

Careering to the “Toppermost of the Poppermost”ⁱ

If I could have coffee with a career role model, it would undoubtedly be The Beatles.

You’d think that growing up around Liverpool, one of the UKs most deprived cities, in the recession hit 1980sⁱⁱ would result in a city stifled of aspiration.

But Liverpool had produced the ‘Fab 4’ and everyone from Merseyside, including me, knew that they too could change the world.

John, Paul, George and Ringo started as a small band from Liverpool with one piano lesson between them but they – and their great manager Brian Epstein - believed in their potential.

Epstein openly stated in 1964 that ‘The children of the 21st century will be listening to The Beatles.’ⁱⁱⁱ

A remark that back then must have sounded as daft as some saying that The Beatles – who broke up in 1970 - would have the bestselling album of the 2000s (which they did).^{iv}

The Beatles were the embodiment of self-efficacy, ‘an individual’s belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task, influencing their motivation, persistence, and overall behaviour’. ^v

A bedrock for anyone’s career development.

If we construct our world around us then The Beatles were constructing in my mind that anything was possible. If you could change the world through music, why not through something else?

I haven’t changed the world, I’ve not even managed to change my default browser from Google. Though others equally inspired have achieved more.

Steve Jobs not only changed his default browser from Google but even found time to co-found the company Apple, declaring, ‘My model for business is The Beatles.’^{vi}

And although the word resilience doesn’t appear in that definition of self efficacy it is also key to it and our career journey.

Decca Records famously rejected The Beatles in 1962 with the disputed refrain ‘guitar groups are on the way out’. ^{vii}

If The Beatles had then called it a day, the end of the cold war would have been cancelled, as Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of the Soviet Union explains:

“More than any ideology, more than any religion, more than Vietnam or any war or nuclear bomb, the single most important reason for the diffusion of the Cold War was ... The Beatles.”^{viii}

The law of unexpected consequences doesn’t apply to most career journeys in this way! But there is always fall out from any career decision we make – however big or small.

Our actions matter and sticking to our passions and motivations make a difference to who we are and thus impacts on those around us.

I’m not using this point to encourage myself or others to go out of their comfort zones, that’s not the message. In fact it’s the opposite.

The Beatles instead mastered the art of playing to their strengths. Each member focusing on what they did best and collectively demonstrating that the sum is greater than the parts.

That didn't mean they didn't do new things.

If you're going to 'almost single-handedly rescue the Western musical system'^{ix} you'll be incorporating long forgotten medieval Dorian modes^x and avant-garde atonal crescendo^{xi} into your 'latest electronic noise'.^{xii}

They did all this by following their passion for their art.

Indeed this passion for their art meant The Beatles even stopped performing live, their main source of income, because no one could hear their creations through the screaming crowds.

Cutting off your main source of income doesn't sound like a good career decision. But for The Beatles their art came first.

Following their passions and motivations turned out to be both risk free and a great career decision. Swopping the stage for the studio in 1966 they started a new musical revolution in record production^{xiii}.

Career decision making does from time to time involve taking risks. Being risk averse I find this part of career decision making the hardest.

Over time I've made the mistake of avoiding the risk and not putting my career passions first. The results were never what I desired.

But The Beatles didn't make these career decisions in isolation. Their community affected them as it does us.

What led to their early success was making those decisions with equally talented and genuine guys, Epstein and their record producer George Martin.

When in 1966 The Beatles started to record Tomorrow Never Knows, you can imagine Martin asking them:

'Come on boys you've made yourself famous by writing 3 minute hummable tunes about young love. I'm not sure this track based on the words of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, incorporating multiple tape loops and reintroducing a Drone note into western music is going to cut it with that audience.'

(hummable as the Beatles couldn't write music, so they had to be able to remember their compositions in the morning)^{xiv}

Only being a great mentor, Martin didn't say anything like that.

Instead he embraced their idea and encouraged their creativity, seeking out a Leslie Speaker to play Lennon's voice through, making it sound like a 1000 chanting monks^{xv}.

We don't make career decisions in a bubble. We make them through and with others. Company matters and good company more than most in helping us with our careers.

