



by Weelan Ho

### Reflections on learning

Experience is the best teacher. Making mistakes and creating success stories are all part of life's learning and they offer learning opportunities. They help expand our capabilities so that we are better at what we do and the associated experiences can be character building. Thus, having the ability, willingness and, very importantly, the open-mindedness and objectivity to reflect on the consequences and impact of what we do (i.e. the good and the bad) are prerequisites for learning. Everyone has his / her opinions. Opinions are not facts and should not be set in concrete, enabling one to be influenced by stronger lines of argument and a solid rationale. To remain obstinate is to deny oneself the opportunity to be better.

Some areas to ponder and questions raised include:

- The sources and others' perspectives of why they disagree without triggering off your in-built defensive mechanism, i.e. automatically becoming defensive and thinking about 'how right' you are
- Better and alternative ways of doing and handling issues if you have to do the same thing all over again
- Comparing and contrasting differing means
- Lessons which can be learned to draw generalizations and guiding principles for future reference

### Sources and scope of learning

I am often perplexed by some people's narrow-mindedness about learning, which limits their learning sources and scope. Someone once wrote to *Readers*

*Digest* that "You need to be educated in order to be literate, but you certainly don't need to be literate in order to be educated" to highlight the differences between being educated and being literate.

Even illiterate people can be very educated through life-long learning, and we can learn from them.

Literate people are not necessary educated people. Being literate only means they have completed their schooling and they have learned to read and write. Think about the following. Would you consider someone with tertiary education but who treated the tea-lady badly (e.g. with no respect and no manners) to be educated?

I am certainly not proposing that we can forget about schooling and the need for a formal education. I am merely highlighting the fact that being literate does not equate to being educated. Education includes building one's character and therefore should be broader in scope.

I often wonder why technical and professional journals cater for technical and management and soft skills learning but regard learning from indirect sources to be irrelevant. For example while not relating directly to professional roles i.e. parents' capability to lead and coach. We seem to think that leadership examples must be derived from corporations rather than day-to day learning from all sorts of people including our parents.

### Learning from people around us

Our family and friends are often the best source of learning. Communication is a socialization skill and we learn this skill through interacting with family and friends while we were young. The tone, choice of words and body language are picked up during our developmental years and follow through to our adulthood. These can be of benefit to us if what we learned were appropriate skills – or to our detriment if they are inappropriate and cause interpersonal skill problems. Our willingness to reflect and the courage to change provide a basis for improvement. We learn to undo bad habits of the past, build new skills and reinforce the positives.

### Learning from situations around us

Some people leave the workforce to take care of their family and re-enter the workplace when the children have grown up. Looking after children, doing the house work, juggling priorities and running errands around for the family can be hard work despite having assistance from

domestic helpers. Experience, trial and error during the at-home period teach people useful soft skills that are equally applicable at work. Some skills learned include multi-tasking, prioritizing and delegating work and problem solving, just to name a few.

These at-home situations offer many invaluable opportunities for learning and can only increase our self-marketing asset value if we are open to learning from them. They also make us feel good in knowing that we are able to handle both situations at home and at the workplace.

T/D

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