

FOLLOW THE LEADERS

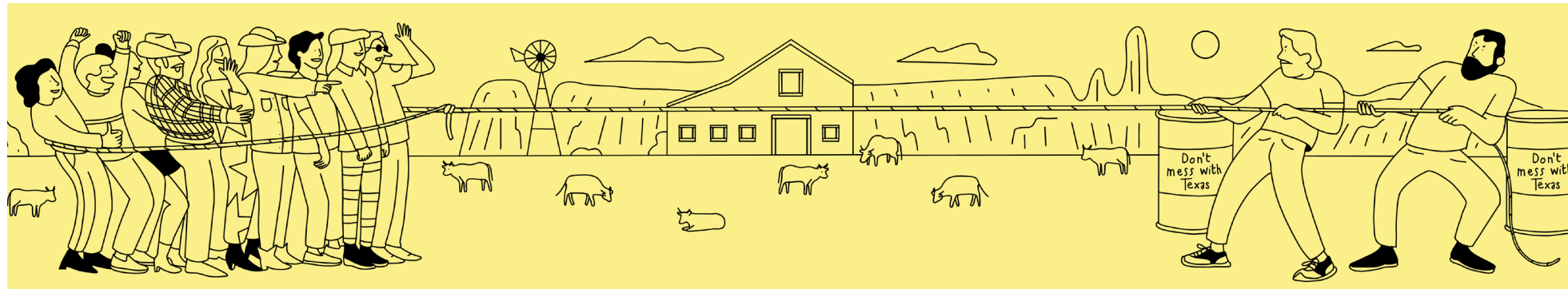
There's truth to the adage that too much advice can be a dangerous thing, which is why we've decided to focus on words of wisdom from six people who know what they're talking about. So before you go it alone, enjoy some esteemed company. ILLUSTRATOR *Elena Xausa*

1. — **Narrative tricks** by *Will Storr* —
Storytelling is a fundamental part of human communication and the best way for brands and businesses to connect meaningfully with their audience. —

Most organisations aren't trying to do business with everyone – they're trying to connect with a specific market. But who are these people? What's their tribe? What are the values that bind them together? And how can you tell a story that connects with this tribe? Answering these questions successfully – and

Times, “bubbas in pick-up trucks” – not a cohort likely to be moved by the sight of the weeping indigenous person. The executives then made a campaign that was tailored to that tribe. In 1986 they hired Dallas Cowboy players Ed Jones and Randy White to make the now iconic Don't Mess With Texas ads that appealed to their intended audience's patriotic love of their state. Within a year littering had declined by 29 per cent; four years later it was down by an extraordinary 72 per cent.

Over the past few years it's felt as if everyone's been talking about the value of storytelling. Bankers, technologists and strategists at global



creating the right story – can be critical to the success of your company and its campaigns.

Back in the early 1980s the Texas Department of Transportation found itself spending more than \$20m every year on clearing up litter. It tried to fight the scourge with an advertising campaign revolving around a Native American shedding a tear at the mess. It didn't work.

To try and understand why, advertising executives Mike Blair and Tim McClure researched the kinds of people who were doing the littering. What was their tribe? What were their tribal values? The litterers were, as McClure later told *The New York*

NGOs have all been thumbing copies of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* or Blake Snyder's *Save The Cat!* and trying to incorporate their teachings about myth, literature and blockbusting screenplays into their working lives. By now the idea is beginning to feel like an annoying fad that'll inevitably pass – but nothing could be further from the truth.

Storytelling isn't going anywhere; it will be just as crucial for entrepreneurs to understand it in 100 years' time as it is today. This is because story is the natural language of the human brain. We think in stories. We're raised on stories. Stories

help define our culture, our values and our moral lives. Stories orient us. They define us. If we want to talk to other people so that we connect with them and influence how they feel and behave, it's critical to understand some of narrative's basic rules. It's not much of an exaggeration to say that if we're not communicating with stories, we're not communicating at all.

Successful pieces of corporate communication, like successful story plots, should be structured in an elegant sequence in which one point leads to the next. Yet a lot of companies tell their stories in dense paragraphs that are more like lists.

