

Bridging THE GAP

KRIENGSAK NIRATPATTANASAI

Take some time to sharpen the saw

‘K hun Kriengsak, may I sit with you?’ Kae asks me. I am having lunch alone in a Japanese restaurant near a Silom road head office where Kae is the country operations director.

‘Be my guest,’ I invite her.

‘Where did you go for Songkran holidays?’ she asks me.

‘I went to Vietnam for coaching. I coached a group of Vietnamese and a French managing director.’

‘How did the session go?’ she asks.

‘Very well, this is the third time that I’ve been to Vietnam in the past five months. Vietnamese people are ideal learners. They are diligent when they study. They spoil me with their eagerness to learn. I told my Thai clients that after coaching Vietnamese people, I wonder whether I want to coach Thais anymore. We are more passive learners.’

‘Is that right?’ Kae exclaims.

‘You may be an exception,’ I tell her.

I’ve observed that Kae has a talent as a learner and a hunger for knowledge.

‘Eventually, foreigners will go to invest there, don’t you think?’ Kae asks.

‘I think so. Every time I go there, I notice progress — not the buildings but people. On my second trip, I noticed that their immigration officers were eager to help foreigners — even though their work process may not be as modern as Thailand’s.

‘But on this trip, I was surprised by the Immigration Officer who checked my passport. When he noticed my Thai passport he asked me: *khun chuu arai?* (What’s your name?) He tried to pronounce my name correctly. I thought to myself, ‘Wow! This is a government officer. I doubt that any Thai Immigration officer would do that with foreign visitors.’

‘On my first day during lunch, I met a Thai businessman who had an industrial estate there. He introduced me to a young Vietnamese woman named Thu who works for him. I had a chat with her. Thu is quite smart and speaks perfect English. I asked her where she graduated. She said from a university in Vietnam. But what impressed me was she learned her English from a Vietnamese teacher.’

Kae nods her head, I continue.

‘I teased Thu about her food. ‘I would like to import that kind of food and sell it to my Thai friends,’ I said. It would be nice if our people were diligent, eager to learn and hard-working like them.’

Last year, I attended a conference at Sasin. One of the speakers — Dr Dipak Jain, dean of the Kellogg School of Business Management, shared his thoughts about the Vietnamese. He told the delegates that from his experience in the United States, Vietnamese students were the most diligent and hard-working in his classes. Dean Jain spent few years

in Thailand as a visiting professor in marketing. He loves Thailand. He said that the Thai government should sponsor Vietnamese for education and then hire them to work in Thailand.

I mentioned Dean Jain’s idea to Ms Thu, and she told me the Singaporean government already had a similar programme for Vietnamese people.

Kae and I talked some more, and I asked her if she was still taking executive coaching from Jean-Francois, one of the best executive coaches I know.

‘Yes, I am. But I don’t have time,’ she told me.

‘Kae, an executive coach is a luxury. You should try to manage your time for the sessions. I also plan to hire him to coach me as well. Speaking of no time, have I ever told you the story about Sharpening the Saw?’

‘No, please do.’

Stephen R. Covey, the author of the best-selling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, tells this story in his book: ‘Suppose you were to come upon someone in the woods working feverishly to saw down a tree. ‘What are you doing?’ you ask.

‘Can’t you see?’ comes the impatient reply, ‘I’m sawing down this tree.’

‘You look exhausted!’ you exclaim.

‘How long have you been at it?’

‘Over five hours,’ he replies, adding: ‘I’m beat! This is hard work.’

‘Well, why don’t you take a break for a few minutes and sharpen the saw? I’m sure it would go faster.’

‘I don’t have time to sharpen the saw,’ the man says. ‘I’m too busy sawing!’

Kae smiles. ‘I get it! Could you tell me the other habits?’

‘You must read the book but let me sum them up as a quick reference:

- ◆ Habit 1: Be proactive; plan ahead and manage your your emotions. Avoid reacting to the environment.
- ◆ Habit 2: Begin with the end in mind; you must have a goal and work your life’s plan based on the goal.
- ◆ Habit 3: Put first things first; Set your priorities based on the second habit.
- ◆ Habit 4: Think win-win; we have to co-exist with others.
- ◆ Habit 5: Seek first to understand and then to be understood.
- ◆ Habit 6: Synergise; 1 plus 1 equals 3.
- ◆ Habit 7: Sharpen the saw for balanced self-renewal.

‘Once you finish this book, you might want to try *The 8th Habit*, another interesting book from him as well.’

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