INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY DAY

UNITY AND A COMMON PURPOSE
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Evolving enterprises
Exceeding expectations of
generations to come

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IMPACT INVESTING
See a need, fill a need -
with multiplier effects

THE MERCY LEGACY
Stepping (far) out of
your comfort zone

RIGHT TO BE HEARD
A chance to lead a
meaningful and independent life
LEADING THE EVOLUTION

TODAY, in conjunction with International Solidarity Day, an annual event to highlight the importance of global solidarity in working to eliminate poverty in all nations, we look at leadership at different levels be it the leaders who, given the right tools and environment are able to elevate themselves from disadvantaged circumstances; or the leaders who find a way to create that needed environment.

Since I joined, no two days at Leaderonomics has been the same. One of the reasons for this I believe, is that we’re all bursting with ideas on how to achieve our shared vision. The myriad of ideas and approaches we have reflect the varied backgrounds and lives we’ve led, people we’ve met, and also the zeal that our leaders have instilled in us. So I’ve seen the strength of diversity in action. And how can I not? Working for this company, living in this country.

We begin with a look at the economics of employee engagement and the evolution of organisations, thereby setting the stage for the role of social enterprises in a diverse labour force.

On uniting a common (societal) goal, Shahrain Masood focuses on what role we can play as individuals, and as organisations. For individuals wanting to take the next step to set up their own organisations with double bottom lines of profit as well as social goals, this dovetails into the next article which is on impact investing – what it is and how it works.

We were privileged to also connect with two women who are heroes in their own ways. Tan Sri Dr Jemilah Mahmood, obstetrician and gynaecologist turned humanitarian crusader shared her journey and nuggets of wisdom with our readers. And Dr Laura Cordisco Tsai talks about how her passion for working on human trafficking in Asia was ignited, and about the myriad of ideas and approaches we have reflect the varied backgrounds and lives we’ve led, people we’ve met, and also the zeal that our leaders have instilled in us. So I’ve seen the strength of diversity in action. And how can I not? Working for this company, living in this country.

This International Solidarity Day, take a moment to think about the challenges faced by members of your community and those further afield, and how you can mobilise your family and friends to step up and take action!

Have a fantastic weekend all!

KAREN NEOH
Editor
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EOF

SELFLESS GIFTS

By LIIM LAY HSUAN
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WE’re counting down the days to Christmas and everyone is busy preparing for a time of celebration, giving and shar-
ing. In a celebratory mood, we sometimes get carried away by our own needs and wants that we forget there are many who are not as fortunate to enjoy such abundance.

As an individual or an organisation, have we reflected on our attitude of giving? Are we giving for the purpose of receiving something in return, or do we give readily and unconditionally?

Or, are we holding back our blessings to others because we live in a mindset of scarcity whereby we believe that the more we give, we lose something and become “poorer”?

ALL BLESSINGS FLOW

Les Brown, a world renowned motivational speaker, in his talk on The Power of Giving, explains that whenever we, as a group, give to others, we give back to ourselves. How is that so?

Brown likens giving as passing on a gift in circles. The gift will eventually come back to us as long as everyone keeps on passing it in the circle.

He also clarifies that when we give, a vacuum is created for new blessings to flow in. That is why people who volunteer to help others are reportedly happier because they live with a purpose in life and a sense of connectedness with others.

On the other hand, when we hold back our giving, we somewhat “short circuit” the flow of blessing into our lives.

EDITOR’S NOTE

Because of an editing error in our pullout on the Graduate Recruitment Awards 2014 (page 11, 22 Nov 2014), the table of winners misstated the finalists in two categories. The Best Internship Experience Finalists should be CIMB Group and Worthy Book, not Maybank and EY, and the Best Social Media Usage finalists should be Maybank and EY, not CIMB Group and Worthy Book.

DID YOU KNOW?

01 “We are not interested in the past of our borrowers, we are only interested by their future.” – Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank

02 “Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish and teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionised the fishing industry.” – Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka Changemakers

03 “My dream is to find individuals who take financial resources and convert them into a difference in the life of the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.

04 “We believe people are basically good; we believe everyone has something to contribute; we believe that an honest, open environment can bring out the best in people; we recognise and respect everyone as a unique individual; we encourage you to treat others the way you want to be treated.” – Pierre Omidyar, co-founder of ebay

05 “People are yearning to be asked to use the full measure of their potential for something they care about.” – Dan Pallotta, humanitarian activist

The opinions expressed in this career guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.
By Karen Neoh
Karen.neoh@leaderonomics.com

In this week’s Be a Leader, I would like to focus on leaders who firstly, are clear of their goals and objectives; second, realise that the prevailing methods of achieving these goals are ineffective and/or inefficient; and third, have taken the lead to develop and execute their own approach thereby shaping the community they are working for.

