders. He met with us, wrote for our publication, and spoke at our leadership conferences. He was always
No one can ever take Warren’s place—he was truly a friend of the heart.

available for us, and we cherished his wisdom and advice.

We are grateful that we had Warren Bennis with us for so long. Now, we say, not “Good-bye,” but, “Warren, we hold you in our hearts, with deepest gratitude forever.”

Conclusion

We were honored this year once again by being recognized with an APEX Award for Publication Excellence in categories of writing and site content. This is the twenty-sixth year of these prestigious awards, and we are particularly honored this time, given that there were nearly 2,100 entries. Communications Concepts, the sponsor, describes it on its website as: “An Annual Competition for corporate and nonprofit publishers, editors, writers and designers who create print, Web, electronic and social media.”

Leader to Leader rises to this recognition because of the quality of the people who write for us—their contribution! Let’s celebrate!

Frances Hesselbein is editor-in-chief of Leader to Leader, founding president of the Drucker Foundation, president and CEO of The Frances Hesselbein Leadership Institute, and former chief executive officer of the Girl Scouts of the USA.
PETER DRUCKER
AN AMAZING GRASP OF CONTEXT
by Bob Buford

“Bob was one of the early great thought leaders who discovered ‘the father of modern management,’ Peter F. Drucker, and felt called to help move Peter across the country and around the world. Bob and I traveled to Claremont to convince Peter that our new institute had to be in his name. It was the only battle Peter ever lost. We will always be grateful to Bob who opened that door.”

—Frances Hesselbein

“It is through you and your friendship that I have attained in my old age a new and significant sphere of inspiration, of hope, of effectiveness: the mega-churches. You cannot possibly imagine how much this means and has meant to me, and how profoundly it has affected my life.”

—Peter Drucker

The quotations that open this article provide a sense of the deep impact Peter Drucker had on my life, as a mentor and a friend. In 1997, Atlantic Monthly editor Jack Beatty interviewed me for two hours for a book he was writing, The World According to Peter Drucker. This was pretty heady stuff, even for a Texan, and I confess to at least a small dose of hubris as I awaited the book’s release. I was smart enough to realize that not all of my erudite observations would appear in the book, but two hours would certainly provide this world-class journalist with a fair amount of provocative material.

When I bought the book upon its publication the following year, I quickly paged through it, looking for my contribution, only to discover that all my pontificating on Peter had been reduced to a mere six words: “He’s the brains, I’m the legs.”
“He’s the brains, I’m the legs.”

After I got over myself, I realized that those six words accurately captured our remarkable relationship. Peter passed along to me—and others—his vast knowledge of how the world works, and I applied that first to my business and then to the world of large churches. He challenged me with his thinking; I responded with a plan of action and, often with the help of others, executed it. I have given up thinking that any of my ideas are original or unique, for just about everything I know about running a business or nonprofit came from Peter. As I have written previously—and have said so many times—I have long ceased trying to determine which thoughts are mine and which came from Peter.

Writing for Action

Beatty noted that Peter “is a thinker, not an academic,” and “above everything, he is a teacher.” That distinction is more than semantic. Peter was all about results, coaching me to “write for action” as I embarked on my first book, Halftime. He contributed the foreword to that book, six pages of tightly packed wisdom written on September 1, 1994. Writing about an organization I formed after my career in business, he offers that my “. . .Leadership Network worked as a catalyst to make the large, pastoral churches work effectively, to identify their main problems, to make them capable of perpetuating themselves (as no earlier pastoral church has ever been able to do), and to focus them on their mission as apostles, witnesses, and central community services. And now he is extending this work to many churches, including midsized ones, not as a preacher but as an entrepreneur who converts latent energies into performance.”

In 2001, Peter honored me by writing “The World Is Full of Options,” the foreword to my book Stuck in Halftime. In it, he writes that “I believe more and more people will look to the social sector—volunteer organizations like the church, education, community services, and so on—for either a new career or one that parallels a current position.”

An obituary for Peter in the Economist, one of his favorite publications and one for which he several times wrote fascinating, extended essays, contrasted him with “academic clones who produce papers on minute subjects in unreadable prose.” His prolific writing was never intended to impress other professors but rather to be read by actual managers, giving them knowledge that would make their organizations more productive, which in turn would contribute to a fully functioning society. Indeed, a 2003 collection of his essays, which he personally chose and edited, is titled A Functioning Society: Selections from Sixty-Five Years of Writing on Community, Society and Polity. It contains “The New Society,” a nineteen-page essay he published in the Economist in 2001.

His influence was widespread. By the 1980s, about three-quarters of American companies had adopted a decentralized model that Peter had championed in his prescient 1946 book, Concept of the Corporation. In the preface to the 1972 edition of that book, he concludes, “We have to learn to manage and to control large-scale organizations. To be able to do this, we have to first understand them.”

Peter, of course, wrote and taught on both the organizational and personal levels, where his insights
were equally profound and wide ranging. I applied his lessons as I was seeking wisdom about how to make the second half of my life as meaningful as possible. He possessed an amazing grasp of the context within which I was operating, adapting five basic questions he had developed for executives to my quest for significance:

1. What is my business on earth?
2. Who are my customers or those whom I hope to serve?
3. What are their values?
4. What have been my results so far with that group of customers?
5. What’s my plan going forward?

I can honestly say that I never would have been able to enter the new entrepreneurial domain for which I felt called without Peter’s mentoring. I have always believed—and still do—that no one is indispensable. As we church people like to say sometimes, the Spirit moves as he chooses. Had Peter and I chosen some other entity into which we invested our resources, I’m confident that God would have raised up someone else to accomplish what he has through large, entrepreneurial churches. What I still find remarkable, however, is how our lives intersected and grew into something more than either of us could have imaged after our first meeting in the early 1980s in his home in Claremont, California.

