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`Good PR should come from the heart'

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GOOD public relations (PR) should come from the heart, said founder of LimKokWing Integrated Group Tan Sri Dr Lim Kok Wing.

"Not everybody can do PR. Some may be good but how genuine are they?" he said during a recent interview with Business Times in Kuala Lumpur.

Lim said PR that comes from the heart will produce good results and this is proven when he was awarded the "Most PR Savvy Chief Executive Officer (CEO)" award by the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM).

Lim was awarded the award for his continuous social work in the country as well as to the world.

Born into a humble family a year after the World War II ended, Lim is very sensitive to what happened around him. His artistic ability was evident from young.

He loved art and culture. He believes that those who are attached to art are simply honest to themselves. These people love good relations and always work hard to give the best for other people.

Lim was fascinated over the flow of lines, the mix of colours, the different shapes and the perspectives.

"I was fascinated with all these, especially with the resulting harmony," he said in a recent interview with Business Times.

What makes it interesting is that Lim dropped out of school as a teenager and for two years, his parents never knew about this. He had more fun earning a living, finding out about life.

Impatient to get into the groove of things, Lim became a reporter. Tired with the straightforward style of factual writing he tried his hand of being a cartoonist.

"Even that was not enough to whet my creative appetite," he said. Then came the opportunity in advertising. This was his calling.

He entered the advertising industry as an illustrator and within a short span of time rose to become creative director of one of the world's largest international network, making history as he assumed the role.

"I was the youngest to hold the position and also the first Asian," he said, adding that a significant fact was because the industry was dominated by foreigners. Lim was in his 20s when he was made creative director.

Advertising gave him the space to hone his many skills and fulfil his creative urge. It opened a new chapter that completely turned his life around.

The complex, high pressure world of advertising was exactly what he needed.

It was the catalyst he needed to bring many skills to the fore. Lim explored and experimented from print to the electronic medium.

The ideas poured out of him. His hands worked hard to keep up with his brain. Lim astounded his employers and stunned the clients with the diversity of his talents.

While working, Lim also became aware of the potential the industry has and was appalled with the lack of opportunities for local talent.

From his own experience, he knew it was not easy for others to achieve what he had done. He found it easy to do what he did because he enjoyed his work.

"I found pleasure in the many projects I worked on and never minded the many hours (of work) and the long hours I kept every night," he added.

Regardless how much you he loves the job, Lim became restless and dissatisfied with the foreign dominated environment.

"I had strong views about the region and how advertising should be presented to address the various cultures and markets," he said.

Being the sole Asian voice in a business dominated by foreigners, he could not project his ideas strongly. Lim decided to leave as he also felt he had a lot to contribute to anchor a strong Asian presence using local talent.

He felts it was time to set up his own agency.

Another door opened. Another chapter began.

Tracing his roots in the advertising industry, Lim said he was 29 when he set up Wing's Creative Consultant in 1975. It was a bold move because he was muscling into an industry controlled by expatriates and multinationals.

The few local agencies were more sign makers than anything else. He knew the business and understood the market.

Lim laboured patiently and diligently to convince many of the multinational manufacturers and other companies to use local talent. For the first time, a home grown agency had the guts, the talent and the business acumen to woo and win blue chip accounts.

While making a name for himself, Lim was still churning out the ideas but this time the credits were coming his way. His agency grew together with the reputation.

Creatively, Lim was raising standards winning more than 100 national and international awards. The industry elected him to head the Accredited Advertising Agencies Associations.

Using the association as his platform, he pushed hard to build local branding.

"I believed in the quality of local talent and felt compelled to champion their cause using his personal experience as a yardstick," he said.

Lim later pioneered the 6As annual award, known as the Kancil award, as a means to encourage and reward quality in the industry.

His relentless efforts began to pay off as local advertising reached sophistication in approached and execution. Local talent gained recognition for quality work.

"My greatest satisfaction came from the growing conviction of the local industry in its own abilities," he further said.

His own business moved on to become part of an international network in the world. A stable of clients have grown and this is when Lim reached the pinnacle of his profession, and again ... he got bored.

This time, Lim turned to bigger prospects. He was drawn by the country's vision of transforming Malaysia into a fully developed nation by the year 2020.

"I wanted to contribute to this vision and I strongly feel that I need to do something," he stressed.

The mid-1980s and 1990s saw him begin a new era as a strategic communicator - becoming one of Asia's best.

This was an era and that even now, continues to see him use the wealth of his experience, knowledge, creativity and skills to move people, change mindsets, influence the hearts of not just Malaysians, but others.

He built his campaigns on meaningful messages, strategically communicated, skillfully using the right media mix.

Companies, governments and humanitarian causes found it useful to use his services. In one man they sourced a strategist, one who was highly creative and most able to put ideas into action.

Lim worked closely with the Malaysian Government delving into cause

marketing and relationship building. He had a tough task communicating to a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society to build cohesiveness and trust.

The Malaysia Inc publication in 1995 was an outstanding promotion of Malaysia's policies to the foreign world. It was a book that had the participation of captains of industry and high-ranking bureaucrats who presented a scenario of public and private sector economic co-operation.

Lim's involvement in national events are countless. He helped create the "Rakan Muda" movement aimed at youth development. The concept and philosophy of the movement was adopted by a number of countries.

He pulled together a campaign to educate people on inflation with a common target to achieve "Zero Inflation" and set out parameters when Kuala Lumpur won the bid to host the 16th Commonwealth Games.

When the currency crisis hit the region, Lim put together a campaign to persuade people to show their support for the games to ensure it success. The game was widely acknowledged as the best organised last century.

He was specially selected to help South Africa as the country prepared for its first democratic elections and this has received special acknowledgement from the country's then president Nelson Mandela.