**ECONOMY**

When there is a mismatch in employer and employee expectations, there is certainly a direct cost associated with it from poor retention, and there is certainly a direct cost associated with it from poor retention, and third, have taken the lead to develop and execute their own approach thereby shaping the community they are working for.

**ENGAGEMENT**

Changing needs of Talent

According to the Deloitte Millennial Survey 2014, 74% of millennials believe business can do more to help society. They want to work for organisations that foster innovative thinking, develop their skills, and make a positive contribution to society. Millennials are eager to make a difference (63% surveyed gave to charities, 43% actively volunteered or were a member of a community organisation). Barry Salberg, CEO of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited advises, “To attract and retain talent, business needs to show Millennials it is innovative and in tune with their world-view.

By working together and combining their different skills, business, governments and non-governmental organisations have an opportunity to regulate the Millennial generation and make real progress in solving society’s problems.” In Malaysia, Gen-Y are also seeking more meaningful tasks in the workplace (Aon Hewitt). The Guardian reports that students in the UK are increasingly setting up social ventures while still studying with 86% stating that it important that their work makes a positive impact globally.

This trend appears to be here to stay as Gen-Zs are also determined to make a difference, with social entrepreneurship being one of the most popular career choices. According to the US Department of Labor (2013), 76% are concerned about humanity’s impact on the planet.

**EVOLUTION**

From my experience in the social economy, the adage “birds of a feather flock together”, does hold water.

It is based on this premise that I hypothesise: due to the changing needs and demands of our workforce, setting up social enterprises may indeed be another tool in a business leader’s toolbox for attracting and retaining the right talent.

**STRATEGIC PARTNER OF, FOR AND BY THE PEOPLE**

It is worth noting that the senior Gen-Xs (who share the desire to have jobs with a positive societal impact) have risen through the ranks and themselves taken on more senior roles along the Gen-Xs in organisations.

Coupled with the move to elevate the role of HR to be a more strategic partner of business leaders, key decision-makers may be more and more inclined to put into place social/environmental objectives.

Internal spokespersons and leaders of engagement and corporate culture can communicate these to their workforce.

Externally, brand ambassadors can work closely with PR (public relations) and corporate communications on employer branding.

**SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN THE UK**

There are approximately 70,000 social enterprises in the UK, contributing £18.5bil to the economy and employing almost a million people.

In the UK, a social enterprise is defined as businesses that have mainly social or environmental aims (Social Enterprise: Market Trends, Cabinet Office 2013), with the criteria:

1. The enterprise should not pay more than 50% of profit or surplus to owners or shareholders.
2. The enterprise should not generate more than 75% of income from grants and donations.
3. The enterprise should not generate less than 25% of income from trading.
4. The enterprise should agree that it is “a business with primarily social/environmental objectives, whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or community rather than mainly being paid to shareholders and owners”.

Karen is in awe over the truly amazing ability to connect-the-dots that social entrepreneurs have – seeking, seeing and seizing opportunities that checks all the boxes and earns brownie points with multiple stakeholders. For more leadership content, do check out www.leadership.com
By SHAHRAIN MASOOD
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SOLIDARITY: unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group. (Oxford Dictionary)

THE UN’S MILLENNIUM DECLARATION
In 2005, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly announced that International Solidarity Day would take place on Dec 20 each year. This annual event is to raise awareness of the importance of global solidarity in working towards eliminating poverty in all nations.

World leaders identified solidarity as one of the universal values that are critical to international relations. Leaders emphasised, “Global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes the costs and burdens fairly in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice. Those who suffer or who benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most.”

With continued and deepening socioeconomic issues, and the increasing pace of globalisation – poverty numbers continue to increase.

According to Unicef (United Nations Children’s Fund), 22,000 children die every day due to poverty. At this rate, the millennium declaration goal to reduce this number is far from being realised.

These statistics are of course skewed to certain regions and countries with consistent poor governance and implementation of strategy, but regardless of circumstance we should all focus on what we can do at home, and to capitalise on what is within our control.

To realise this global initiative we all need to work together. Eradicating poverty is a collective effort that is realised by first looking after the people in your own community. Solidarity first at home, and then afar.

IT STARTS AT HOME
In the book titled The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time by Jeffrey Sachs, American economist and head of the UN’s millennium project, suggestions are key big picture factors that have led some nations to poverty.

These include government policies, physical geography of a community, civil rights, corruption, cultural barriers, war and ineffective trade relations.

In the context of an individual, these big picture factors might seem daunting in terms of effecting change.

By focusing on issues and interventions at ground level – through local community solidarity, we can equip people and families to break the cycle of poverty, and instil new economic value and sustainability through:

1. **Education**
   - It is the critical factor for sustainable change in communities. Children are given the knowledge and life skills for personal and professional growth.
   - The keys to success include teacher selection and training, building of schools, setting the curriculum, and setting the tone for fair and equitable education – which means an all-inclusive student population regardless of race, religion or gender.

