



“If you dare to strip yourselves down naked and tell me all your pains and problems how can I not trust you and not bond with you?”

Kwong Lok Wah

Master Chair
Chair since 2005
VCE-18 & VEE-10

BUILDING TRUST

Master Chair Kwong Lok Wah reflects on how building trust among group members enables powerful sharing of pain and problems. This has been effective for helping members to be better leaders and human beings.

It was serendipity that Kwong Lok Wah joined Vistage Malaysia as a Chair back in June 2005. He was learning Mandarin privately and his tutor invited him to attend a Mandarin class she conducted at the Vistage Office where he met Richard Wong, Founder of Vistage Malaysia, and Sherine Cheng, Executive Director.

About a month later, he ran into Sherine at a shopping mall, and she encouraged him to think about serving as a Vistage Chair, later arranging an interview for him with Richard Wong. When they met, it was more Lok Wah than Richard doing the interviewing as he was sceptical then that such a coaching process could exist in Malaysia. He told Richard, “You’re telling me that in Malaysia people stand up and bare themselves open to others?” And Richard replied, “Yes they do!” He was not fully convinced until he became an experienced Chair.

Lok Wah found out that the key to open communication was the building of trust. “It translates into members being open in their meetings and coaching sessions to talk freely about their pains and fears, knowing that everyone is listening without judgement, in order to be helped and in the process become better leaders and human beings,” he explains. It could be about business or personal issues and talking through helps to formulate answers or serves as a therapeutic process for the member to reflect upon to enable him/her to move on.

According to Lok Wah, this trust is critical so that when members challenge, ask clarifying questions or make suggestions, the recipient (i.e. the affected member) knows that they don’t mean to be malicious or hurtful but it’s because the members care. This open sharing is extremely powerful, effective, and helpful. The bonding is incredible. “If you dare to strip yourselves down naked and tell me all your pains and problems how can I not trust you and not bond with you?” he reckons. This is the reason, he says, why Vistage is over half a century old (in the United States) and has been here in Malaysia since 1994.

On how he deals with egos of members, he notes, “I remind members that once the meeting door closes, all our egos are left outside the room and we leave them out. They learn to submerge their egos and drop their facades.”

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From experience, Lok Wah is also thoroughly convinced of the power of peer group meetings. Members may have faced parallel issues, and peers serve as a sounding board for a member making a decision or taking an opportunity. Lok Wah points out that all members have their own sets of experiences and skills which when combined in a group meeting, is a powerful tool.



Kwong Lok Wah and his VCE-18 members, Andrew Wong and Khor Lee Fan at Vistage CEO Summit 2018

“We give away our trade secrets as we are open with each other because within each group there are no competitors and there’s no hidden agenda,” he points out. When members visit each other’s work premises, they learn their host’s operating systems, are exposed to best practices, and they give feedback to the host to help the host improve. “It’s a two-way win-win situation,” he adds.

Since becoming a Chair, Lok Wah says he has become a more patient and a non-judgemental listener, and has built a caring, sharing relationship with his group members. To keep developing, he continually reads, especially on aspects of leadership, management and coaching, apart from learning through his interactions with his groups. He says he learns from them as much as they receive whatever take-home values they may get from him.

“I have learnt from members as much as they have learnt from me. For instance, when a member told another to ‘let go’ in a relationship issue, I realised how true that was and how important it was to be at peace with oneself.” As a result of that issue processing at that meeting, he says he too has learnt to let go. It helps with the stress levels too.



Group hug by the Ang Misyon Orchestra members at their farewell dinner in KL

He relishes the one-to-one coaching sessions which inspire him. “How blessed am I that every day, I have three to four intelligent persons with whom to have very interesting, useful, and fun conversations. It’s intellectually stimulating, helps me grow and keeps me alive!”

Kwong Lok Wah has been in the business consultancy profession for over 30 years interspersed with holding senior management roles. In his consulting practice, he engages in financial services such as turnaround for financially distressed businesses, corporate and financial restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, due diligence reviews, share valuations, and project feasibility studies.

Lok Wah is an experienced Life, Leadership and Business Coach. His previous management roles included that of CEO of Super Latex Sdn Bhd /Superior Gloves Sdn Bhd, and Deputy Managing Director, Strategic Planning at Lam Soon Bhd.

He is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales, a member of the Malaysian Institute of Certified Public Accountants, and a member of the Malaysian Institute of Accountants.

Lok Wah is engaged in social work, helping deserving communities. He is active in helping the *Ang Misyon*, a foundation that provides free classical music lessons, subsidised school fees and meals to underprivileged children in the Philippines.