What Peter Did for Me

Due entirely to Peter’s stature, the business media not only took note of his work with mega-churches but seemed genuinely intrigued that he spent so much time in a world unknown to them. In doing this, they provided to a different audience a spotlight on the likes of church leaders and institutions such as Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, and Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California.

In 2002, three years before his death, *Inc.* magazine published an article, “The Uber Mentor,” about how Peter mentored me, as well as John Bachmann, who had been chairman and CEO of the innovative brokerage Edward Jones, and Nan Stone, who had been editor of the *Harvard Business Review*. In that article, I identified nine contributions that characterized Peter’s influence on me as a mentor over the years:

1. He identified the landscape for me.
2. He defined the opportunities, the “white space”—what is needed now.
3. He helped me clarify my strengths and capacities.
4. He identified the myths, the false paths, the incorrect assumptions of the “industry” within which I was working.
5. He encouraged me to “go for it.”
6. He helped me sort out the right strategies.
7. He affirmed results.
8. He pointed out wasted effort.
9. He (gently) held me accountable.

Aside from the twelve apostles, I don’t think anyone could have had a better mentor.

Learning from Mentoring

A few years ago, I asked my friend Joe Maciariello to try to make some sense out of the more than one hundred hours of taped transcripts that came out of my regular meetings with Peter. Joe collaborated on several books with Peter, taught alongside him at the Drucker School in Claremont, and is the coauthor, with Karen E. Linkletter, of the foundational work, *Drucker’s Lost Art of Management: Peter Drucker’s Timeless Vision for Building Effective Organizations*, published in 2011. What Joe discovered, among other
The guest list to his eightieth birthday party was itself a tribute to the many great lives Peter had touched, including Andy Grove, cofounder and CEO of Intel; Mort Myerson, CEO of Electronic Data Systems and later Perot Business Systems; C. Gregg Petersmeyer, assistant to President George W. Bush and director of the Office of National Service; C. William Pollard, CEO of ServiceMaster Co.; James Osborne, national commander of the Salvation Army; and a host of other leaders from business, government, and the nonprofit sector. Frances Hesselbein, now the president and CEO of the Frances Hesselbein Leadership Institute and earlier the CEO of the Girls Scouts of the USA, helped me organize this memorable event in New York City. We called it “A Day with Peter F. Drucker: An 80th Birthday Celebration.”

Within a few days of returning home to Dallas, I received a letter from Peter, typed on his manual typewriter, complete with a hand-corrected typo. Peter was perhaps the most courteous man I’ve ever known, and I had grown accustomed to receiving similar notes of encouragement or appreciation. He never lost sight of the human side of every equation and took the time to recognize the contributions of others.

But this letter was different. In addition to thanking me for the birthday celebration that I had had a hand in organizing, he revealed something that I still find incredibly humbling, because it more or less confirmed Joe Maciariello’s view that in the best mentoring relationships, the mentoring flows in both directions. As the recipient of Peter’s teaching and friendship, my life has been enriched beyond any measure I could have imagined. That the working out of my quest for a more significant life had any impact on Peter is a fitting illustration of what it means to be a lifelong learner. This is a portion of that letter to me:

But above all, this is a letter of profound thanks for what you, Bob, have done for me and for the third “half” of my life—the last fifteen or so years. It is through you and your friendship that I have attained in my old age a new and significant sphere of inspiration, of hope, of effectiveness: the mega-churches. You cannot possibly imagine
how much this means and has meant to me, and how profoundly it has affected my life. I owe you so very much for your generous willingness to allow me to take a small part in your tremendously important work—I cannot even begin to tell you what your confidence in me and your friendship has meant for me.

In warm and affectionate gratitude,
Peter Drucker

Conclusion

Peter could not have known then that his “third half” would continue for another fifteen years. Or that, spurred along by his influence, large churches would continue to innovate, experiment, and change in order to do a more effective job of introducing people to God and nurturing their relationship with him. And that these churches would provide millions of hours of community service outside their own walls. It is nearly ten years since Peter’s death, but his influence, encouragement and challenge continue to guide me every day of my life.


Bob Buford is a graduate of University of Texas and the Owner/President Management Program at Harvard Business School. Until the sale of his company, Buford served as chairman and CEO of Buford Television, Inc. He played active roles in Young Presidents’ Organization and World Presidents’ Organization.

In 1994 Buford wrote the bestseller, Halftime, a book about how to deal with the second half of our lives and later launched Halftime, an organization to help successful people convert their faith into action and effective results.

Shortly after the death of his longtime mentor, Bob spearheaded the efforts to launch the Drucker Institute. His book, Drucker & Me (2014), is his story of that friendship and lessons learned. You can learn more about Bob at www.ACTIVEnergy.net and on Twitter @bobbufordTX.
Success is often viewed as a linear path involving the attainment of a proper education, completion of a degree, development of an impressive résumé, and commitment to working your way up the ladder into a high-paying job so you can eventually retire.

We are driven to succeed and often sacrifice family, friends, vacation time, sleep, and unfortunately our passions to rise to the top. Yet, is there really only one way to get to the top? Notice that volunteerism and community leadership do not have a role in the path to success described above. Despite a world that is increasingly embracing the need for social change and a budding youth generation that is historically service driven; we still grow up to view volunteerism separate from our careers. Volunteering is still often considered a hobby, unrelated to our business life, that we attend to only if we have spare time.

Is the value of money worth more than the value of volunteerism?

Volunteerism at a Glance

Humanitarian or volunteer work as a whole is not held with the esteem that it deserves in the workplace. We live in a bottom-line world, in which dollar signs drive our decisions and business. The worst part of this is these values are engrained in us at a very young age.

I recall in grade school being asked what I wanted to be when I grew up. I started off young and naive, thinking anything is possible; answering the age-old question based on my passions, “I want to be a ballerina, a writer or maybe a fashion designer.” Yet, I became
quickly jaded by the world around me, and I found by the age of ten my answers that had already changed to be more “practical.” My passions were replaced with dollar signs: “I want to become a lawyer. . . . Why? Because they make over $100,000 a year.”