Apart from that, Lim also work to help Bosnia Herzegovina rebuild the wartorn country and this too, has been widely acknowledged as a masterful execution involving a publication, exhibition and website to raise funds.

As a designer, Lim know where and when to play his part. He endeavoured to communicate the central role played by design for a local market of aspiring manufacturers who saw design primarily in artistic terms.

"The country was progressing rapidly, but it had another rung to climb. It had to be able to produce original, high quality products in order to gain reputation that will help the country in developing its own brand," he said.

Lim was one of the few people in the country who could see the future the Government was trying to build. And this perhaps, explains why he has been able to conceptualise and visualise so successfully the projects that he has been entrusted with.

He worked with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry to promote Malaysian branding overseas and put the design factor in place when Kuala Lumpur began to change into a global city.

He devised the information design for the first electric train, the international airport and the light rail transit system.

The corporatisation of many companies also saw him involved in creating corporate identities that gave the entities a sophisticated look befitting their new status.

He took steps to establish the Malaysia Design Technology Centre, an organisation completely devoted to design unparalleled in its concept.

It was created to be a hub for design. In fact it will be a fully integrated centre, the only one of its kind in the world.

From a museum that showcases outstanding product designs to exhibition centres devoted to the display of rubber, plastic and timber products as well as studios, training centres and service clusters that incubate idea generation, the centre will interact with the global community of designers.

Ultimately, Lim aims is to evoke design conciousness among Malaysians.

"I want to create a love for quality and good design that will have a spin-off effect on products and services developed in this country." This concern also also led to the establishment of a school to nurture a new generation of designers who will have the right training and who will have the skills of new media that will enable the country to reach a higher level in its aspiration to be able to create and innovate.

As an educationist, Lim's involvement not only created a new chapter in his life but set trends in the sector. Lim entered the world of education desiring to impart the value of his experiences to the young.

"Upon making my entry, I found challenges waiting," he noted.

He brought the world into the classroom through smartpartnership with some of the world's most established and reputable universities and colleges.

Lim is driven by a concern for the next generation and his emphasis on creativity as a competitive edge is now receiving its due recognition after a decade of championing its value to business and life.

He changed mindsets helping people to grasp the elusive concept of creativity and thus enabling young people to convince their parents of building careers in creative professions.

As to date, there are graduates from the Limkokwing Institute of Creative Technology contributing to the country's transformation into a knowledge-economy (k-economy).

The Millennium Institute of Technology is a more business oriented entity focusing on electronic-business (e-business) that prepares the new young for the new mode of global transactions where the computer plays a central role.

Wings of Creativity completes his intention to cultivate creativity in everyone. While his other institutes provide avenues for higher learning, Wings of Creativity looks at the child to develop critical and creative thinking skills.

Wings provides a curriculum to develop the whole child to enable this young generation to become more articulate, able to solve problems and grow up confident in his abilities.

Lim tried almost everything in life and publishing is not left out. His publishing efforts were strategic to the campaigns he orchestrated.

In any case he had a love for the printed matter. He became an extraordinary publisher because his involvement in every word and page began from conceptualisation and ended at printing.

Being highly creative he had a fascination for typography. Lim saw more than just the message he wanted to preserve and communicate. He saw the visual impact as well.

Every book that he has published is an outstanding example of message delivered in sophisticated form.

"Malaysia Incorporated" showcased the unique public and private sector co-operation that were the catalyst to the remarkable growth of the economy in the late 80s to the mid-90s. "Bosnia Herzegovina Beyond Words Beyond Tears" complemented the Government's stance to the world to help rebuild this wartorn nation.

"Green Horizon" was a cover to cover visual presentation of rainforest richness to counter misconceptions about Malaysia's forest management.

"Hidden Agenda, Currency Turmoil and New Voice of Asia" explained Malaysia's reason for its unorthodox reaction to protect its currency from being exploited in the world market.

The publications gave the world Asia's viewpoints on issues that were distorted by the West.

Lim also annually produces a publication - Education in Malaysia - that promotes Malaysia throughout the world as a regional education hub.

His humble background made him the ideal giver and throughout his life, he has supported charities and a multitude of causes - homeless, spastics, blind, heart disease, HIV, drug addicts and cancer victims. His recent project to help train the mentally handicapped so that these people could at least lead part of their own life.

"We are helping them to do basic things in life like cleaning up

themselves and eating," he said.

His work with the Malaysian Red Crescent Society is well known too. He was the vice-chairman and used to be international adviser to the world Red Cross Society.

He is not content with giving cash but donates his time and abilities as well. All thro-ugh his working life, Lim has found time to organise international campaigns to gain support for the movement.

Lim uses his creativity to draw crowds and reach their hearts. He organises campaigns, designs indentities ad sponsors videos to communicate his messages.

He produced "The Trap", an anti-drug film which was presented at a world conference by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

It was voted one of the top 10 public service films in a world-wide competition held in New York. The film carried a universal message and it was made available to other coun-tries to help them counter their own drug problems.

Lim has been helping people for more than 35 years and sometimes his contributions are made directly to individuals who need help to overcome other hardships.

Sometimes he turns counsellor when people bring their personal problems. This part of his life will stay forever changing shape according to needs and demands of community.

Lim enjoys art, especially Asian art and antiques.

"I surround myself with their beauty," he added.

Unlike others who invest in art and artifacts of ancient times, he buys them out of sheer love. Every nook and cranny, corridor and passage-way of his house and office will make a visitor stop to study.

He plays a vital role in the country to promote and preserve the arts and crafts of the different ethnic groups.

One of Lim's efforts in preserving the heritage is when he adopted a heritage building "Loke Mansion".

He coined the word "Artiquarium", a word for the building and turned it into an art and antique gallery to give purpose to the building and opportunity for people to visit the place.

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