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BECOME AN INFLUENCER

By ROWENA MORAIS

11 years ago, in the home office of my two-bedroom apartment, I started a magazine. It was called HR Matters and it was a quarterly human resource publication. There was no other HR magazine at the time in Malaysia. Here I was, an ex lawyer turned entrepreneur, delivering executive education programmes in the Klang Valley deciding that I was going to start a magazine.

Never written much before this. Much less publish anything. No one to look to, to guide me through this process. No idea at all as to how to start or even how to continue. But with a small team of three, we got that magazine off the ground and profitable from the first issue. My proudest moment - when we were able to successfully sell advertising space in a thing no one had heard of, much less seen a copy of.

I'm here to share one very simple but powerful idea.

What if I were to tell you that if you wanted to, you could have people listening and taking your views very seriously? What if I were to say that you had an opportunity to become an influencer?

This is not about becoming a guru or achieving celebrity status. This is about becoming a different kind of influencer. A person, an ordinary person in many respects but one who has earned a significant and loyal following simply because of their particular expertise.

Why should you become an influencer?

Well, when you're an influencer, you make things happen. Doors open, opportunities come to you, people listen to what you have to say and in everything you do, whether you realise it or not, you're choosing to influence those around you.

When I started HR Matters, I thought I was merely starting a magazine. But what I was really doing was working towards influencing people. I see that now but I didn't see it back then. I was influencing people through my choice of topics we cover, through the selection of contributors we featured and through how the magazine looked.

We all want the people we like and whom we care about to listen to us, to pay attention to what we have to say and to appreciate our opinion. If you think about it, you'll realise you already spend time influencing those around you - through your words, your actions, your social media and so much more.

And likewise, you are also influenced by those around you. Your choice of university, your friends, your travel and even your shoes and the restaurants you eat at are all influenced. But to become an influencer is to think about your personal brand.

Why should you do this? You've also got all kinds of information coming at you, from

peers, best friends, teachers, family and also, media. Everything is competing for your attention. But I know this.

There's no better way to learn than to do. People around you who love you will try to set you on your path because they want to be helpful or they think they know better but the truth is you will need to find it on your own. You won't just miraculously know, at the start of your life, what it is you want to do with your life.

You don't know. And people can't tell you.

You make it your own path through discovery, exploration and then, focused practice.

If I could go back in time to talk to my 15 year old self and tell myself that I would be standing here today, I wouldn't have believed it. 15 years old, awkward, that ugly blue uniform, nerdy as hell, living in my parents semi detached house. A deathly serious, ever responsible first born whose nose was always deeply buried in a book, dreaming of becoming a surgeon. Never raising my hand in class. The one who walked home from school. Shy and insecure.

Nothing in my past led me to believe and see the life I am living now. That I would just hop on a plane to Auckland after just two years of legal practice because there had to be more to explore, see and do. That I'd be involved in a startup in Sydney and work there for five years. That I'd return to KL and start a business from scratch and a HR magazine.

Why do I say this? To reinforce the point that you don't know. You just don't until you live. Until you try and experiment and get curious and do what you care about.

So I come back to my earlier point about becoming an influencer. Your personal brand matters and it has tremendous impact in how others perceive you. Which may not seem important until such time you need to get in front of people for

some reason. Until you need people to think a certain way or to do something.

There are very few avenues where you can work almost completely alone. At some point, you may need to call on others... stakeholders, investors, supporters, believers, amplifiers. And your voice and how you've developed it will make a difference in how well you are heard and received.

There are three parts to my message. The first is that you spend some time to focus on finding your voice. The second is that you develop your brand. And the third is that you work towards becoming an influencer.

Deceptively simple to understand but exceedingly hard to do. The difficulty lies not in the technicality of the tasks - yes there are things to be discovered, learnt and practised but this is easy enough. The difficulty lies in believing in yourself and doing the hard work that will take you from here to there. And to do it in the face of hardship, silence and uncertainty.



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THIS article has been adapted from the TEDx UUM talk I delivered in March 2018. To watch the 17 min talk, visit the TEDx Talks channel on Youtube and look for **Rowena Morais Become an influencer**.

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