



# *Woman of Substance*

by Sarina Chan, AMIM

Newly crowned “Manager of the Year (MOYA) 2008”, **Hor Chee Leng**, heads Treasury Operations Malaysia at OCBC Bank (M) Berhad. Tough without losing her femininity, the tenacious thirty-seven-year-old mother of two shares with *MANAGEMENT* her life’s philosophy and principles for success.

**How has winning the “Manager of the Year Award” (MOYA) 2008 impacted and helped you in your career advancement?**

Winning was a great way to cap off an interesting journey. The MOYA selection process gave me the opportunity to meet interesting personalities and expand my network to beyond the banking industry. The press coverage and the finale was a grand affair, and the publicity given to the winners and finalists was very well covered.

The award was also widely publicised in the OCBC group and I received congratulatory messages from my Group CEO, CFO and colleagues as far as Bangkok and Indonesia. I hope that awareness of this award will spur many more capable managers within OCBC Bank to participate in future MOYA initiatives and get recognised for their contributions as well.

**Coming from the background of Chemical Engineering, why did you choose banking as your career? Was it by accident or coincidence?**

It was not by accident or coincidence. As opposed to common perception, Chemical Engineering is not Chemistry. Chemical Engineering provided me with sound analytical training and project management skills which laid a very relevant foundation when I started my career in business consulting with Accenture.

In Accenture, I consulted with clients and implemented business strategies and processes for various financial institutions in Europe, Singapore and Malaysia; hence the transition to banking and OCBC Bank was a very natural progression in my career path. I have very good support from my current supervisors, and a very clear career path and business objectives. OCBC Bank is indeed an employer of choice.

**Who do you regard as your role model and has the most influence on you to become what you are today?**

I don’t have a single but many role models. Various women leaders in world set different examples that inspire me differently.

For instance, the strong and decisive character of Margaret Thatcher inspires me to lead with a no-nonsense attitude and confidence. But when I read about Mother Theresa, she reminds me about what makes a compassionate manager and, ultimately, a more caring person.

**What do you think are the traits/characteristics that every manager/leader should possess?**

In a nutshell, these are the characteristics I believe that every manager/leader should have:

- Compassion and trust – to lead as a better person and to empower effectively;
- Charisma and catalyst – to drive for changes, for the better; and
- Decisiveness and determination – to champion for results and strive towards even higher goals.

**Please describe your leadership style and how it has benefited you and your team and helped to bring you to greater heights.**

Like Yin and Yang, there is a certain harmony in taking a balanced view. It is in taking a balanced path that guides me in my day-to-day work.

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I practise an open management style and I believe in true empowerment to bring out the best from every staff member.

**In your journey of “managership”, what were the specific steps you took to ensure continuous learning and personal development?**

Apart from classroom training, continuous learning is very often picked up on the job. I relish undertaking new assignments and challenges beyond my current job scope to widen my influence and learning opportunities. I always remind myself not to be lulled into a sense of complacency where a comfort zone is built, as this is when the learning stops.

**In what ways do you raise the bar for yourself and others around you?**

The treasury business moves so fast that there is little room for complacency. Each year, our department aims to better our previous year’s KPIs and this gives us no room for complacency. Obstacles and challenges pose opportunities for everyone but we go in as a team to face them together.

**Where do you see yourself in five years?**

Work-wise, I like the banking industry and I like the industry of making money! Apart from excelling in my work, I want to be remembered as a compassionate and effective leader to my colleagues and staff.

**Tell us about a time when you had to go above and beyond to get a job done.**

I have faced many of such challenges. A project that had left an indelible mark on me was when I assumed the role of a project

manager mid-way through the project implementation for a large MNC client in Singapore.

Inheriting project budget and timeline overruns, I literally walked into a battle zone! We were clocking in 100-hour weeks as well as working weekends, and this went on for half a year. I was facing high attrition, low employee morale as well as had little time with my family.

Looking back, it was the determination to brace myself for difficult times, and holding on to the hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel, which kept me going – such experiences are the times when we grow and learn the most.

The project could have been better planned and the experience has provided me with invaluable insights on what not to do when going into a project. Never underestimate the importance of planning because if we fail to plan, we plan to fail.

**How do you juggle the balance between family and work and what advice you would give to female professionals?**

Let me know if there are any female managers out there with a solution! Work-life balance is a continuous challenge. I have two young children of school-going age and I don’t have the luxury of doting grandparents who can take care of them.

Life is about choices. I love my family but I still choose to keep working. At this stage, with the little time left after work, I “make” time to spend it with my family. Personal time is a luxury but in the priority of things, such luxuries will just have to wait. **IV**