

## Marshmallow Test for Managers

The marshmallow test is one of the most famous psychological experiments: Children of four to six years are brought into a room and sit on a chair before a table. On the table there is a plate with a marshmallow on it.

The instruction from the investigator is: "I will let you alone now for twenty minutes. If you wait until then without eating the marshmallow, you get a second marshmallow, and you will be allowed to eat both. If you eat this one, you won't get a second one."

The videos on youtube give you an idea of the inner fights that the children endure in face of this temptation, with heartbreaking entertainment value.

The actual sensation was a follow-up investigation thirteen years after the experiment: the ability of showing patience, a mixture of self-control, frustration tolerance, and endurance, turned out to be a precise predictor for a successful life: the patient ones were more determined, more successful in school, had higher social competence, coped better with setbacks, were less often addicted to drugs etc. The results persisted later in life.

The conclusion seems fair that leadership positions today are predominantly held by people who at the age of five could have resisted a marshmallow facing the perspective to get the double portion with a certain delay.

Although sometimes you could ask yourself where this capability has gone, for example when it comes to put long term success before short term profit, or when it comes to develop dangerous aspects of corporate culture in a future-proof direction in a comprehensive and sustainable way, well knowing that it will take years before you will be able to reap the benefits.

In a manager's world there seem to be temptations that are bigger than a marshmallow was for five-year olds (Trump is out of competition, for him a marshmallow will still easily do). The pressure for short term thinking, especially in public companies, creates reflexes that hinder two things, above all: suspending, listening, and observing on one hand, and taking on a long-term perspective, on the other hand.

Movements to reach the next level have started, though: alternative banking models, humanistic management concepts, and platforms like the Sustainable Investment Forum or the Global Values Alliance are no longer marginal. They pick up speed and could create the necessary momentum to transform our economic behavior.

So: passing the marshmallow test at the age of five is not enough; you also have to know the form of your present temptations, and your personal vulnerability so you know which ones are particularly dangerous for you.

It will be compulsory for future training and consulting formats to be suitable for developing the ability to pause (that by definition eliminates all one-time happenings, for a start). Trainers and Consultants for their part will have to be able to contain the pausing. If the thesis is right that we have former marshmallow champions in leadership positions today, then it is all about creating spaces between impulse and action, so that leaders and teams can reflect on qualities that they do in fact have but are pushed in the corner by the noisy dynamics of everyday business life.

Should there be something like an entrance test for investors and business leaders one day, I have an idea for a test element...think of the future that comes after the future.