2. **Healthcare**
   - It is an important immediate response to current illness in a community, and to inoculate people as a preventative measure.
   - Part of this intervention involves engaging with community leaders through information sharing, and educating the public on effectively managing and cultivating resources of food, water and sanitation.

3. **Empowerment**
   - Apart from giving children and adults an academic start, people need to believe in themselves as well as the collective effort and power of their communities.
   - Empowered communities are effective in making immediate and long term change. They continue to shape their own future by being aware of their rights and by taking active roles within their communities.
   - A truly sustainable community involves empowering children to express their views and make decisions that will shape their future and influence the people around them.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
Companies can help eradicate poverty by engaging directly with their community. Solidarity initiatives and projects can come from within a corporate organisation – in simple terms, corporate social responsibility (CSR).

At times, a CSR programme is an underutilised tool because of varying levels of commitment and consistency.

From the standpoint of fulfilling a minimum requirement, a CSR might look like engaging an underprivileged group for a photo opportunity, and to present them with an oversized cheque. A CSR delivered with heart and commitment can elevate company staff to become inspiring community leaders, and to create a sustainable effect in reducing poverty in areas of their local community.

Corporates are in the best position to carry out sustainable community development because of their instant access to local labour resource to carry out a task, with strategic minds and capabilities to deliver projects efficiently.

Last but not least, corporates have an allocation of CSR funding that is provided on a yearly basis – which does not include the money that can be generated from internal fundraising initiatives.

Given the credibility of most organisations, there is opportunity to influence at an industry and governance level. By definition of the UN General Assembly, “Those who suffer or who benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most.”

In terms of “those who benefit the most”, I believe they are specifically referring to the corporates.

CSR projects may include:

1. Financial contributions
   - Pure donations-based initiatives provide an immediate and effective means to fix urgent individual and community problems.

2. Soup kitchens
   - A great way to connect with and nourish people in our community. Through conversation it’s an opportunity to provide friendship, counselling and mentoring support.

3. Building homes and infrastructure
   - This immediately provides shelter and facilities to those who have been affected by natural and man-made disasters.

4. Training
   - With a focus on immediate and long-term employment, projects can include delivering trade skills to prepare for entry into manual labour jobs or to enter primary industry, and soft skills training for personal and professional development.

5. Scholarships
   - Providing full and partial scholarships for tertiary education including certification, diplomas and degree programmes.

6. Internships
   - Providing entry level opportunities into your company, which might include mentoring, and career development opportunities.

On International Human Solidarity Day today, take a moment to consider the effect an individual can make to eradicate poverty, and the opportunity for like-minded individuals to come together to create a long-lasting impact for their community.

Share your initiatives and connect with like-minded groups and companies – chances are there are people around the world with a common project and purpose to eradicate poverty.
By KAREN NEOH
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EVERAL years ago, I had the opportunity to work closely with Micaela Ratini in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Ratini has always been passionate about development and, after eight years at a consulting firm Bain and Company in Italy, she took a sabbatical to explore professional options in the development space.

My own interest in social enterprises deepened when I met with the social entrepreneur she refers to in this article. While working in Cambodia, I met many people – from Gen-Ys all the way to the Baby boomers and the “silent generation” who sought jobs that were aligned to their life missions and frequently found themselves either in a non-governmental organisation or a social enterprise.

When Ratini first came to Cambodia in 2006, her plan was to apply the experience and knowledge she had acquired during her years of consulting, to work with a social entrepreneur who needed help restructuring his three businesses employing trafficking survivors.

“My first year in Phnom Penh was challenging. There was an enormous amount of work to put into these companies and in general into social businesses in an emerging market with cumbersome bureaucracy, relatively inefficient infrastructures, and lack of necessary skills,” recalls Ratini.

“I decided to stay.”

Today, Ratini is the managing director of Insitor Management, an impact investing firm based in Cambodia with offices in New Delhi, India and Yangon, Myanmar.

Insitor Management is a small, specialised team that invests in companies that have the potential to fundamentally improve the lives of low-income families in emerging countries.

“An impact investment firm is a professional financial intermediary that actively raises, invests and manages impact funds. We raise funds from qualified investors globally and deploy them into social businesses in frontier Asian countries,” explains Ratini.

How would you define the types of companies impact investing firms like Insitor Management invest in?

“Impact investing is still a fragmented industry, with a wide variety of definitions and target companies. Impact investing firms share the vision of serving the underserved needs of vulnerable clients,” says Ratini.

“By choosing to invest in funds, investors agree to delegate investment decisions to the investment manager, within the limits of an agreed upon investment strategy.

“Investors can monitor the companies’ performance by receiving quarterly financial and social updates and can present issues and concerns to the investment manager through an investors committee.”

What are some of the criteria that impact investing firms typically require of companies?

“Successful social entrepreneurs have in their DNA the sense of responsibility to fight for success once they have identified a social issue and potential solution. A do-good mentality will not be enough to succeed.”