But there's more to effective storytelling than elegant structure: it's also vital to communicate your values. We are a strange species: we're tribal and the stories we tell each other often communicate the rules that bind our tribes together. It's partly thanks to these stories that the members of the group discover how they should behave and what the group stands for.

Even a fledgling firm should have a clear understanding of what it wants to say and who it's trying to say it to. By building a company you're creating a tribe and it should be one that other people want to join. The stories a company tells about itself and the world should connect

subconsciously with the stories that their customers tell. The price of admittance is the price of a purchase, which will then be displayed with pride. This is why storytelling is no fad. To understand its power is to understand how humans think and behave. What could be more valuable than that? — (M)

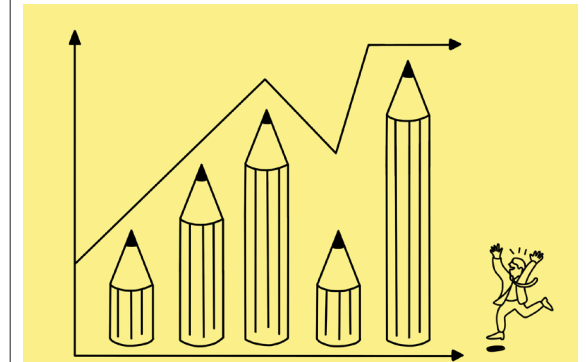
ABOUT THE WRITER: Storr is an award-winning writer and photographer. He's the author of five critically acclaimed books and his journalism has appeared in titles such as *The Sunday Times*, *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*.

2. — **Return to form** by *Sarah Balmond* —
A firm's founding values can be brought to brilliant life through design, helping to promote differentiation and brand awareness. There's no need to be daunted; harness design's power. —

The argument that design can build better and more successful businesses has already been vindicated: Apple Inc. Need I say more? Design can be everything from a well-considered brand through to a clean, intuitive website, professional communications, meaningful products, streamlined services, intelligent processes and, of course, stand-out environments, interiors and architecture. Wield it in the right ways and design can be immensely powerful.

Don't be intimidated. It's important to remember that design is above all else a human process, deeply linked with emotion. Design is experience. Start with questions: how do you actually want people to feel when they see your logo? What do you want them to experience in your shop? What memories do you want them to take away from a night at your hotel?

Integrate a design approach from the very beginning. And if things are going wrong, design can sometimes be the fix too. You want more people in



your restaurant? Lay down a gloriously crisp, clean tablecloth (yes, it could be that simple). Footfall slow? Take a hard look at your shop front. What more could you do? Revisit your business regularly and use design to steer it. Turn to common sense and intuition. Design could just be the glue sticking your entire operation together. — (M)

ABOUT THE WRITER: Balmond is a director at Balmond Studio; the research-led practice, with offices in London and Sri Lanka, undertakes architecture, art and design projects globally. Previously she was the founding design editor at MONOCLE.

3. — **All together now?** by *Fiona Wilson* —
Stirring company anthems used to be a morning staple in Japan – is it time for a comeback? Probably not. But the workplace harmony they coincided with is a more lamentable loss. —

As if Monday mornings weren't bad enough, imagine how much worse they would be if instead of the usual latte and light banter you had to join in with a rousing ode to your employer. And yet a chorus of the company song, or *shaka*, was how the day used to start in factories and offices across Japan.

Businesses large and small had company songs; somewhere between a school song and a national anthem, they were bellowed out by workers and management alike. There are some painful dirges among the classic company anthems and more than a touch of the North Korean collective. But in more paternalistic job-for-life days, when a young recruit could see a straight path to retirement in the same company, workers readily embraced the communal spirit. Some even played the songs at their weddings.

When a *New York Times* reporter took a look at the Japanese company song in 1972 the practice was still in full swing. Foreign visitors, says

The lyrics were positively nation-building. Fujifilm's employees would sing "Fuji! Fuji! Fuji! Ah, with one voice let us sing a prosperous future!" Matsushita Electric's song had such lines as, "For the building of a new Japan, let's put our strength and minds together, doing our best to promote production." You get the idea.

