



Noriswadi Ismail of HeiTech Padu Berhad not only happens to be a recipient of the prestigious British Chevening Scholarship and an accomplished writer but also the winner of the “Young Manager of the Year Award” 2008. Just recently, Noriswadi clinched the Majlis Amanah Rakyat *Skim Pelajar Cemerlang* (SPC) Scheme Award to pursue his PhD research in Queen Mary, University of London, on “Radio Frequency Identification Technology: An Interdisciplinary Analysis between Data Surveillance and Privacy in the United Kingdom and European Union”. Multi-faceted, opinionated and fiercely focused, the thirty-three-year-old Noriswadi talks about his journey through MOYA, and discusses his ideas on management and the country with *MANAGEMENT*.

by Barry Mark Westerhout

Quantum *of* Success

ON THE COMPETITION

What made you decide to participate in this competition?

I was inspired by the previous winner, Effendi Azmi Hashim of Mesiniaga, who had clinched the award in 2007. In a way, he motivated me to try my hand at emulating his success! Besides, most importantly, my superior and the senior management had also supported my nomination to run the extra mile for this competition; in no particular order, they are Dato' Mohd Hilmey Mohd Taib, Encik Tajul Razi Abdul Aziz, Tuan Haji Safiee Mohammad, Encik Khaeruddin Sudharmin and Encik Ahmad Abdul Ghani.

Share with us the experience of going through the judging rounds.

The judging rounds were indeed a thought provoking experience. I knew that the judges had read the application form, written essays and answers. And during the face-to-face interviews, I could see how the judges delved into practical managerial questions and hypothetical scenarios at hand. From one round to the other, I could see the natural progression; where I had to prove [being myself] as a transformational manager.

Did any particular segment seem tougher/easier?

Yes. It was during the Viva Voce segment. It was akin to the Donald Trump's "The Apprentice" final interview round. I was impressed and thoughtfully stimulated with the range of questions that the panelists threw at me – it really challenged me. At the same time, I was advised by the Chairman of the panel to get married as soon as possible ☺

Was there any form of preparation done for this competition?

Yes. I started revisiting my archives of working achievements and failures. The 360 degree leadership survey appraisal had helped me a lot. I think 80% of the preparation mostly relied upon my practical

experiences and corporate case studies in my working place. The remaining 20% was very much a mixture of personal readings, management insights, inspiring stories of successful managers, leaders and of course, prayers.

How do you think winning this Award impacted your career?

Winning this award is indeed a blessing. I do not see the impact on career wise only. But, I see it as a potential opportunity for me to contribute back towards nation building. Whilst there are many excellent managers out there who, perhaps, have not had the opportunity to being in this selection, I believe, by working together with them, we could transform the level of professionalism not only to one's career progression, but also to public policy and strategic engagement to building a better Malaysia.



ON MANAGEMENT

In your view, what are the attributes of an excellent manager or management leader?

I think excellent managers should preach the L.E.A.D notion:

- L: Lead through communications;
- E: Exemplary thought leadership;
- A: Accountability through integrity; and
- D: Dare to fail and learn from mistakes.

Those are the strong values that a manager should consistently uphold in the entire spectrum of the working environment across the organisation.

If there is one exemplary management leader you could emulate, who would it be and why?

On the political front, I would opt for the 44th American President: Barack Obama. It's not because of the Obama "tsunami" that has affected the world, but it's his campaign's journey and understanding of sophisticated issues ranging from

investment, economy, politics, philosophy, social stigma, security and international relations to domestic matters that are consistently exceptional. He is a strategist, executer and a pragmatic leader. A people's leader with the influential thoughts to provoke, induce, influence and convince people from all walks of life.

On the corporate front, Tan Sri Dato' Sri Dr Teh Hong Piow is an inspiration. He climbed the corporate ladder and made himself a respectable corporate leader in this era. His leadership and management principles are prudently applicable amid the changing times despite the unpredictable economic landscape. He embraced strong integrity and had such a fair and informed conviction of the risks that he took when he first founded and helmed Public Bank. I have read his biography which he launched in 2007. It is an enriching management guru reference.

What do you think is the secret to success?

I am convinced that the following abilities are indispensable to attain success: the ability to be consistent, to translate one's thoughts with substance and factual evidence, and having an innovative leadership approach. As time flies with sophisticated managerial and leadership challenges, one has to move very fast and keep abreast with global best practices within the local context.

How do you personally rate yourself as a manager or management leader? What do you think is your strength, and also areas which you wish to improve on?