Consider the following:

1. Be honest about your skill set, and either study to fill in the gaps or recruit complementary team members.
2. Most social entrepreneurs are either from business or development backgrounds. Regardless of which one you are, you will have significant deficiencies as it is only half of the picture.
3. Learn introductory finance and accounting. Many great ideas hit the wall as soon as you meet the harsh reality of numbers.
4. Write a business plan for every idea you have. Reality will rarely play out like the plan says, but it is a good way to organise your thoughts and be more realistic about the opportunities and challenges of transforming an idea into a social enterprise.

THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TO FIGHT FOR SUCCESS ONCE YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED A SOCIAL ISSUE AND POTENTIAL SOLUTION. A DO-GOOD MENTALITY WILL NOT BE ENOUGH TO SUCCEED.

IN CONCLUSION

With her wealth of experience in the world of management consulting, and now firmly entrenched in impact investment and the social economy, I asked Ratini to share her words of wisdom for those interested in starting their own social enterprises.

“Being a successful social entrepreneur is difficult. You will face all the same obstacles as a commercial entrepreneur.

“Plus the added dimension of operating in exceptionally challenging markets to achieve not only financial results, but also social impact. It is an uphill battle, but the potential outcomes are highly rewarding.”

“True social entrepreneurs have in their DNA the sense of responsibility to fight for success once they have identified a social issue and potential solution. A do-good mentality will not be enough to succeed.”

Karen believes that a well-run social enterprise can be the incubator for leaders who can take their companies, and indeed countries, to the next level. For more leadership content, visit www.leaderonomics.com

TRUE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS HAVE IN THEIR DNA THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TO FIGHT FOR SUCCESS ONCE THEY HAVE IDENTIFIED A SOCIAL ISSUE AND POTENTIAL SOLUTION. A DO-GOOD MENTALITY WILL NOT BE ENOUGH TO SUCCEED.
So Good They Can’t Ignore You

Why Skills Trump Passion in the Quest for Work You Love

By KEVIN SING AOD TEAM

“Why do some people end up being good at what they do, while so many others fail at this goal?” Author Cal Newport realised that the advice “follow your passion” might not be as helpful as most people think in the context of starting the work you want. Newport was a psychology associate at MIT, and one way to becoming a professor – the natural progression path, and professor is a job for life. It was then that he started his obsession of figuring out what makes people love their job.

Newport’s research specialty was not particularly popular at that time, but academics were looking for ways to help students find their passions. So he decided to write a book, Career Advice, which New York Times called “the best career book ever written.”

So Good They Can’t Ignore You is a summary of Newport’s research, which Newport has now distilled into a new book. The book argues that passion is a myth, and instead, skills matter. The book is structured into three parts: the first part explains the problem of passion, the second part presents the solution of skills, and the third part is a set of practical advice.

The Science of Passion

The Off-Fleat summary on social scientists has never really been as popular as it was a few years ago. When I read the book, it must have been the year that matching your job to a pre-existing passion was one of the most popular ideas in business. The passion hypothesis predicts that the passion hypothesis convinces people that some- where out there, there is a magical right job that will make you happy. However, upon closer scrutiny, the top few identified passions were dance, hockey, skiing, reading, and swimming – obviously not passions that can be matched to most careers.

RULE #1: DON’T FOLLOW YOUR PASSION

The Passion Hypothesis: The key to occupa- tional happiness is to first figure out what you’re passionate about and then start thinking about what you would want with his life, and this brought him to the question: “How do people end up doing what they do?”

NEW WAYS OF THINKING

So we see that Apple did not result from passion, but from a — well, a plan that flourished, albeit unexpectedly. Of course, the Jobs we know ultimately became passion- ate about his work. So, how do we find the work that we are going to love?

PASSION IS RARE

The Road to Nirvana Revolution

RoadtoNirvana, a non-profit started by graduate students, that interview people who love meaningful work and keeps an impressive video archive of the interviews. They’ve asked people about their work, happiness, and what they would be good at. Glass resulted in a statement that does not believe in “follow your dream idea for him, madness happen in stages, in “Get good at something, it takes time. He said: “It took many years for him to even have interesting options laid out. Had that thought a tough stage in a False, 2% of the 966 identified pas- sions had any relation to work or education, with 85% describing hobby-style interest.

The Question is, how can we follow our passions if we have no pre-existent pas- sions to follow?

PASSION TAKES TIME

Any Winsenbrooke explains the distinction between a job, a career, and a calling.

Career: Any job that has the potential to be better work.

Career: A full-time, six-weeks-notice- better work.

Call: An important part of your work or by itself is not a sufficient reason to pursue something you love.

A survey found that most people identify their next work with three categories, and the first step is to figure out what you really want to do. The passion hypothesis predicts that people who experience the work as a true calling, in fact, are less likely to be prone- to burnout. But how do you find a true calling?