This may not seem like a problem to many; it is important to make a reliable living, and there is nothing wrong with wanting to pursue a successful career. The issue lies with the indifference society has toward volunteerism as it pertains to their careers. According to the 2014 Bureau of Labor Statistics, 74.2 percent of the U.S. population did not volunteer last year. It was noted in the 2005 Bureau of Labor Statistics that the number one reason individuals do not volunteer is a lack of time. If you ask a young person to volunteer, it is not uncommon for them to decline the opportunity because of a conflict with work and school. Even as teenagers, when we often do not yet need to be completely financially independent, we will pick the minimum-wage job at the cash counter over a leadership opportunity as a volunteer.

Volunteerism is seen as an “extra”; something to add on for good-hearted intent when we have time and not something that could be of value in our career pursuits.

However, there is so much hidden value in volunteerism beyond the intrinsic reward of doing good. I have achieved most of my accomplishments and career advancements to date based on my leadership work as a volunteer. Volunteerism can build soft skills, garner field experience, and provide an outlet for leaders not only to explore their talents but also to jumpstart their careers.

**Getting Your First Break**

From my experiences, I believe there is a glass ceiling for youth in the corporate world. Rather than the common gender debates that linger from past decades, I have witnessed an increasingly prominent barrier for youth to enter the workforce. Age is viewed as a disadvantage, translating to a lack of experience and qualification for high-level leadership roles. I have shared this view with many executive-level mentors, and though many acknowledge these barriers, one conversation has remained forefront in my mind. In speaking with the CEO of a leading global company, it was discussed that “age isn’t a factor, it’s experience.” This brings an interesting debate, as it now becomes the classic “chicken-and-egg” scenario. How can a youth garner the experience to be considered for hire if no one will take the chance to give him or her a first role to gain that experience?

This is where volunteerism takes precedence over our practical career ideas. A minimum-wage job working frontline at a store will not provide you with the experience necessary to be considered or taken seriously from a global company or established brand. So how can one gain experience and refine one’s skills to prepare for a desired career? Volunteerism.

As a volunteer you can be mentored by professionals, try your hand at a variety of skills and roles, all at your own pace. If you want to pursue a career in finance, you can volunteer your time to help a local nonprofit with their accounting practices; in doing so you get hands-on experience practicing skills that are relevant to your career objectives. If you are an aspiring videographer, there is nothing wrong with offering to do pro bono work to build up your portfolio. In fact, taking the time to volunteer your services and build your skills is often respected by employers because it demonstrates leadership and an altruistic nature beyond your evident talents.

**The Free Labor Debate**

Many will debate this perspective and argue that individuals deserve to be paid for their talents and values. I do not object to this; however it needs to be a give-and-take arrangement. You may be a highly talented videographer, but without a portfolio and experience it will be difficult for you to find clients who will pay for your services. It is not “selling yourself short” to volunteer your time to build your career; rather it is an investment in your future. The truth of the matter is you need to start somewhere. You can continue to hold out for paying opportunities, but you will be stuck in that chicken-and-egg scenario.
To worsen matters, youth unemployment is a prominent concern across borders with rates as high as 51 percent in Greece as of March 2014. Upon graduation, undergraduates are finding the workplace oversaturated, and it is difficult to stand out from peers and differentiate one’s qualifications and skills. Volunteerism provides an avenue for differentiation. Leaders are able to build their careers beyond their education, add diversity to their portfolios, and apply their learning beyond the classroom.

I have a twenty-two-year-old colleague who has been a web developer for thirteen years. If you have done the math, yes, he started his career at the age of nine. Do you think when he was nine people were willing to pay for his services? No, he volunteered his time and worked to build his portfolio through a variety of pro bono work. In doing so, within two years’ time he had founded his own web developer business and would later find himself in a career developing for Fortune 1000 companies before the age of fifteen. While not for all, volunteerism can be a powerful tool to expedite an individual’s career and leadership. It allows us as leaders to act on our ideas and take steps toward our goals at our own pace. My colleague could have gone the traditional route and stuck to education, waiting until he obtained his degree to qualify him for his trade. However, he didn’t need to wait; volunteerism gave him the experience and respect of professionals to pursue his passion at his early age.

I believe that volunteerism is undervalued and is one of our greatest assets as leaders. Not only can we build our own experience but we can harness volunteerism to power our own business goals. I run three companies under my corporation, and each got its start or is still volunteer run. As a young entrepreneur I did not have the resources to hire staff or a team to bring my ideas to life. Financial limitation is a common barrier for most entrepreneurs. One of the most common answers I hear from youth when asked why they don’t believe they can lead community change is that they don’t have money. The first thought on most young entrepreneurs’ minds when they enter a networking room is who they can approach to ask for funding. I ask you then, What happens when this funding is not raised? Should everyone give up and treat this as a sign from the universe that their ideas weren’t good enough? No. Money shouldn’t dictate your success or potential. Though it may be more difficult without funding to bring your idea to reality, it doesn’t mean it can’t be done.

Rather than letting financial obstacles bar me from my pursuits, I turned to volunteerism as a solution. Volunteerism is a reciprocal relationship. You can grow with your goals, but you also give the opportunity for others to grow with you. Everyone needs to start somewhere; to break that threshold and take on her first experience. Why not create that opportunity for someone else in pursuit of your own business goals? As an entrepreneur I built my ventures with volunteer teams, taking the risk but allowing the opportunity for young talent to become involved in my vision. In doing so I was able to build my business despite a lack of resources and funding; I could move beyond the dollars and nurture my vision. In many ways it was a blessing in disguise. My passion was put to the test and my vision challenged. I was forced to build a team based purely on passion, one that shares a common belief in my vision and was comprised of individuals who were committed to helping me succeed.

We can harness volunteerism to power our own business goals.

