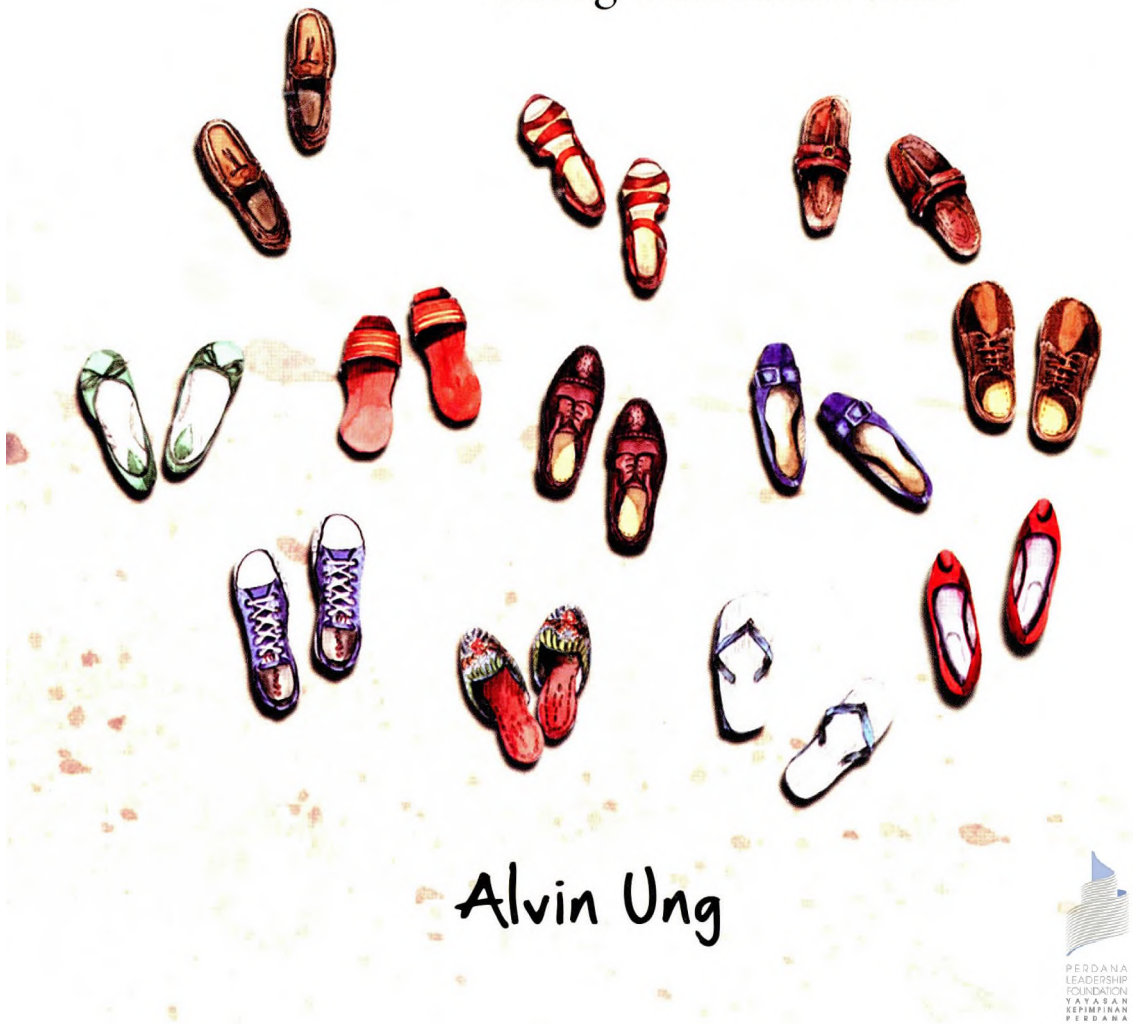




Barefoot Leadership

The Art and Heart of
Going That Extra Mile



Alvin Ung

Ordinary people possess the capacity
to be great leaders.

Set in the multi-cultural context of Malaysia, *Barefoot Leadership* highlights how you can lead without business suits, briefcases and leather shoes. Read how author Alvin Ung journeys through the meandering rivers of Borneo, the dense oil palm plantations in Selangor and the dark alleys of Chow Kit to track down real people with real stories of embracing their true calling.

You will meet:

- a high school principal who takes over and turns failing schools into academic powerhouses
- a hotelier who built a world-class adventure travel company by hiring illiterate juveniles
- a homemaker who has built a school that provides the best education for the poorest of the poor
- a Yale dropout-turned-doctor who fought for the rights of farmers, squatters and villagers.

Through inspiring stories and vivid examples, *Barefoot Leadership* guides CEOs, managers, young executives, teachers, parents, homemakers, students and virtually anyone to take that next step towards becoming extraordinary leaders.

Barefoot Leadership is an illuminating book that will put into your hands a blueprint to break through your comfort zone and powerfully reach out to others. Each chapter contains practical tips plus real-life dilemmas for you to grapple with, and ends with a personal reflection exercise for you to discover your own leadership path.

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Going That Extra Mile

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For Huey Fern
who has walked that extra mile with me

and Andrew
whose journey has just begun



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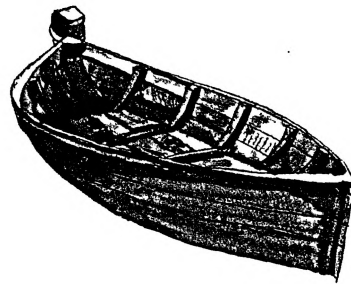
I thank God for His blessings and presence throughout this project. For me, He is the principle and foundation of joy and life.