To test this explanation, Winsenbrooke surveyed 941 people and found that the strongest predictor of a true calling was the presence of a pre-existing passion.

Beyond Passion

Ruling Steven Levine, Peter Travers, is an exceptional case that substanti- ates to their coworkers, and had seen instances of it. However, when they fail to find it, which is highly likely, bad things such as chronic job hopping and prighting can double- fault. These are statistics to prove that there has been a consistent downward trend in the number of people who have a true career: from 25% in the past two decades since the passion hypothesis was popularized.

To this question, Scott thought he had matched his skills and a passion for his work to a job, but eventually, he did not find it: “If a job is going to be a true calling, he said, then it is not just a career, but a calling, and you must have a pre-existing passion.”

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Passion is a variable that is not constant.
By CINDY YAP
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It is difficult not to be captivated by the candour and charisma of Tan Sri Dr Jemilah Mahmood, obstetrician and gynaecologist turned humanitarian crusader, founder of Mercy Malaysia (Mercy), recipient of Bahrain’s prestigious Isa Award for Services to Humanity 2013, and chief of the United Nation’s (UN) World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) secretariat.

Dr Jim, as she is fondly known, shares with The Leaderonomics Show her experiences, thoughts and struggles, and reveals how spending more than a decade in Mercy really propelled her into a leadership role.

“You are only a leader when you actually have followers who believe in the cause,” she shares.

THE GROWING UP YEARS

Dr Jim developed a philanthropic spirit while growing up with parents whose doors were always open to people from all walks of life, and who always had food on the table for guests.

She reminisces how her mother made her, at the tender age of 13, embark on solo trips by train to Singapore during the school holidays to hand deliver money to underprivileged relatives.

“I was entrusted with money to ensure that the children had schoolbooks, shoes, etc. Being the youngest child and a rebel, I thought that my mother was just trying to get rid of me,” she recalls.

May 13, 1969 was another defining moment in Dr Jim’s life.

Her father, who was a respected member of the community, passed away when she was 11. She recalled a member of the community, passed away when she was 11. She recalled

“He would pack little bags of food and make us walk along those large monsoon drains to avoid detection to distribute food to different houses, especially those without families.”

THE CALLING

After completing her medical degree, doing a postgraduate degree, becoming an academic and going into private practice, Dr Jim became tired and disillusioned by the profession. She realised that she could offer services in times of crisis to fulfill her heart’s desire, but soon grasped the many challenges of being a full-time doctor and part-time humanitarian.

“The tipping point was the tsunami, where I had to decide when to take the dive and risk this huge career change,” she recalls.

She founded Mercy in 1999 in response to the conflict in Kosovo, south-eastern Europe. “Being deeply affected by the war, my then five-year-old son urged me to help these people.”

With the encouragement of her strongest supporter husband Datuk Dr Ashar Abdullah, she started writing to organisations in Malaysia conveying her intention, without getting much positive response. “Maybe they thought I was crazy to want to go to a war zone?” she quips.

Eventually, she applied to join Doctors Without Borders, but was inspired by Dr Ashar to start her own humanitarian drive instead of “just being one Malaysian doctor in a French organisation”.

THE BIRTH OF MERCY

With their personal savings as seed capital, Mercy was born.

Although Mercy was something new to Malaysians, help was forthcoming from the public as Dr Jim was a well-loved medical specialist with a strong client base.

“Mercy is a unique local organisation. When we travel overseas for missions, people are amazed that my volunteers assimilate so well. We eat sambal together and converse in Bahasa Malaysia regardless of race or religion, as it is like a secret code which nobody else understands,” she gushes.

That was Dr Jim’s biggest joy – seeing real unity and people coming together through Mercy.

OVERCOMING SCEPTICS

Admitting to having tackled negative, sensitive and controversial remarks, Dr Jim overcame them with the strong support system at home that believed in her vision.

“Some people will continuously try to block you. With my strong conviction in doing something I sincerely believe in, even if I fail, I fail beautifully," she says.

Throughout her 10 years of running Mercy, the word “impossible” was never in her vocabulary. “Nothing is a challenge if we look at everything as ‘half empty and half full’,” she stresses.

With no training in management and finance necessary to run an organisation, she believes in asking for help from family, friends and the corporate sector.

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Her biggest wake-up call for a continuity plan came in 2004 when somewhere in strife-torn Iraq, Dr Jim was shot. That got the strong-willed woman thinking, what if she had died then?

She muses, “I brought the whole team together and pondered on ‘Life after Jim’. Would the organisation just collapse?”

Starting out as an organisation where volunteers paid for their own airfare going to war zones and disaster areas, she realised that as Mercy grew, they had to be more professional. Hence, the need to develop a strong framework.

“Establishing a solid foundation and organisation structure in order for Mercy to outline me was one of the biggest decisions I ever made,” she says.

She subsequently gave herself a timeline to step down.

When asked whether it was hard to eventually let go, she replies, “It wasn’t difficult, because it was never about me. It has always been about setting a platform for the nation.”

