

Community Leadership PDF Resource

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Leonie Leong – Case Study

"I feel rewarded when I help to enrich and empower people," says Leonie Leong President of the Chinese History Association Inc. (CHA), reflecting on the rewards of being involved in and developing community based projects. Leonie recalls her involvement with multicultural Chinese community activities developed from her own attempts to trace her family history. Leonie notes *"It began with traveling, that became a journey of discovery, trying to find out things about myself- ... discovering my cultural identity. I wondered if others were doing the same thing, wondering about their heritage or history as well. That's when I decided to use the web, to share my learning, so that it could be a resource for others interested in the same adventure, both now and in the future a tool to help others while helping [myself]."*

Through her professional experience working in public policy and industry development, Leonie states she came across a few community groups, particularly a local council Chinese cultural mapping project. Leonie states *"I noticed that there was no strategic direction happening in terms of Chinese community development and activities, focusing on the big picture."* Since then, Leonie has set about developing a grassroots-driven strategic approach. As she said

"I would like to empower people with information so they can make their own informed decisions and one channel is through the web, it provides a bridge across time to link young and old. ...It's about creating a 24/7 space both online and offline where traditional and contemporary expression can mutually exist."

Leonie's philosophy of leadership is clear. According to Leonie

"There are two types of leaders. One can either be a people's leader or an office leader. ... Leadership is about enriching people; it's not just about power or position. If you approach it with intention of em-powering people, it brings in a different attitude...- it changes the whole perspective and outcomes."

Asked what she believes are the key qualities of successful community leaders, Leonie states:

"I believe the key lies in your drive or passion, it's about getting other people to believe in their dreams and linking it with yours so they are motivated to transform it into a reality; this is the hardest task because most community activities are based on unpaid volunteers."

Leonie believes that good leaders plan for the future

"One of ...the characteristics of good leaders and mentors, is the willingness to pass their experiences and knowledge to others, some what like succession planning -'paying it forward" . It's about inspiring and empowering others so that the good work grows and multiplies."

Leonie states

"People know if you are sincere and genuine, if they trust you then that helps you to get them involved. It's about trying to create a win-win outcome; I'd like to give it a go and know that I tried my best rather than to have not tried at all."

Leonie indicated that she faces many challenges, particularly managing different motives and agendas of various stakeholders involved. Leonie recalls:

"It involves a lot of courage to believe in your dreams and [to take] that leap of faith, especially when you're doing something new. Maintaining trust and communication is very difficult because things change so often. It requires a lot of patience and commitment."



...When you are breaking new ground, being innovative and changing things, it's hard for those who feel safe in their old values and thinking ... to break out of their comfort zone or apathy. That's when mutual respect and acceptance is important, even if it's about mutually agreeing that you don't agree."

Leonie notes that community leaders need to have access to people who believe and support them. For her, family and friends are very important. As she says:

"My family and friends are absolutely fabulous, they're very supportive. They are there through thick and thin, they're my secret ingredient that helps me transform my goals and dreams into reality. I also have role models who inspire, listen and mentor, and if that isn't enough, ... point [me] in the right direction."

Leonie summarises the rewards of being a community leader,

"The greatest benefit is generating community spirit, working together. It's all about making a difference and helping people on our mutual journeys. It's great to see people have some fun and do something they normally wouldn't consider – that's very rewarding because it's about the courage to enjoy yourself and follow your dreams."