

Personality: Theresa Goh The Path Towards Success

By Malkeet Kaur

Crossroads. At some point in our lives we all come to a crossroad and make decisions that ultimately determines the path that we choose to take in life. Such was the case with Theresa Goh, who made a decision that has led her to the top of her profession today.

Theresa had always been interested in veterinary science and had even planned to study it before she stumbled onto accountancy. A casual part time stint at an accountancy firm opened up a whole new world for her. It fascinated her so much that she decided to apply for an articleship at the KassimChan office in Penang. But at the same time, she had also garnered a spot in the university to study veterinary science and the Dean of the faculty gave her a positive glimpse of life as a veterinarian. Back at KassimChan, she had a Filipino audit manager who absolutely inspired her.

Theresa found herself at a crossroad. However, by what she now absolutely believes to be divine intervention, Theresa met someone who would later on become her life partner. It was he who persuaded her to first stay on with accountancy, and then to switch away from audit to taxation. And it was because of her marriage to this Klang Valley boy that she relocated her career to the headquarters of Deloitte Kassim Chan, where she met several mentors who would help groom her and offer opportunities that eventually led her to her present position.

Accountancy wasn't the easiest of paths but it was one she never regretted.

"I guess you can say that I sort of stumbled into the profession. In those days, we never really thought of accounting as a profession," said Theresa who is today the Executive Director of Deloitte KassimChan Tax Services Sdn Bhd.

With her penchant for challenges, Theresa chose to do the MICPA, which is considered one of the toughest challenges in the field of accountancy. But she rose to the occasion even though life in a university would have been a breezier option. Theresa appreciates the MICPA qualifications even more because it has given her the mental toughness and an inner strength to take on anything that comes her way and make a success of it. However, as a young articled clerk newly arrived in a big city, she could not have done it on her own. Her husband stood by her as a pillar of strength, becoming her mentor, encourager and advisor as she ploughed through the difficult MICPA examinations and faced the inevitable challenges in working from clerk to partner whilst raising a brood of three.

Even now, at the dizzy heights where she is perched today, having made Executive Director eight years ago, she relishes new challenges that come her way. Her bring-it-on attitude has resulted her in opting for newer areas of practice with the latest one being Transfer Pricing, an increasingly important and contentious area of tax around the world.

When the Transfer Pricing Guidelines were first introduced, Theresa suddenly found herself leading a Transfer Pricing team. It was a new development in tax and her visionary Managing

Director saw her as the perfect person to groom in this area. For Theresa, it was a challenge she couldn't say no to.

"The transfer pricing guidelines were issued some time in July 2003. And I think at that time, most of the Big Four did not have a specialized division for Transfer Pricing as yet. My MD at the time thought that this is going to be an important area of tax practice in the future. And when he wanted to start a TP department, some felt that it was too early for such a move. I came into the picture, some time end of 2003 and early 2004. At that time I was just doing part time TP and from there, slowly, the business picked up. It was a gradual process," she explained.

It was a gradual process that has today made her one of the few Transfer Pricing Specialists in the country. Attending international seminars annually has given her a broad insight into this area of practice and her perceptions are much appreciated by the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia (IRB), with whom she works very closely. With Transfer Pricing being a new area, Theresa has had a lot of support from her overseas counterparts.

Not surprisingly, the International Tax Review (ITR) included Theresa in their list of Leading Tax Advisors in Asia Pacific in the area of Transfer Pricing and named Deloitte Malaysia Transfer Pricing Firm of the Year.

"I am happy and pleased to have won the award but I don't consider myself a TP expert especially when I compare myself to my counterparts overseas. In comparison, TP is relatively new here so we are still on a learning curve," said Theresa who admitted that her passion for TP has grown by leaps and bounds, especially after attending the global TP seminars.

"This is where I get the opportunity to meet managers and partners who have done TP for 15-20 years. They are, in their 50s and when they stand up to speak about TP they are so passionate and I am very encouraged," she enthused.

Being one of the foremost Transfer Pricing experts in the country today, Theresa is quick to admit that it has been quite an exciting and fruitful journey so far and currently Deloitte, with her assistance is setting up Transfer Pricing branches in Penang and Johor Bahru, all in the efforts of bringing Transfer Pricing awareness to their clients.

Despite her demanding schedule, Theresa also finds time for the MICPA. As one of the Council members, Theresa is keen to give back something to the Institute that has given her so much. She is well aware of the challenges faced by the MICPA and the competition surrounding it.

"I am in the council so I know the challenges and the limitations that the MICPA faces. If I didn't, I would say that the Institute is not really doing enough but I can see that we are limited because of our resources and we are not able to do some of the things that other CPA qualifications can easily do maybe because of the much larger funding that they have to promote the brand. So if we look at the competition that we face and the amount of resources the competition has and what they are able to do, of course, MICPA loses out. And that's something the council has been deliberating for many years as to how and what we can do to change that. If you are not up there, people don't know you, they wouldn't want to be a member and if you don't have the critical number of members you don't have enough funding and resources that will put you up there. It's a chicken and egg thing," she explained at length.

“In the initial years when we were articled students, we were very proud to be associated with the MICPA because you know that it is tough and difficult to pass. It’s like climbing a mountain and you feel a sense of achievement when you reach the top. The MICPA has taken me to where I am today. All the training I received during those years has sort of put me in the right direction in terms of my career growth,” said Theresa, who away from work divides her free time between family and church.

TEN QUICK QUESTIONS

TMA: What are your likes and dislikes?

Theresa Goh: I like spending time with my two daughters and son who are 19, 21 and 23. I dislike routine stuff that is not in the mainstream of what needs to be done.

TMA: What sort of music do you listen to?

TG: Mostly Christian worship songs

TMA: How do you relax?

TG: Watch movies, read and walk the dogs in the evening.

TMA: What are your favourite food and drink?

TG: Durian and honeydew sago, which is really a dessert.

TMA: To you what does it mean to be a Malaysian?

TG: I am a Malaysian first, especially when I am doing my job.

TMA: Your favourite travel destination?

TG: I love Switzerland. Tasmania is great as well.

TMA: Do you ever see yourself retiring?

TGA: I have too many years left to go. I would love to spend more time with my family.

TMA: Are you into mobile gadgets?

TG: I have my Nokia E71 and am mobile.

TMA: If you could, is there anything you would like to change in your life?

TG: I have been pretty happy so far. When I look back, I think being a CPA is fine. I am happy with my career choice, family, and church.

TMA: Complete this sentence. Being a CPA...

TG: has provided me with a lot of opportunities in life, which I wouldn’t have been able to attain or achieve if I were not a CPA.