Now back to head the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to prepare for the first ever WHS 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey, she endeavours to spend two to three years laying down procedures, influencing policies and turning them into action before leaving.

Calling herself “an international civil servant”, she likens UN to a huge ship that cannot be manoeuvred quickly, but one that has the whole opportunity to look at global policies.
By KAREN NEOH
karen.neoh@leaderonomics.com

**THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED**

_R_\text{Karen Neoh_} is a trailblazer in the field of human trafficking who, through her personal experience and dedication, has transformed the lives of many victims. In her capacity as the founder and CEO of the non-profit organization she started, she has been able to provide safe employment, education, and lifelong care to survivors of human trafficking.

**RAISING FROM YOUNG THAT I WAS AND WILL ALWAYS BE “THE CHAMPION OF THE UNDERDOGS”, I HAVE OFTEN GRAVITATED TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE INSPIRED ME TO PERSEVERE AND STAY ON THE PATH LESS TRAVELLED.**

One of the first people I met upon arriving in Cambodia, on a new quest to work with women and children who had been trafficked and abused, was Laura Cordisco Tsai—\text{a} wonderful human being who quickly became a firm friend.

Tsai came from humble beginnings, and took charge of her own life from very young to be the person she is today.

Her first residence was in a trailer, and she started working during her childhood to save money for college. Tsai paid her way through college at Brown University by working multiple jobs.

I am married and have a sweet elderly dog whom we adopted last year. I’m obsessed with Thai food, and I love for my food to be as spicy as possible! My favourite meal is papaya salad (spicy) and sticky rice.

In my spare time, I enjoy trying to learn to cook Thai food, going to the opera, and spending time with my family, she shares.

It is with great honour that I share with you her story.

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1. **Tell us about yourself. Was it a challenge blazing your own trail and choosing to pursue your Bachelors, Masters and then doctoral degree?**

   I am a social worker by training. My work focuses on providing social services to people who have been trafficked—particularly social services that help them start a new life once they have escaped human trafficking.

   While working at non-profits that provide services to them, I noticed that there weren’t enough programmes to help them find safe employment upon escaping human trafficking and returning to their communities.

   Due to lack of alternative employment options, I saw many returning to the same exploitative working situations that they suffered before.

   I made it my personal mission to increase access to alternative employment opportunities for people who had been trafficked.

   This personal mission ultimately led me to pursue a PhD, as I wanted to further hone my skills and conduct research that teaches practitioners about the best practices in economic empowerment programming for trafficked people.

   It was challenging forging my own path and it was often a lonely road.

   I didn’t have any mentors who were specifically doing the kind of work that I was interested in.

   However, I often reminded myself that in order for new solutions to be developed, someone has to walk a lonely path to get there. If we do what we’ve always done, the field won’t progress.

2. **You have given much attention and devoted many years to different communities in Asia. Could you share with us what prompted your decision to live and work in Asia?**

   Originally, I moved to Thailand because I was interested in working in the area of human trafficking.

   Thailand is one of the worldwide hubs for human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking.

   However, once I lived there, I fell in love with the country. I fell in love with working in Asia.

   Since then, my love for living in Asia and my love for my work has solidified my commitment to working in Asia long term.

3. **Did you play a role in helping women and children who had been trafficked, take charge of their own lives?**

   People who have been trafficked have often had their trust broken by many people in their lives.

   Many have not only faced abuse in their trafficking history, but have faced other forms of ill treatment—including abuse in their own families.

   From my experience, part of leadership development in working with them is supporting them in being able to dream again and have hope for their futures.

   When someone has been abused and exploited in many ways for so long, it can be difficult to believe that they deserve good things or that they can achieve their goals.

   Restoring hope, belief in themselves, and supporting people in daring to set a personal vision for themselves is a key first step in leadership development within this population.

4. **Do you have instances of inspiring leadership (community leaders, the women) you would like to share?**

   There are many examples. One of the non-governmental organisations that I helped launch in the Philippines has a college scholarship programme for people who have been trafficked. Among their clientele, the most popular college major is social work.

   It is very inspiring for me to see people who have faced such abuse themselves strive to use their lives to help and uplift others.

   Many of them are the first person in their families to graduate from high school, and it takes considerable dedication and personal resolve to graduate from college—much less to pursue a career that involves significant self-sacrifice and is often not highly valued in society.

5. **Who is your role model? Would you like to share how that person has impacted your life?**

   My mother is my personal role model. She raised me as a single parent.

   Although we had very limited financial means, she always ensured that I went to high quality schools and always encouraged me to pursue my dreams—even when it meant doing things that no one in my family had ever done like moving away for college, pursuing a PhD, or moving to Asia.

   She also works in social services—particularly with children who have experienced child abuse and neglect, or who have witnessed violent crimes.

   She inspired me through her commitment to serve others and through her work ethic.