Collaboration

In tandem with volunteerism is collaboration. A volunteer team in itself is merely a mutual collaboration. Volunteerism in the business sector does not always have to be on an individual basis. It may be seen as
Money shouldn’t dictate your success or potential.

marketing budget. It is a give-and-take relationship; in some cases you must be willing to sacrifice your value in order to build the stepping stones for success in the future. Yet, if you are willing to take the risk, the reward can be well worth it.

Power of Enablement

The future of business lies in our ability to see past the dollar signs and follow our passions. Volunteerism lies at the heart of this industry shift, and as leaders we need to help foster this wave of change. As leaders we can take advantage of the opportunities in our community to grow our skills and build our experience. Entrepreneurs can find strength in pursuing their ideas beyond their financial obstacles, and as professionals we can explore new partnerships. Most important, we feed into a cycle of enablement. Volunteers provide the support and labor to help entrepreneurs pursue their visions, and professionals provide the opportunities for young leaders to build their experiences.

Volunteerism is not a frivolous endeavor; it can in many ways be a strategic path for personal growth and business development. As a volunteer you can have the opportunity to work alongside mentors or expose yourself to a more challenging line of work. As a business you are able to collaborate with fresh talent, acquire human resource support, and access innovation that otherwise may be beyond your immediate capacity. In both circumstances a symbiotic relationship is nurtured.

I like to envision volunteers as freshly planted seeds in the barren soil of a new business. There are not many resources initially available to the volunteer or business. Unconventional, but taking a volunteer collaborative approach to corporate partners can have its hidden advantages. Corporate collaboration enables small-scale companies to access the larger market share; this is of particular use for young entrepreneurs. Why struggle as a small organization to build a network of consumers when you can tap into one already established and maintained by a larger corporation? This notion is most advantageous in marketing. Marketing budgets can be a huge cost to an organization of any size and be multifaceted, including design, public relations, social media management, and traditional advertising. For a startup, having the funds readily available to put together a cohesive marketing campaign with all of these components is very demanding and expensive. Through a collaborative approach, one can leverage one’s own assets to combine forces with other organizations. For instance, as a videography company you could offer to volunteer time to create a promotional video for a public relations firm in return for them assisting with your marketing campaign. Bartering is a traditional custom respected but long since forgotten by many in our dollar-driven society. The power in collaborating even with large billion-dollar corporations is underestimated. Corporations regularly get asked for money, and unless you have an extremely compelling case or have equal brand power, you can expect a difficult time in finding large-scale support in your early stages. If you go into a board meeting and your first ask is not financial, you open up a new avenue of partnership that is rarely explored. Budgets are finite, however, in-kind services and time create a different conversation. You will find increased flexibility for partners to meet your needs if in your early stages of development you are willing to collaborate and in some cases volunteer your services.

Volunteerism and collaboration are the core principles that support my business. Through such efforts, I have been able to scale my startup from an idea into a full-fledged national organization in less than six months. I have secured advertising in more than 360 storefronts across the country, online marketing to more than 200,000 users and access to video networks made up of more than 120 million subscribers without a
Volunteerism is a reciprocal relationship.

to grow independently. The seed needs soil to unleash its roots, and the land needs nutrients to prosper. Working in tandem, the seed can grow its roots and develop its flower while the land can become fruitful to support more life with the nutrients from its plant. Both develop as they need but through the process form a bond. The flower can certainly spread its seeds and move on; however with strong roots in its current land it often will in part always remain. As a business matures and grows its capacity, those who have grown with it often become integral parts of the team. As such, there is a transition from volunteer to colleague and equal.

I have seen some of the strongest teams evolve in this way. It is unique to any other recruiting process as you find individuals who share in the passion and vision of the business. For volunteers to commit their time and energies, they must care about their work and believe in your mission. You do hire individuals that clock in for their 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. shift; you collaborate with team members who stay overtime, wake up in the middle of the night with a burning idea, and come to work in the morning with a genuine desire to be there.

This is where the true key to prosperity lies. When you can build a business and team that runs on passion, not dimes.

Conclusion

The best gift we can provide our society is the gift of service and enablement. As leaders it is our responsibility to lead this shift; to provide opportunity and empower our peers. By supporting others in their goals, you will grow in your own pursuits and in many cases build lasting bonds along the way. Everyone has to start somewhere. In your own career, at one point you had to take your first step. What was your first experience or opportunity to build your skills? More important, who took that risk and gave you a chance? I challenge you to become that first step for someone else as your past supporter was for you. In doing so, we can create a strengthened economy, one that does not only revolve around dollar signs but around leadership and service.

Volunteerism has a true place in the future of business. It is not an “extra” to consider after we find success, but rather an integral part of our career development. When embraced, volunteerism can be worth more than money.
LEADING WITH QUESTIONS

by Greg Bustin

Leaders are problem solvers.

It’s okay to admit that you’re better than most people at fixing things. I’m not talking about being handy around the house. I’m referring to your ability to fix business problems affecting your organization.

You’re a potent combination of characteristics that have propelled you into the upper echelons of your organization, perhaps all the way to the top: technical ability, problem-solving acuity, seasoned judgment, a keen sense of urgency.

When you see that something’s not as it should be, you move quickly to fix it. You assess the situation, formulate possible options, select the best one, then direct your colleagues to implement that option.

The result is that a potential problem is avoided or an actual problem is solved. You’ve achieved a positive outcome in the short run. But is it the best outcome? What effect is your behavior having in the long run on your organization and your colleagues?

Good leaders are problem solvers. Exceptional leaders are great questioners.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates popularized a form of inquiry and discussion between individuals that was based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to illuminate ideas.

So when you stop acting like Mr. Goodwrench and start leading like Socrates, you will find that occasionally setting aside your direct approach and adopting a more inquisitive one will change you and your organization for the better.
Exceptional leaders are great questioners.

