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Faith and Value Based Leadership and Management

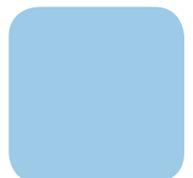
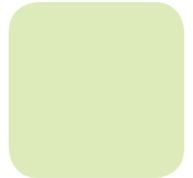
Why the World Needs Tzu Chi

Written by Rey-Sheng Her



Harvard University School of Business Administration is the world's most renowned institution of its kind. For nearly a century, Harvard Business School has consistently been the place where the world's topmost management talents are educated. Tzu Chi, an international non-profit organization based in Hualien, has been carrying out charity work in more than 70 nations in the world. Its spirit of volunteerism also received high praises from Harvard University for using values and faith as the cores of management and leadership to become a role model organization.

In June of 2008, through introduction by Stan Shih, I visited Harvard University to share the missions of Tzu Chi and the mindset of Dharma Master Cheng Yen with the faculties of the School of Management. During a one-hour meeting, Harvard Professor Goodman was quite moved by what I conveyed. He then requested that I provide an English summary of Tzu Chi missions. Based on the previous speech that I gave on Tzu Chi missions to international graduate students at the Bai-Ma monastery in China, I began to prepare the summary. The final summary report for Harvard consists of sixteen pages, starting from Master Cheng Yen's early days of Bamboo Coin Banks and spanning to her vow of self-reliance and refusing alms. It highlights Master's establishment of a role model for selfless giving by volunteers, as well as describing the Master's outlook of helping others while keeping gratitude in mind. It is through actions that the proper attitude and sentiments are forged. This practical routine prescribes right actions as vanguard to be followed by the accomplishment of right thoughts. Finally, the notion of unbiased love promoted by the Master Cheng Yen was discussed; first: love all living beings, second: inspire all people to love others, third: respond to hatred with love. To highlight the solid achievements of Tzu Chi missions, I cited examples from Indonesia, South Africa,





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and China where Master Cheng Yen teaches that in affluent countries, the rich should be inspired to help the poor, while in impoverished countries, helping the poor should become life lessons for the rich. In areas where there are standoffs, love should be used to eliminate hatred. Through these outcomes, I conveyed to the Harvard Business School the profound impressions and accomplishments of Tzu Chi regarding the world of poverty.

In 2009, Senior Professor Herman B. Leonard of the Harvard Management School and the Kennedy School of Political Science made a special trip to Taiwan for a meeting with Dharma Master Cheng Yen and to conduct a special case study on Tzu Chi. In a visit that spanned less than a week, Professor Leonard concluded that Tzu Chi is an important model for modern humane charity organizations. He held special high regard for Master's style of using values and faith as core essence behind management and leadership. He stated that in his extensive interactions with other important world organizations and their leaders, Master Cheng Yen is one of the very few who lead with values. One example would be former South African president Nelson Mandela, and the other that springs to mind is Dharma Master Cheng Yen. Prof. Leonard commented to me that Tzu Chi "uses actions to trigger compassion and uses action to inspire proper thinking", which are in strong alignment with his beliefs. These are the unique traits of

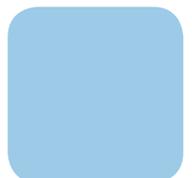
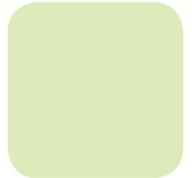
In February 2011, the spokesperson of Tzu Chi Foundation Rey-Sheng Her was invited by Harvard Business School to deliver a guest speech on "Tzu Chi disaster relief experiences and humanity".



the Tzu Chi model, worthy reference for the management academia.

In 2010, Prof. Leonard completed his case study and invited me to Harvard University to lecture on the Tzu Chi philosophies. In February of 2011, traveling with my family, I arrived at the Harvard Business School to speak on the topic of how Tzu Chi turns principles into actions. The professor's invitation was aimed at bringing awareness to Western students about Master Cheng Yen's Tzu Chi and its use of values and faith as basis behind management and leadership. This style differs from the traditional enterprise or organizational management model which leans heavily upon profit margin, competition, productivity, and quantity. To use values and faith as foundations for leadership greatly empowers others in the team, as he observed from Master Cheng Yen.

On February 9, 2011, in a frigid minus 20°C weather, I set foot on the Harvard campus. The architecture and facilities of the school are impressive without being excessively opulent; the buildings fully emanate Harvard as a world renowned university. In a lecture hall at the Harvard Business School, Professor Leonard introduced me to his class, with whom I spent the next two hours. He began with the topic of Tzu Chi gaining a foothold in Myanmar and China and contrasted that with the inability of the American CARE charity to gain entrance into Myanmar. How did Tzu Chi do it? Specifically, since Tzu Chi originates from Taiwan, how did it gain acceptance by the Mainland China government to become the first legally registered non-governmental organization? Professor Leonard raised several issues that are sensitive to the Mainland China government. They were: First, Tzu Chi is an organization based in Taiwan, second Tzu Chi is a religious organization, third Tzu Chi focuses on direct interactions with the people,





Professor Leonard (left) commented after Mr. Rey-Sheng Her's speech that it's one of the most successful sessions in his life.



and fourth Tzu Chi provides volunteers training.

According to Professor Leonard, these matters would alarm the Mainland government, but Tzu Chi prevailed ultimately. The class was split into two sessions; with Professor Leonard teaching the first hour and I explaining Tzu Chi's philosophies in the second hour. My discussion included how Tzu Chi exercises a value system that emphasizes giving without expecting returns and how Tzu Chi won the trust and acceptance of the Mainland government. My seminar was followed by a question and answer session for the students. In the Harvard Management School lecture hall, many of the graduates and doctoral candidates came prepared. Whenever there is opportunity, practically all hands would raise concurrently. The slower one would miss the opportunity to comment. One key question they asked was: "How would you evaluate the success of the effort if we were to use values and faith as guidance?"

I cited the example of the success from the Red River project in Indonesia, which validated the profound influence and inherent power of the values system. Some students asked if the decision planning model relied upon one individual. I explained to them the concept of multi-faceted decision making model and a local mobilization model. For the latter, in a disaster, local volunteers are first to initiate relief

effort and then report to headquarter, at which point the headquarters will provide necessary assistance. For a charity event planning, local volunteers, members of the local chapters, or volunteers in Taiwan make suggestions; and Dharma Master Cheng Yen will share her wisdom to provide guidance. This is the model of innovation that an entire Tzu Chi organization follows, not the commands by a few individuals to guide the Tzu Chi missions. Another student asked about how we would pass on or continue Master's exceptional leadership energy? I replied that each and every one must take charge and continue the effort. I emphasized that Master Cheng Yen personally told all Tzu Chi volunteers that the passing of the torch is not meant to take place after her death. It begins now and it is something she wishes to witness now.

Professor Leonard found Dharma Master Cheng Yen's mindset to be extremely admirable for her foresight and wisdom to recognize that now is the time to implement transferring of organizational responsibilities, not after her passing.

After two hours of formal lecture, the students stayed for another hour to engage in further discussion. After the class ended, Professor Leonard commented, "In my more than thirty years of teaching, this session is one of the most successful." My section of the lessons was recorded for replay in other classes. In conclusion, Professor Leonard stated, "While the financial world repeatedly encounters crisis of integrity and trust, Tzu Chi and Master Cheng Yen use values and faith as the foundation for management. For the students and the Western culture, such is quite an inspiration." He wanted his students to understand the importance of this management model, and hoped that this faith and value based model of leadership can become widespread in the Western societies.