   One of her favourite quotations is from Martin Luther King Jr., “After we’ve discovered our life’s work, we should set out to do that work so well that the living, the dead, or the unborn couldn’t do it better.”

   She truly exemplifies this quotation.

   She is always striving to get better at what she does so that she can serve more people, and I try to follow her model.

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**MESSAGE FOR OUR READERS:**

“I would like to say that every one of us has unique gifts, talents and knowledge that can be used constructively in society. Serving others doesn’t require working in a helping profession full-time. Follow your passion and experience and be creative in finding ways to use your passions for the good of others.”

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Karen admires leaders who choose to work hard to overcome their personal challenges, and who go on to skillfully build lives and other future leaders. For more inspiring stories and leadership content, visit wwwleaderonomics.com
CELEBRATE UNITY IN DIVERSITY
BE UNITED IN FIGHTING POVERTY

By JOHN WALTER BAYBAY
editor@leaderonomics.com

E VERY Dec 20, the United Nations (UN) observes International Solidarity Day to celebrate unity in diversity. The celebration also aims to remind us of the importance of solidarity in eradicating poverty. But, what does it all mean to us?

WHAT IS SOLIDARITY?
The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as: “a feeling of unity between people who have the same interests, goals, etc.”

The Collins Advanced Dictionary of English interprets it in a more practical manner: “If a group of people show solidarity, they show support for each other; or for another group, especially in political or international affairs.”

This is the essential prerequisite for any group or faction that seeks to realise a common end.

Based on the definitions of solidarity, it is obvious that this cannot be carried out by an individual alone, for one person cannot be aware of anything that is common, or general, in the absence of others who value the same ideals, views, etc, in order to comprise a working body.

That fact is supported by the statement of John Donne, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”

SOLIDARITY IN THE WORLD

When man began to familiarise with the world, it inevitably came to his/her attention that chaos and disorder was an intrinsic truth of life. The grand scale of this reality would presumably have presented him/her a futility with regards to correcting and/or organising it.

While creating a perfect global existence proved impossible in present day, there came to existence a myriad of circumstances, reasons and affairs which diminished the individualistic lifestyle of man.

Solidarity lies in every place. In the world, its subordinate networks and those thereof, it is an omnipresent element of life. Something people cannot do without because each and every one is a part of an entirety.

Enter the microcosmic units of society such as family, a business society, political factions, sports teams, musical bands, idealist groups, armed forces and many others.

All these are built and stand firm on the basis of solidarity. Though differences and uniqueness inevitably induce the partitions of individuals, there are always means and situations which provide them the opportunity to correlate.

ALL FOR ONE, TWO FOR ALL

Emile Durkheim, in his Division of Labour in Society, introduced two types of social solidarity which correlates with types of society. These are mechanical and organic.

Humanity, in general, comprises two specific societies in which either of the given are functional.

● Mechanical solidarity is normally practised in small scale and “traditional” societies which are defined as familial networks. An example of this would be a tribe. For their common interest of preservation and survival, every member of the whole tribe has a designated role to play and an obligation: hunters provide food, warriors enhance security and safety, elders set rules and instil order, etc.

● Organic solidarity is the type which is functional in societies and are characterised as modern and industrial. It refers to the “interdependence of the component parts”. To supply a descriptive picture, countries with international ties, especially in trade, would be sufficient to take into consideration.

THE POWER OF DIVERSITY

According to Forbes magazine, the idea of diversity seems to be centred around the idea that “It is simply the right thing to do.”

Much of the issue was based on the idea of social inclusion that embraces the variances of gender, race and beliefs. Fast forward to the millennium: Organisations have realised that diversity is not only an ethical and social issue but is now recognised as a competitive advantage.

Embracing a diversity advantage unlocks creativity and innovation. It also gives a heightened sensitivity to market needs by building a culture of understanding human needs within the organisation first.

The key to using diversity as a competitive advantage lies in the organisation’s capacity to unite its various components under the principle of “solidarity”.

HOW SOLIDARITY CAN CREEP INTO THE CUBICLES

Employees sitting behind individual desks in one department of a company must learn to work with each other despite having various self-interests.

They work to provide for their families, pay debts, invest in extra sources of income, or even placate their desire for self-indulgence.

Conversely, in their professional working environment, there is one distinguished goal they are working for – their behaviour and interaction with their fellow workers, whether those in the same, higher or lower divisions of the hierarchical structure, is the essential instrument to achieving a common end.

The value of solidarity is generally accepted as favourable means of achieving a positive end. Sadly, this principle is impartial to morals or interests.

The goal which is established by a certain society, faction or assemblage shall determine whether it has been a contributive factor for the good or the bad. No matter how right or wrong it may seem, there is always a general standard set by the majority. The privilege or freedom of non-compliance has always been an integral part of life’s balance.

A collaboration of individuals contrary to the universal good can use solidarity for what will apparently be judged as contemptuous or unconscionable by many.

