

Reflections Of An Executive Coach: A Perspective From Singapore

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" East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." Whilst true in former times, this saying holds less sway in the 21st century, as See Luan Foo a Singapore-based Executive Coach, amply demonstrates. In this article of personal reflection on life in general and coaching in particular, he blends the rich traditions of East and West in his approach to knowledge, livelihood and enjoyment. These are his three pillars of Life : Learning, Earning and Yearning.

"Those who know the rules of true wisdom are lower than those who love them. Those who love them are lower than those who follow them".

----- Chinese Proverb-----

QUO VADIS

There is a saying that if you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there. We are so engrossed in our daily activities that often we do not stop to ask where we are going or do not care where we go, as long as we are busy and expend vast energy in the process. So we end up quite often traveling on the wrong road and we numbingly know that no amount of travel on the wrong road will take us to the desired destination.

Apart from knowing which road to take, it is also important to have a feel for the environment in which our journey takes place. As we survey the surroundings, it is not a scenic picture. The world seems entangled in a mess. A huge mess (an understatement). Who can untangle the tangle? Coaches can, in a small and humble way. The process is likened to the coach lighting one candle; the coachee in turn lights another person's candle, and the process continues. Little things have a way of adding up and then the sum becomes significantly meaningful. If this process brings about more understanding and trust between people of the world and ends up with more peace and less violence on earth, we in the coaching profession would have done our wee bit.

OPTIONS

Rather than leave my journey to lady luck, I prefer to go down the road which is less traveled and focus my path towards Learning, Earning and Yearning. These can be viewed as my life's foundations or the three pillars of my life; hopefully they can bring about an integration of mind, heart, and soul, including an appropriate balance between work and family life, between change and stability, and between inquiry and advocacy.

LEARNING

A good starting point here is what Albert Einstein said: "I never teach my students; I provide them an environment in which they want to learn."

The wisdom of this axiom is that it can be applied to myself as well as others with whom I interact, whether they are sponsors, clients, fellow-coaches or team players. It takes both "flexible" content and process to achieve the goal, delivered in an ambience of light-heartedness, fun and spontaneity. Too much seriousness derails the process! In all likelihood, this approach helps to build awareness, equanimity, and communion with nature and being, at least for me. The good thing is that my journey of self-discovery is neither "locked in" nor cast in bronze. Rather, I hold it as malleable, dictated by the "here and now" moments.

Ralph Waldo Emerson aptly captured this spirit when he wrote: "What is important is not what is behind us or ahead of us, it is what is within us." So, go within and discover. You will be pleasantly surprised.

EARNING

The lure here is to maximize earning, whether it is from salary or from other forms of investments such as equities, bonds, mutual funds or rental income. Maximization as an end objective has seldom brought the desired returns. Moving closer to the band of "when enough is enough, there will always be enough" tends to tilt the fulfillment odds in one's favor.

In a micro sense, the challenge is no different when it comes to arriving at an optimal mix between corporate and personal clients. There are significant differences between the two in terms of fees, duration of contract, expectations and perceptions, etc. Ultimately it is what the coach and coachee desire from the coaching relationship that points to the optimal mix. Steer clear of the temptation to subordinate the spiritual dimension to the materialistic veneer. Did not the sage of China advise, "the superior man seeks what right; the inferior one, what is profitable"?

The end uses to which the fees are put represent a real challenge. Should it go into consumption or investment, especially investment in oneself, where the payoff is longer term but leads to higher fulfillment and satisfaction levels for both coach and coachee? For me, notwithstanding how alluring and glittering the former is, I have gone down the latter path. With no regrets whatsoever. Did not John Rockefeller say "He who ignores education walks lame the rest of his life"? And as coaches we walk straight and erect.

YEARNING

This is the stuff that dreams and fantasies are made of. The learning and earning stages of one's life seldom leave space, time and energy for yearning which inevitably gets pushed to a later time frame. The nub and rub of this is that some folks never make it this far; fate intervenes suddenly and cruelly.

So the maxim beckons....enjoy the sunshine whilst you can, smell the roses, eat more ice cream and travel more. And whatever else pleases you and appeals to your fancy. This is the power of now. Yet so many of us are unwilling to trade the past and future for now. Consequently the quality of life slips. A big price to pay. The past can be a good teacher...we can learn and profit from it. Though the future ain't what it used to be, it can still be Shangri-La. Sometimes it isn't. It can be an illusion; when you finally get there, there isn't any there, there. The present is here and now and there is all there is to it. Enjoy and savor it. You may be rewarded with a glimpse and touch of Heaven. Only that it will slip away. And the cycle begins. Back to reality. And Reality. So make as much hay as you can while the sun still shines.

CONCLUSION

When you have thought through, have meditated and reflected, especially on the options you face in life, you are likely to nod in agreement that "time and tide are on the side of the ablest navigators". What future are you now navigating? And when will your boat reach the shore yonder?

For me simpler is better. This applies to life in general as well as in specific situations and decisions. And in coaching.

In the meantime, I continue to be guided by the three pillars of life, namely learning, earning and yearning. They have been both fulfilling and satisfying for me.

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