The Power of Questions

Questions wield enormous power. And the most powerful questions are often simple ones, which don’t always translate to easy answers.

Asking questions is a conversation—a journey to a new destination traveled together.

The opposite also is true. Consider the impact of leading a team or an organization where questions go unanswered or—worse—unasked.

First, a reluctance to ask a question diminishes confidence. If you fear embarrassment from asking a so-called dumb question, you’ll reach a point at which you choose to remain silent. The flip side of this coin is a reluctance to admit you don’t know the answer to a question. Either way, this kind of fear imprisons you and eventually puts a major dent in your self-esteem. This kind of fear also likely places a ceiling on your career.

Second, a reluctance to ask a question hinders individual and organizational performance. How many times have you left a meeting where the purpose of the meeting, the decisions made in the meeting, and the next steps coming out of the meeting were fuzzy? Asking questions brings clarity to purpose, decisions, and tasks. Are we addressing the right opportunity? What do we want to accomplish? Who will do what by when? If those issues are not clear, the chances of achieving the outcome we say we want are reduced.

Third, a reluctance to ask a question hinders intellectual growth. Life is not a multiple choice exam, so those in the workplace are well advised to learn that the way a question is asked often determines the quality and practical application of the answer. What’s more, when questions are asked, those on the receiving end of the question learn just as much—about a situation, themselves, and the person posing the question—as the questioner. Asking questions improves listening skills, strengthens problem-solving abilities and fosters innovation.

Fourth, a reluctance to ask questions hinders teamwork. High-performing teams are built on a foundation of trust. It’s easier to ask the tough, necessary question if you’re confident the people around the table have each other’s best interests and the best interests of the organization in mind. Questions promote self-awareness and create a professional framework for resolving conflicts. Are the questions being asked in your organization posed to learn or to judge?

Fifth, a reluctance to ask questions hinders organizational growth. A so-called dumb question can unlock an organization’s potential or fix a problem that adds hundreds of thousands of dollars of profitability. Asking questions allows a problem or opportunity to be considered from a fresh perspective. It’s staggering to think where some organizations would be today if the obvious question—Why do we do this that way?—had not been asked. A questioning organization is a growing organization: It encourages questions, challenges assumptions, learns from experiences, and embraces the type of positive change that allows it to achieve and sustain high performance.

Let’s examine three scenarios where leading with questions can deliver powerful outcomes.

Life is not a multiple choice exam.
Unlocking Organizational Performance

Scenario 1: Leading with questions to unlock organizational potential

When Peter Drucker died in 2005, Jack Welch, former chairman of General Electric Co. and regarded as one of the most successful business leaders of his time, called Drucker “the greatest management thinker of the last century.”

Drucker was a master at posing the deceptively simple question that could unlock potential in people and, ultimately, in organizations.

Early in Welch’s new role as CEO of GE, he invited Drucker to the company’s headquarters. Drucker posed two questions to Welch that shaped the CEO’s long-term strategy: “If you weren’t already in a business, would you enter it today?” “And if the answer is ‘No,’ what are you going to do about it?”

These two simple yet pointed questions prompted Welch to insist that every GE business had to be either number one or number two in its class. If one was not, the business was fixed, sold, or closed. The strategy that transformed GE into one of the most successful American corporations of the past twenty-five years started with two questions posed by Drucker.

One of Drucker’s guiding principles was the belief that “what everybody knows is frequently wrong.”

Whether or not you agree with this premise, consider posing one or two of the following questions to your team of leaders the next time you’re together at one of your regular meetings:

• Do we really know how we make money? Are we crystal clear on why our customers buy from us instead of our competition?

• What are the barriers customers and prospects must overcome to do business with us? What can we do to make it easier for them to become major users?

• What are the barriers we can remove to make it easier for our employees to give us their best?

High-performing teams are built on a foundation of trust.

• How do we encourage the best ideas from the most people?

You likely already know the answers to these questions. How would those with whom you work answer them?

The lesson: Encourage questions to build trust and teamwork and you’ll ultimately discover new solutions to old problems.

Developing Talent

Scenario 2: Leading with questions to develop talent

Exceptional leaders may be the first to identify that something needs fixing, but they resist the urge to jump in and solve the problem themselves.

Rushing to rescue a colleague who’s pursuing a course of action that may not produce the desired result limits that colleague’s independent problem-solving ability. Your colleague thinks, “Well, I guess that’s what my boss really wants me to do. . . .”

Such behavior by any leader short-circuits a colleague’s ability to assess the issue, develop questions, and select a solution. You may have solved the problem quicker or better if you’d done it yourself, but in the long run, you’re hijacking the ability of those who work for you to perform at a higher level and grow to their full potential. In essence, you’re allowing them to rent your solution versus developing, owning, and being accountable for a solution—and outcome—that is theirs.
Leaders who are frustrated with the apparent inability of their direct reports to solve problems should ask themselves:

- What role do I play that’s preventing my colleagues from thinking for themselves?
- Am I prepared to let them learn by allowing them to fail?

The next time one of your leaders brings you a problem they expect you to solve, ask:
1. What’s the problem you’re trying to solve?
2. What are three options for solving it?
3. Which of those three options is the best solution?
4. What decision would you make if you were me?
5. What’s keeping you from making that decision on your own?

Until you hold yourself accountable for requiring your leaders to bring you solutions and not problems, the ability of your organization to grow and flourish will be directly proportional to the amount of work you can personally oversee.

**Old Habits Die Hard**

Learning new behaviors takes time. It takes time for you to accept that you don’t have to be the smartest person in the room. It takes time for you to develop the patience and skill of asking questions to help people develop their problem-solving abilities. And it takes time for those who have been bringing you their problems to become convinced you’re serious about making them think for themselves.

I travel a lot and recently found myself in the Qantas lounge in Sydney a couple of hours before my flight. I couldn’t help but overhear one side of a conversation between a leader and a colleague that went something like this:

“What bring me up to speed. What’s going on?” the leader asked his colleague. He listened to the answer.