Indeed after Epstein's shock death in 1967 the Beatles quickly fell apart. Briefly dismissing Martin and completely breaking up just 2 years after, ironically amongst disagreements about which new manager they should listen to when making decisions.

Personally, I've been lucky with the company I've kept. I wish though I had reached out for more guidance at times.

George Harrison 'always felt sorry for Elvis 'cause he was on his own'^{xvi} whilst The Beatles had each other.

So if you are alone and going through a career change why not get by with a little help from your friends?

And these can be friends from our past and present. Famously McCartney's mother came to him in a dream telling him 'To Let It Be'^{xvii}

Indeed McCartney says he believes in magic, citing that the melody for 'Yesterday' came fully formed to him in a dream^{xviii}, what other explanation could there be?

Career decision making is about listening to all those factors that are influencing us: from our beliefs to our dreams. They are telling us something, be congruent with them.

And The Beatles were at their best when they were congruent with their beliefs and actions.

When it was suggested to them that they played to segregated theatres in the USA they flatly refused and by so doing so inadvertently ended segregated concerts across America.^{xix}

And when offered the opportunity to sing on the world's first ever satellite broadcast in 1967 they decided not to cash in and promote their latest album but instead write a new song with a message for all the people of the world to hear.

'All You Need is Love' is about as congruent as The Beatles can get.^{xx}

For all I've said about how The Beatles can inspire our career decision making we must acknowledge that some of their choices didn't go to well.

For example, who amongst us has made it to the end of their film Magical Mystery Tour ! (interestingly Martin Scorsese has – even citing it as an influence on his films^{xxi}).

But that's not the point. The point is The Beatles had a successful career and by analysing it we can see why and learn from it.

The Beatles went to the "Toppermost of the Poppermost" through self efficacy, accessing their allies, following their passions, being true to their values.

And as their career zig zagged from live performances to studio recordings, they constantly sought new opportunities to build on their natural strengths.

I won't get that coffee with my career role models but it's these notes that play a key role in my Long and Winding *Career Road* composition.

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ⁱ When The Beatles were feeling low during their years of touring before they were well known, John Lennon would ask the band "Where are we going, fellas?" and they would reply "To the top, Johnny!" He would then ask "And where's that, fellas?" and they would respond "To the toppermost of the poppermost, Johnny!". [The one line John Lennon would use to cheer up The Beatles](#)

ⁱⁱ [Thatcher urged 'let Liverpool decline' after 1981 riots - BBC News](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Beatles Still Making Millions After Fifty Years](#)

^{iv} [1 \(Beatles album\) - Wikipedia](#)

^v [Self-efficacy - Wikipedia](#)

^{vi} [Steve Jobs: "My model of business is The Beatles"](#)

^{vii} [Dick Rowe - Wikipedia](#)

^{viii} [McCartney film reveals Beatles' impact in Russia - Los Angeles Times](#)

^{ix} [\(91\) Howard Goodall 20th century greats - The Beatles - YouTube](#)

^x [Eleanor Rigby - Wikipedia](#)

^{xi} [A Day in the Life - Wikipedia](#)

^{xii} [John Lennon Shares Identity With NPR Producer : NPR](#)

^{xiii} [10 Ways The Beatles Changed The World of Music Forever | Sound of Life | Powered by KEF](#)

^{xiv} [The Beatles 'forgot' dozens of songs | The Beatles | The Guardian](#)

^{xv} [Tomorrow Never Knows - Wikipedia](#)

^{xvi} [The Beatles' George Harrison 'felt sorry' for Elvis Presley in 'sad' final meeting | Music | Entertainment | Express.co.uk](#)

^{xvii} [The heartbreaking true story behind The Beatles' song Let It Be - Radio X](#)

^{xviii} [Yesterday \(song\) - Wikipedia](#)

^{xix} [The Beatles, Race and Segregation - The Beatles Story](#)

^{xx} [How the Beatles broadcast love to the world - BBC News](#)

^{xxi} [Fab furore: Is it time to re-evaluate the Beatles' Magical Mystery Tour? | The Beatles | The Guardian](#)