If I were to rate myself, I would give a rating that is above average. Of course, the highest rating would be my preference. Nevertheless, I think it's premature and insensible to rate myself as a 5-star manager as I am still learning many useful managerial and leadership lessons in my workplace. In my opinion, a rating is a number that may



change, subject to performance and surroundings. I think, what causes a manager to be rated as a performer is his or her ability to consistently pursue achievements in the following scenarios: crisis management, leadership conflict, damage control, miscommunication and insubordination. I think my strength lies in the areas of consistency, firmness and innovativeness. These help me very much in my team's working engagements across a multi-talented pool of the organisation and in learning to handle whatever differences, thereby translating the diversity into potential opportunities. I would love to improve on my Emotional Quotient (EQ) leadership ability. I think, it will take

years and time to control the EQ through the maturity of time.

Based on your experience as a top-flight manager, and having encountered/ worked with other managers, what do you think is the one attribute that Malaysian managers could improve on? Are they comparable to their international peers?

I think, Malaysian managers, in general, should be able to enhance their EQ leadership. We have excellent managers with the best credentials in the market, and indeed, they are globally competitive and comparable. I would say that what makes one manager different to the other is his or her EQ. As EQ carries

very much a sophisticated DNA within a corporate culture and across diversified stakeholders' engagement, it's best for us to appreciate each and everyone's corporate or organisational DNA and learn their thoughts and thinking perspectives with one's EQ. Take failures, conflicts and bad decisions as opportunities and translate them into a workable benchmark.

Is there a particular management philosophy that you subscribe to? Why?

Yes. Veni. Vidi. Vinci: I came, I saw, I conquered. It's pragmatic and it could be emulated not only in a management spectrum but to one's life.

“Take failures, conflicts and bad decisions as opportunities, and translate them into a workable benchmark.”

Do you often read about management? Which author/book/journal/magazine do you personally recommend and why?

Yes. I read management articles and treatises weekly. I am a proud subscriber of *Harvard Business Review*, the *MANAGEMENT* publication of MIM and free online articles of MIT Sloan and Wharton Business School’s management, leadership and strategy articles. I have started to read Peter Drucker’s book and am attempting to understand his managerial and economics insights. It’s stimulating but yet, needs some rethinking. I have no special selections on management-related books that much. But, I prefer management leaders’ bibliographies. The narration and storyline will tell you practical experiences and unfold many “rollercoaster” facts that are not writeable in management books!



ON PERSONAL MATTERS

You have an impressive body of published work. Has writing always been in your blood, so to speak?

I love to write and I write from my experience, heart and soul. It has been my dream to be a writer one day, but not now. I aim to be the first Malaysian “John Grisham” one day. Time will tell though and hopefully, it will be a reality.

Which article would be your personal favourite and why?

I think my academic article on: “Corporate Governance: Different Principles-Different Approaches” is the best. That article clinched the first prize at the National Essay Competition on Corporate Governance in 2005. Much of the substance, narration and abstracts

of the article were a reflection of my corporate experiences, comparative theories and arguments that were adduced with my professional colleagues. Indeed, it bore fruit.

Of your many accomplishments, which are you most proud of and why?

This is the hardest to answer and I have to be a cherry picker for this. I would say I am modestly happy when I received the British Chevening Scholarship in 2006/2007. That was the time I had the opportunity to accomplish my Master of Laws in Information Technology & Telecommunications Law in Strathclyde Law School, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK. As the only Malaysian in the Law School, I had so many tremendous experiences. It was a year of useful learning, cultural embodiment and appreciating global views, and in return I am now holding a leadership position in HeiTech Padu Berhad. Being a British Chevening Scholar, no doubt, raised my confidence to greater heights in achieving my next additional mile of dreams. And I am so thankful for the Chevening experience.

How do you balance your time between your personal life and working life?

Take this life one step at a time and nourish its beauty and meaning. I always believe in that at all times.

Any particular extracurricular activities that you favour?

Yes. I love travelling [particularly backpacking] and lately, more into researching batik motives within South East Asia contour. Besides, blogging is my social companion during weekends.



ON MALAYSIA

What are your views on the current political climate?

Malaysians would love to see our country to achieve the reality of its Vision 2020. The current political climate suggests a wake-up call to the elected leaders to be different, extraordinarily accountable and politically innovative, and to regain the Malaysians’ trust, confidence and integrity.

Are there any areas which you feel the present Government could improve on?

I think, we have to thank all of the five premiers that had led Malaysia’s stewardship. They have had done a lot for us and our nation. They are amongst the respectable CEOs and “Solutions Architects” of Malaysia since the post-Merdeka era. In my opinion, the present government has the entire framework, infrastructure and the “software” [people] in place. Now is the time for us to mature the processes and systems and most importantly, being sustainable is the key. Of course, to state a full wish list to the present Government is nearly impossible. But introducing KPIs is indeed an excellent move. We would love to see the translation and achievements, quarter by quarter.

What do you think lies ahead for Malaysia?

Malaysia has what the world wants if all the framework, policies and rules of laws are administered through strong thought and exemplary leadership. What our previous Prime Ministers have contributed to date bears testimony to what we have today. Nevertheless, as politics, economics and social demographics evolve; Malaysians will see a better Malaysia served by the best and brainiest Malaysians one day. 