“What did you do?” the leader wanted to know, and then listened.

“Okay,” said the leader to his colleague, “here’s what you’re going to have to do. . . .”

This leader felt compelled to solve the problem. He’d heard enough, sorted through possible solutions, picked one he thought was best, and told his colleague what to do. His questions were not designed to coach his colleague. He simply wanted a briefing so he could tell his colleague what to do.

Great leaders help those they work with explore and discover their own paths to professional success and personal fulfillment. They accomplish this not by blurting out advice or jumping to conclusions but by asking probing questions that challenge assumptions and lead people to reach their own conclusions. And then they wait for the person with the problem to figure out the best possible solution.

The lesson: **Develop the patience and discipline to require those who work for you to develop their own solutions so when they come to you it’s to confirm their answers and not answer their questions.**

**Addressing Underperformance**

Scenario 3: Leading with questions to address underperformance

Knowing to ask questions is not enough. Asking the right question is essential. General questions (“How’s it going?”) yield general responses (“Fine”).

Avoid accepting the pat answer. They may be telling you what they think you want to hear.

In 1901, American scientist Charles Sanders Peirce reasoned that twenty questions held the mathematical potential to single out one subject from among thousands of possible subjects. “Twenty skillful hypotheses,” Peirce wrote, “will ascertain what two hundred thousand stupid ones might fail to do.”

_Twenty Questions_ became a radio program in the 1930s, and on November 2, 1949, the first episode of the television version was broadcast.
Avoid accepting the pat answer.

In each case, a premium was placed on asking the right questions, as this story—perhaps apocryphal—illustrates.

In a bygone era, when freight trains and passenger liners shared the rails, simple signals were established to warn conductors of impending danger. A common hazard involved two trains arriving at a station within minutes of one another with one train stopped on the track as a second train approached the station.

Once, following a nighttime collision of two trains in which, remarkably, no people were injured, the ensuing investigation centered on whether or not the crew of the stopped freight train had flagged, or warned, the approaching passenger train sufficiently.

Appearing under oath, the freight train’s rear brakeman was asked a series of questions about his method of signaling the oncoming train. In each case the brakeman provided truthful replies.

Yet because assumptions were made by those asking the questions, the brakeman was not asked the obvious and most essential question—“Was the lantern you were using to signal the train lit?”—the investigation was closed because no clear determination of cause, neglect, or fault could be found.

When resolving thorny issues, strained relationships, and difficult decisions, smart leaders ask questions about things others may take for granted.

The Iceberg Conversation

Less than 20 percent of an iceberg is above the water’s surface and visible.

To address underperformance, you must figure out what’s happening below the surface, the part you may not be able to see. What is the underperformer thinking? Feeling? Have that person’s beliefs changed? How aware is the person that his or her performance is falling short?

When you see material changes in someone’s performance, whether it’s a top performer or an average performer, you will need to figure out what’s happening in their life to account for the drop-off in their performance.

Sit down with an underperforming colleague and bring your curiosity to this conversation to understand what’s causing the problem. Questions are less likely to put the person on the defensive, and questions help you avoid making incorrect assumptions about a person and a particular behavior. Learn what’s going on beneath the surface. Determine whether the person is able and willing to improve. You cannot want success for them more than they want it for themselves.

To help determine your next course of action, ask the person who is underperforming to answer questions such as these:

• How would you describe the situation?
• What am I—your supervisor—missing?
• Are the expectations clear?
• What does high performance look like?
• If you could do it again, what would you do differently?
• What’s your plan for getting your performance back on track?
• What’s the first step you plan to take?
• If you were me, what action would you take?
• What can I do to help you achieve the expected result?

The outcome of your iceberg conversation with an underperformer should help you answer this question, which can be the most difficult of all: “How much more of my time am I willing to invest in this underperformer to allow him or her to get performance back on track?”

The lesson: Ask open-ended questions to determine whether the performance issues are related to an ability to do the work (skill) or a willingness to do the work (will).
Learning from Children

We can learn from children.

They ask questions all the time. Unexpected questions. Tough questions. Perplexing questions.

Children seem to have an unlimited source of questions.

Children are relentless questioners. Their curiosity is compelling. And they’re fearless. They’ll ask anything, including the awkward question. Yet they ask their questions with a pureness of heart and a desire to understand and learn that leaders would do well to emulate.

Because somewhere along their way to adulthood—typically in the early years of school—children learn to ask fewer questions and, instead, begin to memorize the answers that have been handed to them. Children learn that asking questions can get you laughed at. “What a stupid question!” Children learn that asking questions reveals a lack of understanding. “He doesn’t get it!” Children learn that asking questions slows everyone down in our fast, faster, fastest get-it-done-now world.

So by the time kids grow up to become adults and enter the workforce, the curiosity that was so compelling a few years earlier has been stifled. Caution has replaced fearlessness. Memorization has replaced thinking. And the ability to master the science and art of asking questions is rarely exercised.

Answers are important. The right answers propel people, businesses, schools, churches, and governments to new levels of success.

Yet more often than not, the best answers come from great questions.

Want to be a better leader? Unleash your inner kid and start leading with questions.

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NAVIGATING U.S. AND CHINESE BUSINESS CULTURES USING GLOBAL MINDSET LEADERSHIP

by Gary Ranker, Donny Huang, & Marilyn McLeod

Understanding Global Mindset

Gary Ranker defines global mindset as the ability to step outside one’s base culture and to understand that there is no universally correct way to do things. Persons in other parts of the world have different beliefs and different ways of doing things that work for them. Developing a global mindset means accepting that our values and our ways of doing business don’t have the same meaning, or perhaps even work, for our counterparts in other cultures. To have a global mindset is to get beyond the trap of believing that what has worked for us and our organization in our country will work to the same degree in another country. It may or may not. But it won’t work to start with the assumption that we will be successful forcing our ways onto the other culture.