In recent years the company song has faded into obscurity. Working habits have changed and people don't expect to be in the same company their whole life. Karaoke has replaced corporate hymns with pop hits. That said, there have been brief *shaka* revivals. Nihon Break Kogyo, a demolition company, scored an unexpected hit in 2003 with a soft-rock tune that was accompanied by a hilariously un-rock video of workers tearing down buildings. For all the publicity that it attracted, the song wasn't enough to save the company from bankruptcy in 2009.

Some companies have tried to jazz up their songs; Panasonic went so far as to hire the services of distinguished film composer Joe Hisaishi. Three years ago Dentsu, one of the world's biggest ad agencies, set up a new *shaka* competition; an exercise in branding, its purpose was to boost the profile of small companies that were lagging behind their larger counterparts.

4. — **Hustle and flow** by *Alain Sylvain* —
Just because a business has found success doesn't mean it has to stick to the tried and tested. Greater rewards lie in wait for those organisations that embrace the entrepreneurial spirit. —

We're drunk on entrepreneurialism. And it's not just because it's entered the mainstream: entrepreneurs give us the feeling that we too can do anything we set our minds to. They symbolise vision, agility, hustle – values that society holds dear. They challenge the status quo by exploring new ideas and taking risks. They're inspiring. It's also the reason that so many big businesses try to emulate that start-up feel, either through office design or company culture.

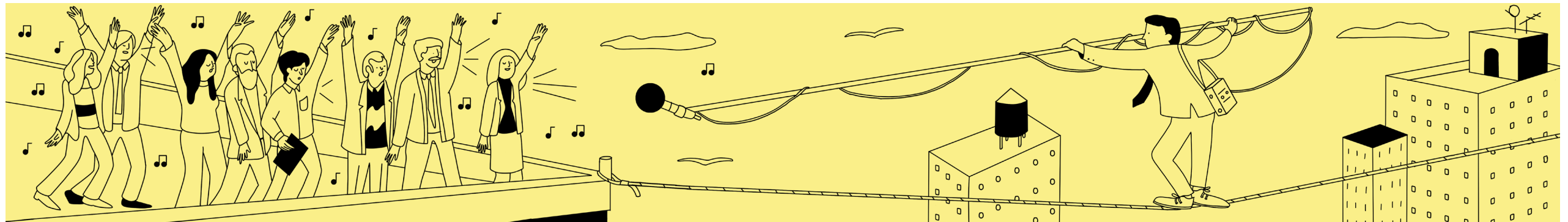
But with big organisations comes lots of red tape. Rapid growth means that responsiveness and agility diminish. The freedom to fail and start again, something that is quintessential to the start-up mentality, is lost. But most importantly the "hustle" becomes unnecessary – and a seeming liability as it flirts with disrupting what has worked well so far. Big businesses are "safer" and the much vaunted qualities of entrepreneurial employees become muted.

their own ideas. The same should go for big business. Find and secure partnerships with different communities that inspire you, be it customers or, potentially, competitors.

Prioritise invention from the inside out. A lot of big companies, from technology to food, use in-house accelerators, incubators and venture funding to promote invention. That's commendable but the challenge is doing it in a way that is authentic and properly integrated so the results are felt across the company.

Don't rest on past success. Every move by an entrepreneur could make or break them, while big businesses have the resources to play it safe. Lose the safety net and get the hustle back. Allow staff to take risks, fail, learn and start again, and motivate them to share failures. This will allow for new lessons and experiences, and leave everyone with an open mind for unforeseen opportunities. — (M)

ABOUT THE WRITER: Sylvain is the founder and CEO of Sylvain Labs, a strategy and design consultancy, and Certified B Corp. He is also a partner and investor in several ventures, including a mobile-gaming company, an açai bowl company and a pet-food start-up.



the piece, "can never quite believe the spectacle of hundreds of workers at, say, the Matsushita Electric Industrial Company, whose sales exceed \$2bn, bursting into song".

The first company song dates back to the early 20th century but the high point for the genre was during the postwar years when Japan, having been destroyed by conflict, was rebuilding itself. Turning the country into the economic behemoth we know today was an epic effort that required everyone to be facing in the same direction. Stirring company songs helped to bond workers and give a shared sense of purpose.

