



The Women's Leadership Program

An Asia Pacific CFO with a passion for learning and motivating others is inspired to take her aspirations to a higher plane.

Siew-Quen Thong
CFO, Asia Pacific
Texon International Group

Like a growing number of CFOs today, Siew-Quen Thong has stepped up to a more prominent role within her organization, engaged not only with the numbers side of the business but the increasingly important people equation of it as well. "Though CFOs these days find themselves at the forefront of the business, the road to becoming a people-focused CFO is relatively unpaved," said the Hong Kong-based executive with Texon International Group, a British multinational company.

Employees, she strongly believes, should no longer be viewed simply as a headcount number. "Instead, it is time to acknowledge the fact that people are the drivers of the financial numbers. As CFOs, it should be our responsibility to understand how to drive these people."

When CCL awarded Siew-Quen a scholarship to attend The Women's Leadership Program, she saw it as an opportunity to learn the art of leadership and determine whether she has what it takes to forge the way for a new breed of CFOs. Assessment and feedback are strong suits of this development experience, as they are with other CCL programs. Yet in The Women's Leadership Program, they are combined with research-based content that delves into women's leadership and work experiences. The program provides a setting that participants find conducive to exploring a range of issues, such as the choices and trade-offs women face in juggling their personal and professional lives.

"To be in a learning environment with a dozen women leaders from impressive backgrounds, and yet be able to come together quickly and strongly to support and encourage one another, is an exhilarating experience," said Siew-Quen, the only woman and Asian on her company's management team. "By listening to and giving honest feedback for improvement, we helped

"The Women's Leadership Program cultivates an environment of trust, fostering a willingness to share our experiences and innermost feelings about issues faced at work and in life as women. By listening and helping each other, we learn how to deal with these issues. It is an exhilarating experience."

each other manage issues, including those that are normally not discussed in the workplace."

The program's comprehensive array of assessments confirmed her people-development philosophy and leadership capabilities. As a consequence, Siew-Quen was able to clearly articulate her aspirations in life. They are two-fold: self-development (living a life of discovery and continuous learning) and people development (creating opportunities for others to develop their potential).

"Gaining this clarity reinforced my thinking about what is important and has galvanized me into paving the way for people-focused CFOs," she said.

In addition to organizing innovative development programs aimed at helping employees grow in their roles, Siew-Quen spends many hours mentoring undergraduates in Hong Kong and MBA students in Shanghai. Those activities are part of living up to the people-development part of her aspirations.

As for living a life of discovery and continuous learning, Siew-Quen has a simple mechanism for checking on whether she indeed is. "I just frequently ask myself, 'When was the last time I did something for the first time?'"

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