As Chinese move more toward global mindset, Chinese traditions of respect for authority will begin to blend with the Western sense of entitlement and tradition of questioning authority. Chinese value a sense of patience and oral contracts, and Western cultures value deadlines and depend on legal documents signed before any work begins. A Chinese organization’s chairman explained to Gary, “I don’t understand the Western way of thinking. With all of these rules, where to park or not, how to use a toothbrush in the right way, labels on cords that warn against dropping the appliance into the bathtub . . . It looks to me like a society of leaders who don’t trust their population.”
Within China there are different business cultures.

An investment banker in New York City told us, “The Chinese don’t understand how to play our game. They tell us they want to acquire a company. We tell them the rules of how to get involved in mergers and acquisitions, but then they don’t play by our rules. They don’t understand that U.S. companies may not be able to do the deal without getting the necessary paperwork signed by the deadline, and many deals fall apart as a result. This is disappointing to both sides, who were really ready to do the deal.” As more power shifts to China, our rules may gradually become less effective, and we’ll have more success as Western executives find ways to work more effectively with the Eastern way of doing things.

Within China there are different business cultures. Leadership styles and employee expectations for behavior and workflow vary among multinational companies, local private companies, and government owned organizations. The State Owned Enterprise (SOE) is the most traditional. Local Chinese companies still follow traditional customs, but they may also incorporate Western concepts into their business systems, especially if they are led by the emerging breed of young Chinese entrepreneurs. Western multinational companies operating in China bring their Western cultures, and Chinese employees working within the multinational company learn to operate within this subculture.

Chinese and U.S. children grow up with different values. The Chinese culture values obedience. Americans value independence and creative thought. These early expectations carry into adulthood, into the culture, and are brought with them into the workplace.

Tracing History

In 221 BC, King Qin Shihuan (秦始皇), who first built the Great Wall and Terra Cotta Soldiers, created the first Chinese united kingdom. From 221 BC to AD 1911, China had more than ten centrally controlled authoritarian dynasties. The large families formed the kinship social structure, which maintained stability in the countryside and served as an important part of the governmental body in every kingdom. The economic system was built upon the family-based agricultural economy. The glue that connects the family and the state is commonly accepted as Confucian ethics.

This structure maintained stability until 1840 when China was challenged by Western civilization. China could not keep up with the development of the new industrialized world and with decreasing power China faced the invasion of Western forces, adapting to the industrialized era. On October 1, 1949, the People’s Republic of China was founded. The government successfully fended off Western influence in the Chinese mainland. In 1979 Chinese senior leader Deng Xiaoping initiated the Chinese social reform that introduced Western capital market principles. This began a reorganization of the means of production that has enabled China to grow at unprecedented speed. Today China is still in the process of transition from a traditional Confucian-ethic-based society to a modern society, characterized by Western values such as rule of law, individual freedom, and accountable government.

From a Western perspective the evolution of global mindset has occurred at an exponential level. Consider how these fundamental concepts have evolved:

Personal Evolution. U.S. citizens are increasingly surrounded by cultural diversity.

Corporate Evolution. Companies operating globally will no longer have only the view of their country of origin. Instead they become globally oriented companies that happen to work in various countries. Although they originated in the United Kingdom or in the United States they become something
Confucian ethics are different from anything in North America.

Generational Differences in Chinese Society

Grooming a new generation of leaders is essential for any company or country. The following delineations help us better understand the generational mix in today’s Chinese society:

Over Forty: Chinese over forty years old grew up during a period when China was a very oppressive society. People lived in poor villages with very few opportunities for education or the ability to improve their standard of living. They were taught to know their place and bend to authority without question.

Over Thirty, Under Forty: Chinese over thirty and under forty years old began to see some changes. They were still raised with traditional values of obedience to authority and may find it difficult to think for themselves unless they were among the few who studied abroad.

Over Twenty, Under Thirty: Chinese who are over twenty and under thirty years old were born during China’s one-child policy, which reduced Chinese population growth and changed dynamics within Chinese families. Two parents and four grandparents now had only one child to focus on, and only one child now had the responsibility to support two parents and four grandparents later in life.

The Chinese middle class is gaining new economic power. There are more people with more money.

Confucian Ethics and Politics

Confucian ethics are different from anything in North America. Confucius emphasized personal and governmental morality, correctness of social relationships, justice, and sincerity. Respect for elders and family extends to the ideal model for government. Logical, reasoned argument, and ethical ideals are not as highly valued as in the West; Chinese methods that are more indirect, nonverbal, or suggested through innuendo are favored. Someone following Confucian ethics would choose different strategies in different situations and contexts, and duty to family and friends comes before duty to community. Context becomes very important.

Confucius believed that humans are originally born good. Good leadership is demonstrated by good example rather than ruling by law. If one leads correctly, orders are unnecessary and useless. Giving people face means lifting their social status, with a secondary meaning involving moral standards. A leader without face doesn’t care about the intricacies of Confucian ethics and fails to understand the underlying social expectations and moral standards. In the United States this very same attitude may equate to equality and be considered a virtue.
Members of the Chinese 1980s generation find that generations before them lived lives obedient to authority, without the opportunity to explore personal fulfillment. Their teachers in school can’t help students create career plans because the teachers’ world was so different. This generation carries hope for the many generations before them. They care about self-improvement to support their future potential for career advancement, which will help them support their family, parents and grandparents.

Chinese workers are not afraid of pressure, but after the project is completed they need to hear praise for improvement. They appreciate learning opportunities, such as making presentations to help them improve their skills.

**Context and Rules**

As one seasoned U.S. executive working in China said, the biggest issue between the West and China is that our starting assumptions are very different.

*Government:* In China there is no universally accepted body of law that governs how land is used, transferred, owned, and developed because the Chinese government owns the land. In the United States we rely on one thousand years of British law that says if you own land you can transfer it and develop it, according to applicable laws.