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INTRODUCTION

The Journey
Starts Here



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It was twilight as we sped through the dark waters of the Kinabatangan River in a *perahu*.

Around the bend, the lights of the Sukau Rainforest Lodge twinkled like a fairy-tale palace in the jungle. Fernando, my river guide, cut the throttle to the four-stroke engine. The wooden boat slowed down, settled into the belly of the river, and began drifting starboard towards the river bank. Fernando killed the lights as he lashed the boat against the jetty. Silence and darkness descended on us like a black cloak, and at the same time the sky lit up with a thousand pinpricks of ancient light.

Suddenly, there were big, crashing sounds on the opposite side of the river. It was the sound of small trees being leveled, branches breaking, and twigs snapping like invisible firecrackers. It was like the crack of distant thunder, only more purposeful.

“What’s happening?” I asked Fernando as I walked with rubbery legs on the bobbing jetty.

“Pygmy elephants on a pilgrimage,” he said. “They’ll arrive at our lodge before midnight.”

I, too, was on a pilgrimage.

At dawn, I had flown three hours on a jet plane across the South China Sea, hopped onto a propeller plane, boarded a mud-caked four-wheel-drive, and held on tight to the guardrails of an 800-horsepower speedboat that roared past salty mangrove swamps lining the Kinabatangan River. Finally, as dusk fell, I clambered on a hand-hewn wooden boat and arrived here at the lodge next to this mighty river that flowed deep into the heart of Borneo.

It felt good to be here. It felt good to take off my shoes and feel the weather-worn wood against my feet. It felt good to go barefoot.

As I wiggled my toes and breathed in the heavy tropical air, I pondered the reason that led me to one of the most far-flung parts of Malaysia: I was looking for a different kind of leader.

The leaders most familiar to us wear business suits and leather shoes. They carry briefcases and ride the elevator up to their office on the tallest floor of the tallest building in the city. They are the chief executives who hold the authority to hire, fire or change the secretary's pay grade. They are the media-savvy politicians and lawmakers whose slightest whisper can influence vast networks of powerful people to do their bidding. They can be publicity-shy tycoons who possess the financial clout to buy and sell companies in the time it takes the rest of us to eat a packet of *nasi lemak* for breakfast.

The kind of leader I was looking for is quite different. I was looking for ordinary people who are wired to inspire and motivate others to achieve extraordinary things. I wanted to track down leaders who can get the best from their people - even when they have very little to work with in the first place. Ever heard the story of a man who managed to feed a few thousand people with just a few fish and some bread?

The leaders I was looking for do not need leather wingtips or four-inch killer heels to command a persona of power. They do not need to inherit wealth or be born in blue-blooded families in order to lead. If I removed their shoes and threw away their power tools, these leaders would simply shrug and proceed to lead ... even in their bare feet. And I would be willing to remove my own shoes and follow them.

The leaders I was looking for lead by serving people at the ground level, where true needs are met. These leaders are, so to speak, grounded. They are grounded by the basic principles and values in their lives that guide them forward. They do not go fast all the time. But they can go far - one step at a time - and bring everyone else with them.

And not least, they know what it is like to walk in someone else's shoes. They possess empathy and compassion. By choosing not to stay 'up there' and choosing to walk on the ground, they identify themselves with me. They will also go the extra, costly mile just for *me*. Would you not want to walk with such a leader? I would.

Barefoot Leaders can make a real ~~make a~~ difference ~~without money~~
power or access to a network of ~~network~~ people.



Learn how an English-illiterate teenager created jobs for millions, how a village boy saved an airline, how a woman mobilised hundreds of doctors to save lives in danger zones, and how a teenage boy transformed thousands of poor people into bankers.

Join Alvin Ung as he unearths the mindsets of extraordinary Malaysian leaders who have transformed the lives of many around the world. They include Dato' Sri Idris Jala, Irene Fernandez, Tan Sri Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, Helen Read and Mark Chang. Through uplifting stories, these Barefoot Leaders invite you to transform yourself, your work and your world by being true to your calling.

Barefoot Leadership gives you the art and heart of knowing what to do while staying true to who you are.

———— Praise for Barefoot Leadership

“Alvin Ung leads us to the East instead of the West to find insights into high performance leadership. He tells the stories of how extraordinary Malaysian leaders overcame the impossible to make the world a better place in small and large ways by their courage, conviction, and passion. You will be deeply inspired to lead at a higher level.”

GEORGE A. KOHLRIESER

Author of *Hostage at the Table* and Professor of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour at IMD

“In *Barefoot Leadership*, Alvin Ung bares leadership to its essence and reinforces my belief that everyone can be a leader. Well-researched, crisp and full of heart-warming stories, this book provides a blueprint for developing authentic leadership. A ‘must read’ to inspire you to leadership greatness.”

ROSHAN THIRAN

CEO of Leaderonomics, a social enterprise

“A top-class piece of narrative research. Penetrating. *Barefoot Leadership* tells you the purpose, character and impact of extraordinary leaders. Highly recommended for students, practitioners and scholars of leadership studies.”

SAMUEL M. LAM

President, Linkage Asia

“An excellent read! Because every person matters, how leaders journey with their followers matters as much as the results they achieve at the end. *Barefoot Leadership* cuts across the usual sanitised ideas of leadership and goes straight to the heart of what matters.”

SHAHAZ AL-SADAT

Former Executive Director, Strategic Human Capital Management, Khazanah Nasional

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