



# Building the Foundations of a Solid Career through Performance

By Weelan Ho

## Survival of the Fittest

There seems to have been some form of financial crisis every decade or so for the last 30 years. Hong Kong had its own financial crisis in the 1980s, suffered in the Asian financial crisis in 1997, and now, in 2008, we're entangled in the worldwide financial tsunami, which has affected the global economy. The implication for most companies is a reduction in levels of business, sales revenue and workload. The evolutionary theory of survival of the fittest infers that companies and individuals must be responsive to change, be open and be ever ready to take on challenges in order to survive in the current environment.

We often talk about companies. But exactly what does a company consist of? The people who work in it, all of us, are part of our company. And so the responsibility for making a company successful depends on all its employees. Not just the boss, not just management, but all of us. We each have a role to play.

## Attitude and Abilities Determine Performance

The company's performance is a function of our performance. How well we perform depends on our abilities, which are skills related, and



our attitude or mindset towards work. In short, abilities and attitude determine performance.

Attitude reflects our underlying beliefs about issues, and in this specific context, work. For example, if you believe that you are responsible for your own learning, chances are, you will be more pro-active and active in finding out information you don't know by asking people who do know instead of waiting to be told what to do. You become an active learner instead of being a passive learner. You take ownership. If you view active participation and taking on more responsibilities as an opportunity for further development, you are likely to be motivated by your work irrespective of whether a pay increase is involved because you want to learn, contribute and make a difference. Your perspective is not about now, but future possibilities. Some common characteristics reflecting

work attitude that encourage high performance include being proactive, industrious, innovative, open to trying new work methods, and willing to go the extra mile.

### Technical and Soft Skills are Equally Important

Our attitude shapes our perspectives and our responses towards work and it is a fundamental ingredient in motivating us to excel. However knowledge and skills are the tools we need to help us perform to the standards expected. We need technical skills and soft skills in order to be competent in providing quality results. Technical skills are “know-how” or skills pertinent to the specific area of work expertise (for example, accounting), while soft skills are like lubricants – they help us to be more effective in the way we work.

*Some examples of soft skills sets that are relevant to all walks of life include:*

- Communication skills that encompass active listening, questioning skills, interaction skills, persuasion skills and presentation skills, just to name a few
- Conflict resolution skills
- Problem solving skills
- Management skills

Both technical and soft skills are equally important.

### Performance is Measurable

*The results are reflected in measurable performance, which can be expressed:*

- Quantitatively, e.g. the attainment of goals and objectives in terms of volume, percentages, figures, etc.
- Behavioural terms, e.g. a motivated staff member who is prepared to get the job done by arriving early, working late, trying innovative methods and so on

The outcome of performance is very specific. It is measurable and observable.

### Implications for Learning and Career Development

What are the implications for us all in terms of our learning and career development, particularly during these uncertain times?

It is often said that if you have the right

attitude and are positive, you are already on the right path to success – this is the importance of positive thinking. How willing and prepared you are to put the effort in to develop yourself is in your own hands and within your control.

Luck can be defined as hard work (i.e. the extent of preparedness) plus opportunity. Opportunity knocks on the doors of those who are prepared. As individuals, we must equip ourselves with the necessary skills and be prepared to change with time. We owe it to ourselves to be open to learning. The knowledge and skills we acquire through learning will always be with us and they will only serve to improve our marketability and market value. It is through continuous learning and development that we find innovative ways to contribute to our organizations and, along the way, better ourselves and our career prospects. So, let's work to expand our skills repertoire together!

**T/D**

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