History has also proven that “solidarity”, as powerful as it is, can be used as a tool to achieve an end, whether moral or immoral.

THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

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Embracing a diversity advantage unlocks creativity and innovation. It also gives a heightened sensitivity to market needs by building a culture of understanding human needs within the organisation first.
Solidarity is a gift to humanity. In every corner of the world lies a myriad of realities; and so do the multitude of individuals. They may put up with these truths and continue their existence.

Leadership for Solidarity

Leadership is the most effective means to achieving solidarity. Whether for a right or wrong cause, a formidable arrowhead can deliver the entire shaft and quill to its target.

Douglas MacArthur, upon landing at Leyte, the Philippines, took a microphone which was set to broadcast his words to the masses of Filipinos who relied on him. His oratory began with, “People of the Philippines, I have returned.”

He had gained their attention by announcing his presence, the very same presence they awaited for three years to lead them against the oppression they suffered under Japanese sovereignty.

He presented them their “hour of redemption”, made them aware that they fight for the “principles of freedom” and inspired their solidarity by presenting their common tribulations with the encouragement of how to overcome it.

“A rally to me... As the lines of battle roll forward to bring you within the zone of operations, rise and strike... For your homes and hearths, strike! In the name of your sacred dead, strike! Let no heart be faint. Let every arm be steeld.”

Collective Souls

Other than battles, companies, organisations and social groups can evolve with people who know how to manage and utilise the skills and capabilities of their employees.

Drive them to perform by convincing them of what they are contributing to and making them aware of the universal gain they will profit from.

When leaders can identify the collective concern of the many, unite them for the realisation of a common goal and convince them of the benefits they shall reap from the efforts they have sown. Solidarity is established and success is not far behind.

Solid Gift to Humanity

Solidarity is a gift to humanity. In every corner of the world lies a myriad of realities; and so do the multitude of individuals. They may put up with these truths and continue their existence.

Finding a common end always builds unity among people to perform not only for themselves, but for collective gain. Solidarity has been the driving force behind the survival and success of our species against the elements and even the mastodons. Solidarity is painted within the caves of our earliest ancestors.

I am reminded of a biblical story in reference to the Tower of Babel, as it was said: “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.”

The statement very well sums up the power of solidarity. While we dedicate a day celebrating International Solidarity Day, we must remember that a better world starts with ourselves, but the accomplishment of any mission lies beyond ourselves (the “me”).

Solidarity is the spirit that carries our ideals into realities which may lie beyond our existence. It starts with me, you and everyone around us under a common goal to whom we call “OURSELVES (Us)” = Solidarity!

John Walter Baybay is a regional management consultant who has worked more than 17 years in the areas of corporate strategic planning and economic planning. He is a competitive athlete who balances his time between business coaching, family and working with communities.
IGNITY & Services is an advocacy movement speaking and acting on behalf and alongside persons with learning disabilities. It helps to create a society where persons with learning disabilities enjoy dignity and respect, equal rights and opportunities to lead an independent and meaningful life.

In 2006, the organisation set up a project called OPTIONS with the concept of Supported Living, a project for individuals with learning disabilities to enjoy regular short breaks from their homes and to learn basic life skills. Supported Living is a transitional model which aims to equip individuals to live independently when their parents or caretakers are no longer around.

As Dignity & Services began to progress in this project, it found that these individuals were leaving school at around 19 years old and had no plans for the future. They did not know how to prepare themselves for employment, or know where to seek help.

Persons with learning disabilities, amongst the whole disabled population, present particular challenges when seeking employment in the market. Dignity & Services feels that a social enterprise is the best way forward.

A juice stall called ONE TWO JUICE was set up in 2011, in collaboration with Selangor Dredging Bhd under their Corporate Social Responsibility goal. Today, it has two full time employees and four part time staff with learning disabilities; earning an income in compliance with the Malaysia Employment Act.

The ONE TWO JUICE stall situated in the courtyard of Wisma Selangor Dredging enjoys a very high level of visibility. This has no doubt helped enable a positive change of attitude by demonstrating that individuals with learning disabilities can learn and lead productive lives.

After starting work, these six individuals have been able to address their depression, low self esteem and also able to supplement their family income. They are also encouraged to use public transport to get to work and by doing so, they have enhanced their independence.

BAKE WITH DIGNITY, another employment project led by Dignity & Services was born out of a partnership created by two parents with sons with autism. It was set up with the purpose of creating paid employment and training individuals with baking skills particularly for those who needed a shelter environment.

The baking project is currently in the midst of expansion in order to enable more individuals a chance of paid employment and to become more economically independent.

STARTING A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
To start up a social enterprise, key factors such as identifying the individual who has expressed interest in setting up a business, a corporate partner, a suitable disability-friendly location, business plan, training, orientation programme and high level of support from the supporting non-governmental organisation should all be taken into consideration.

For more information about Dignity & Services please email editor@leaderonomics.com