

LEADING TOWARDS A RESPONSIBLE GENERATION

Dato' Johan Raslan

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way."

John C Maxwell, American entrepreneur and motivational speaker

"Nothing so conclusively proves a man's ability to lead others as what he does from day to day to lead himself."

Thomas J Watson, Sr, American self-made industrialist

"Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitude and in actions."

Harold S Geneen, American businessman

So, what really makes a good leader?

If we go by the quotes, a good leader needs to be able to direct, act and walk the talk. Sounds like a Hollywood movie set; but maybe that perception is not too far off.

For example, the stage is set at PwC to produce good leaders, with the words "accountable" and "responsible" constantly scripted in. At PwC, we take our role as producers of responsible leaders very seriously. Corporate Responsibility (CR) defines what PwC stands for.

As a network of over 140,000 people around the world, we recognise the impact PwC has on the decisions they make and the actions they take. Being a global business with connections worldwide, we must appreciate the influence we have on the business and social community, and even the environment. It's about our people doing the right thing all the time.

In business, we strive to practice integrity and ethical behaviour, i.e. making money responsibly. Socially, we contribute resources to improvements and capacity building initiatives, i.e. we give back responsibly. And as for the environment, we are starting to try our best to contribute positively to climate change issues, i.e. we use resources responsibly.

The objective of our CR initiatives is two-fold. One, our people get the opportunity to give back to the community; and two, we want to inculcate a culture of responsible leadership in our people, and what better way than to embed responsible behaviour in our work culture, leadership programmes, etc.

Our initiatives are supported by our people at all levels. For example, our people volunteer their time to mentor children at selected underprivileged children's homes; we

provide pro-bono consultation to the non-governmental organisation MERCY Malaysia, on further building their capacity and sustainability. We have already assisted MERCY to achieve Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International certification – the third in the world and first in Asia. Our people are supported by the firm, which releases them from work to contribute to these efforts.

In an organisation like PwC, there is a mixture of generations spanning the Baby Boomers (like me), Generation-X and Generation-Y. However, the topic of sustainability impacts all the generations.

Gen-Xs and Gen-Ys (aged in their 20s to early 40s) tend to identify more with the CR agenda given their accessibility to information on the implications of bad CR. They demand responsible behaviour from their employers. One common question we get asked at interviews by new recruits nowadays is whether our office premises are “green”; and do we practice “green” behaviour?

The “Baby Boomers” (aged in their late 40s to early 60s), who may well have lived through a world war, may find that the wars of today – economic, social and environmental – are more difficult to overcome. Although they may be aware of CR, their actions may be dictated more by the needs of their employer/employees and their children/grandchildren, rather than as a conscious reaction to the implications of bad CR. My stint as adjunct professor at UM for the past year has exposed me to the Gen-Ys of today, and while I am sharing my views on the profession from a Baby Boomer’s perspective, they are “educating” me in the views of the generation of today – a great help in managing my own Gen-Ys. I hope that my next three years will provide me with an even deeper understanding of the next generation. This is very important because as PwC develops future leaders, we must also recognise their agenda and see things from their perspective. I look forward to more “lessons” from the UM students.

Dato’ Johan Raslan was appointed on 1st January 2005 as the Executive Chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Malaysia. He graduated in Economics and Accounting from a UK university and he started his career in two accounting firms in London – Robson Rhodes and Price Waterhouse, before returning to Malaysia. He is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) and the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA)

Dato’ Johan’s late father was Malaysia’s first non-British Accountant-General, who went on to set up Malaysia’s first accounting firm, Hanafiah Raslan Mohamad (HRM).

1. What inspired your choice of career?

When I was very young, I had the usual boyish ambitions – a career as a race car driver or a fighter pilot featured high on my list! However, around the time of my Forms 5 and 6, I started to think seriously about the right career. I was keen on a business qualification that is both reputable and versatile, a qualification which would open doors for me in the future. I also wanted something which would provide me with the breadth of experience I

was looking for. I explored many options, but finally decided on pursuing a professional accounting qualification (ICAEW) within an audit firm after completing my degree. I knew I would be given training on the job, plus I could study for my professional papers at the same time. I got to know some inspirational partners from Price Waterhouse Malaysia while I was with PW in London, and they were instrumental in encouraging me to join the Malaysian firm when I returned.

2. Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

A few names come to mind, people from different phases of my life. My late father was a Chartered Accountant and I grew up surrounded by CAs. So, naturally, he had some influence on my career choice. He passed away when I was 11 years old, but I remember how much he valued his professional accounting qualification even though he went on to do many other things. This convinced me that a first degree is simply not enough if you wish to succeed today. While in school, I looked up to my principal, Mr. Victor Gopal. I was not the 'goody-two-shoes' sort while I was in Victoria Institution, but Mr. Gopal understood that it takes many types of people to make an organisation, not just "yes men" who "toe the line". At PwC, I am appreciative of the support from our previous Executive Chairman, Raja Datuk Arshad Uda and our previous Managing Director, Datuk Khoo Eng Choo. They both took a leap of faith and gave me opportunities to take leadership positions at an early age.

3. What is your advice to graduates who want to follow in your footsteps?

Starting your career in Audit has been proven to lead to excellent careers, whether you intend to stay on in the profession or venture into other industries after you qualify. Training in a firm like PwC gives one the opportunity to experience first-hand what you could only read about in an MBA case-study. Another plus point is – you get paid at the same time! In fact, in the absence of a Harvard or INSEAD programme here in Malaysia, I firmly believe this is the best training for business available.

Simply put, if you are aiming for success, there are no short-cuts in life. Nothing beats gaining experience through hard work, which at times also means having to make some sacrifices in the short-term. I can assure you that if you start off on the right footing, you will eventually reap the rewards of your hard work. All the best!

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