A company song has a heavy load to bear: it has to be something timeless that can last for decades, bringing together management and employees while conveying a corporate philosophy at the same time. The cheery rap by office-supplies company Kurabun – a recent winner of the *shaka* trophy – doesn't quite do the same job. — (M)

ABOUT THE WRITER: Tokyo-based Wilson is our founding Asia bureau chief. Having got her way with her suggestion of a MONOCLE mascot (hi, Monochan!), this essay marks her latest attempt to institute a company song.

The good news is that it's possible to restore that mindset; it's also crucial to do so. The drive to challenge the way things are, to reach for the future and create new ideas, is important to the soul and integrity of any progressive organisation. It's ultimately what unites people and helps you stand out in a competitive market. So how can large organisations authentically channel entrepreneurialism within their walls?

Find unusual partners. Entrepreneurs network tirelessly and collaborate all the time; the best know the value of integrating alternative thinking into



Listen and learn

Our weekly radio show, *The Entrepreneurs*, delivers interviews with people running inspiring businesses. Tune in to Monocle 24 to hear host Daniel Bach quiz them about the making, shaping and fixing of enterprises across every sector around the world. It's the show that will help you take a fresh idea to happy fruition. monocle.com/radio

5. — **Put to the test** by Sarah Hernholm —
There's no textbook for teaching entrepreneurship but steer students to success by getting them to execute their ideas in the real world and become more familiar with failure. —

Since the launch of WIT (Whatever it Takes) in 2009 [see "About the writer" panel, below] I've been asked multiple times about "how to teach entrepreneurship". People in the education space want a curriculum, set modules and detailed outlines for how to teach the masses on the subject. Ten years later my response remains the same: "Focus on the doing." There's no textbook for becoming an entrepreneur – it's about giving young people the space to have a go. Provide them with opportunities and time to try out their ideas, create prototypes, take those prototypes to market and use the feedback to do it all over again. Becoming an entrepreneur is messy; there's no straight line.

That's where people usually get stumped. Because in a traditional classroom the approach is one of "getting it right" and perfect scores. Entrepreneurship is about trying and failing over and over again. The work is never "perfect" because the consumer changes, technology advances and

or stepping outside their comfort zones. We reward them every time they fail since that's when they gain valuable feedback on their ideas. Our goal is to take the sting out of it and get our students as comfortable with talking about their misses as they are about their wins.

If you're thinking of designing your own entrepreneurship programme, here are a few more things to consider.

Hire entrepreneurs. So often I see people with zero real-world experience running classes. If you haven't wrestled with the fear and insecurity of being an entrepreneur, you shouldn't be teaching others on the subject.

Celebrate setbacks. Set aside time for students to talk about their mistakes and let them use their experience to inspire and encourage the other students. Remind them that it isn't personal, it's just feedback that will stand them in good stead.

Focus on the doing. So much learning comes from taking action – students learn from actually doing it. Many entrepreneur programmes culminate in a "shark tank" type moment. I used to attend these events until I noticed that most

6. — **Mind the mindful** by Ronald Purser —
The wellness industry promises to make us less stressed and better, happier workers. But are some firms using this trend to a sinister end? —