*Regulations:* In China it’s best to assume you need approval for everything. In the United States approval is only needed if required by law.

*Laws:* In the United States having prior knowledge of the governing laws is key. Because in China laws are applied within context, having good personal relationships with the appropriate people at the appropriate agencies is key.

*Growth:* In the United States roads, infrastructure, and laws concerning ownership and use of land have remained relatively stable. In contrast, entire megacities have been built in China in a very short period of time, taking the local population from poor farmers to wealthy middle-class city dwellers in less than two decades.

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**The Chinese middle class is gaining new economic power.**

*Environmental Health:* As a rapidly developing nation, China requires tremendous resources, sometimes with resulting pollution and environmental cost that would be punishable by law in the United States. In the United States consumer sentiment is increasingly focused on protecting the environment.

*Contracts* are the backbone of American business. They outline responsibilities, exchange of monies, and the details that make up any business relationship. U.S. companies often feel nervous without contracts that lock down all contingencies. Chinese officials may feel offended when they are not trusted at their word, and they are concerned that they’re not given latitude to maneuver as conditions evolve during rapid change.

**Merging Business Cultures**

In the United States people feel special because they are valued for being different. Chinese feel uncomfortable

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**In China it’s best to assume you need approval for everything.**
Cultural Dimensions

Donny Huang, coauthor of *Global Mindset Leadership: Navigating U.S. and China Business Cultures*, has developed the WorldPass Cultural Assessment, used to measure cultural competence, develop cultural self-awareness, and reconcile and capitalize on cultural differences.

Person to Person

*Orientation: Equality and Status*

Do you see everyone as equal, or do you pay close attention to status?

*Identity: Individual and Group*

Are you more focused on the individual or the group?

*Communication: Direct and Indirect*

Do you look for subtle cues to decode the message or for a direct answer to a direct question?

*Consideration: Equal and Contextual*

Do you treat others based on the rules or within the context of a situation?

Person to Business

*Focus: Task and Guanxi*

Guanxi is a Chinese term for “relationship,” referring to trusted relationships among Chinese people that create obvious insider groups and outside groups. Chinese people treat insiders differently than outsiders. Would you prefer to do something quickly that might offend others or do things more slowly in a way that won’t offend others?

*Decision Making: Fact and Intuition*

When making decisions, do you tend to use a scientific method or listen to your inner voice, paying attention to people’s feelings?

*Locus of Control: Internal and External*

Do you trust your personal willpower to achieve or patiently wait for a favorable time to move forward with less effort?

Person to Time

*Scheduling: Inflexible and Flexible*

Do you stick to your planned schedule or reallocate your time based on the importance of needs as they occur during the day?

Our ability to interact effectively in cross-cultural situations starts with understanding who we are, our personality, and our core cultural values. This helps us set aside preconceived notions and judgments and to become more receptive to other ways of thinking, communicating, managing, and leading.
Chinese get things done through people. In China leadership is about the leader’s way of doing things. With Chinese hierarchy the leader has almost complete control, so if the leader changes, the system also changes. Chinese employees respect the authority of the leader and are willing to follow new instructions from the new leader. In the West there is more sharing of power. In many multinationals the operating systems are the same in any country, so a leader can move from one country to another and the system stays the same.

Joint Ventures in China

The value of a joint venture (JV) lies in the ability of two businesses or organizations to work together to reach a common goal. Structures and internal processes may differ greatly between partners in almost every way. Negotiations are ongoing to find common ground and effective strategies with mutually acknowledged interest or gain. What does each entity want? The Western corporation needs to also look beyond what is good for the two corporate interests to whatever value this joint venture will bring to China as a whole.

The CEO in a joint venture in China should have experience and knowledge in both cultures. The CEO needs to put the JV’s interests first and have an agenda balanced between the interests of both companies. Leadership at the JV should be inclusive. There must be considerable communication. Influence and conflict management skills need to be used effectively. They will need a high level of ethics and courage. They should be open, flexible, have perseverance and a local mentor. Experience as a CEO in China will shorten the learning curve. Leaders need to be willing to take risks.

Being in a JV, especially as the CEO, is extremely valuable training that can result in future success in meaningful corporate roles. Failure is a big risk that comes along with international ventures, both for the company and the people involved. Whether they fail or are successful, the returning executive can bring international business experience back to the Western corporation. They have gained skills that are immensely valuable in a world increasingly dependent on having a global mindset.
Global Mindset Applied

Our world is changing rapidly. Just as emotional intelligence has become popular during the past decades, we believe that global mindset is becoming one of the most important new skills of this decade. Bridging the gap between different cultures and regions of the world will become the difference between those companies that become global powerhouses and those that fail at the international level. Getting along effectively with people within our own culture can be challenging enough. As the world becomes flatter and we are all more affected by our neighbors, we add a multicultural overlay to the mix. This creates exponential nuances, each of which affect accurate interpersonal communication, assumptions, and interpretation of any business message. Even the means of gaining rewards, forms of acceptance and support, and definitions of success can vary widely among cultures. For expatriates entering foreign environments, culture shock can be a very real experience.

Although the Chinese have encouraged Western influence in business and technology so they could learn from us, we might benefit in learning from them about ways they have been able to excel. Global mindset can help us acknowledge that the Chinese have been able to navigate fast growth in a short amount of time within their context. Their citizens have grown accustomed to great change and have developed systems to keep their society intact while dramatically expanding their infrastructure and lifestyle opportunities.

Conclusion

We believe the development of global mindset is a requisite for success in business. This will require increased self-understanding and tolerance, and interest in others’ ways of life and management. Only by being truly open to new ideas and new ways of relating to one another can we capture the opportunities available in our new fast-changing multicultural world.

We hope that our overview of factors involved in global mindset has given you food for thought and has helped you become more proactive in the development of your own global mindset.

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