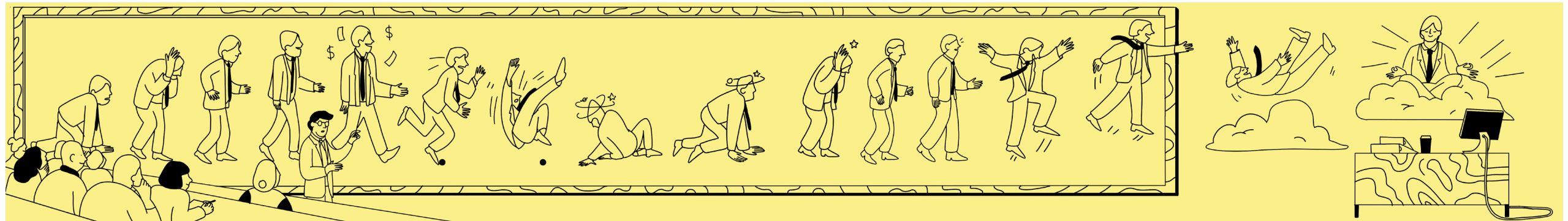
Work, deadlines and the daily grind are stressful and our collective anxiety has buoyed a spate of mindfulness start-ups to help – at least, we hope so. In the US, corporate wellness firms will rake in an estimated \$8bn (€7.3bn) this year. What's less helpful is that the responsibility for happiness is being bundled onto the individual rather than the company or bosses that overstretch them. The exponential growth of the wellness industry has coincided with increasing "employee disengagement" and a rise in chronic workplace stress. HR departments are alarmed by the fact that seven out of 10 employees report feeling "disengaged" from work, resulting in staggering annual losses estimated at \$550bn (€499bn) according to a Gallup study.

Although employees clearly do experience stress in the workplace, what is less certain is that the cause of their distress lies solely in their minds. Yet this is exactly the convenient, albeit faulty, diagnosis that is made by corporate mindfulness trainers.

face to these employees? Tell them that they have imposed stress on themselves? That they could have chosen not to cry? And it isn't just at big corporates: a recent *CBS News* report revealed that eight out of 10 employees admitted to crying at work due to toxic work conditions. And start-ups, as fast-growing companies where employees are required to put their lives on hold in order to execute the founder's vision, can be particularly susceptible to such problems.

As the latest wellness remedy, company mindfulness programmes promise to fix the employee-disengagement issue by making staff responsible for managing their own wellbeing – becoming calmer, more focused and resilient. If we are miserable at work it must be our own fault; we only have ourselves to blame. This victim-blaming philosophy is integral to the mindfulness ethos and doubles as a cheap substitute for real organisational change.

Company-sponsored mindfulness is the new capitalist spirituality that poses no threat to the status quo. When you feel stressed, it preaches, just practise mindfulness. Pay attention to your breath and let go of any mental ruminations that might interfere with the smooth functioning of you carrying out your job. Rather than paying attention to the internal voices of dissent or feelings of anger and frustration with regards to bad bosses or



change are inevitable, which means that the work will never be done.

I don't want to discourage people from creating entrepreneur classes and programmes at their schools, I just want to suggest a different set of metrics and scoring. At WIT we don't grade on whether the business is successful (ie, making money, scaling and so on), we grade on execution, hitting deadlines, using customer feedback, prototyping, and – that word again – failing.

Yes, we give points for failing. Why? Because many young people come to us with a great fear of the concept. They aren't comfortable taking risks

of the pitches were theory-based – they hadn't actually taken their ideas to market yet. So here's the lesson: please ensure that your students execute their idea or product and test it thoroughly. Remember, it is that real-world application that results in students ultimately becoming successful entrepreneurs. — (M)

ABOUT THE WRITER: Hernholm is the founder of WIT (Whatever it Takes), a college credit programme for teenagers in San Diego, Austin and New York (and online). As a former teacher she's failed multiple times and has no problem talking about it.

David Gelles, author of *Mindful Work*, is a vociferous cheerleader for mindfulness at work. He makes a bold claim: "Stress isn't something imposed on us. It's something we impose on ourselves." The workplace mindfulness movement has built a whole new industry by pointing the finger at the mindlessly distracted and stressed employee.

But is stress really self-imposed? What about toxic, sociopathic work cultures such as that at Amazon? In a *New York Times* exposé a former Amazon employee was quoted as saying that he saw nearly everyone he worked with cry at their desk. Would Gelles offer his advice with a straight

just plain corporate stupidity, we are instructed to constantly audit and self-regulate our internal states as a surefire pathway to wellness, happiness and human flourishing. Everyone wants fulfilment from their job but telling staff to focus on their problems "from within", rather than fix the faults of their employer, is less than enlightening. — (M)

ABOUT THE WRITER: Purser is professor of management at San Francisco State University and author of *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*, published by Repeater Books. He also hosts *The Mindful Cranks* podcast.