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Who Contributes to MY SUCCESS?

George Aveling shares

BY ROWENA MORAIS

SOMETIME last year, I got involved in a very interesting project that took a look at different people and their success factors. It started when a friend, Marchem Pfeiffer, did a post on LinkedIn, posing the question "Who contributes to your success?" It drew on John Maxwell's video and blog on "The Value of Asking Questions."

On his blog, John shares that whenever he prepares for a meeting, he spends time determining the questions he wants to ask because as he puts it, "... I want to make the most of the time I have, but I also do it to engage with the other person. I want people to know that I value them, and that, if possible, I want to add value to them". John then went on to share the seven questions he uses.

So, I decided to do this as well, inviting people to share their story using these questions and got these stories published. Today, I share a story with you, the story by George Aveling, Group CEO and International Partner of TMI and TACK International in Malaysia. He is a mentor to senior leaders, an organisational leader, writer and consultant. George opened the TMI office in Kuala Lumpur in February 2005. TMI, with a presence in 60 countries, is a transformation consultancy, focusing on the customer experience. TACK International is a global sales and leadership development consultancy, similarly with offices in 45 countries of the world. Elementrix, a digital learning and innovation company, is the latest addition to the solution offerings offered under George's leadership. George is the co-editor of the book, SHIFT! Powerful Stories of

Organisational Transformation. He has written over 100 articles for magazines in Malaysia and Australia and has lived in Malaysia since 2007.

What is the greatest lesson you have learned?

George: This is a tough question, amid the many lessons that I have learned! I suppose that my first reaction is to be open to learning new lessons in life! If I was to give "the greatest" lesson, I think it would be "Be a good listener - and listen to really understand."

My "badge of honour", in past days, was that "George is a smart guy". If you had an opinion, I would shoot back with my opinion. My life was "opinion vs opinion", where someone is "right" and someone is "less right" or even wrong! Of course, if they didn't agree with me, there was a good chance that they were wrong!

Then something happened that changed my paradigm. I had a meeting with one of my senior people. He made a comment and, sure enough, I shot back with my opinion. He then said eight words that changed my life.

He said, "All I want is to feel listened to".

This led me on a journey. I ended up taking off my "George is a smart guy" badge of honour and replaced it with "George seeks to really understand". The impact on my life is many-fold.

It has led to richer conversations. People feel honoured and respected when you ask questions - sometimes questions that they have not thought of themselves.

It leads to deeper understanding and stronger relationships.

And it leads to the realisation that, in life, there are few absolutes. I no longer live in a world of "right vs wrong" opinion. Rather, I live in a world of honouring other people's opinions, learning from them, coming up with richer solutions with them, and being enriched by them.

What are you learning now?

George: You are great at asking tough questions! I continue to learn about life.

At a personal level, I am learning the power of gratitude. I wake up with a sense of gratitude. This gets me off to a good start to the day. I thank people during the day, either personally or by email. It's amazing what a difference a few words of thanks can make to other people's lives. And it helps to give the brain an endorphin boost - a happy natural brain chemical boost - as well.

For this, I thank my Mother, Rose, who taught me the power of the spoken word.

And, at a professional level, I aim to keep learning, to keep growing. I read to deepen my knowledge. In so doing, it helps me to develop my own thinking on these matters.

How has failure shaped you?

George: I am a big believer in the power of self-talk. I do not speak of failure. That's negative self-talk. Rather, I speak of what I have learned from events in life.

I arrived in Malaysia, almost 13 years ago. An Australian, with no leadership experience, coming into a different culture. I remember going home stressed many times in the first few years of being here. "I am in a different

world," I thought to myself. "How do I deal with it?"

And, then, one day, I came to a realisation.

Each stressful episode was helping me to learn, to get stronger and to be a better leader.

I re-framed. I started to see each stressful event as a part of my growth journey. This has had a big impact on my ability to manage the day-to-day stresses in business life. So now, if something happens that I think, in retrospect, "I or we could have done that different" (and there are lots of them), then I look forward and say, "next time I will do this..."

I am not an NLP expert. However, one of the principles of NLP is "there is no such thing as failure - it is just feedback". I like this way of thinking and apply it to my life.

Who do you know that I should know?

George: That's a great question! I will have to have dinner with you to find out what you are interested in and who you know that might be able to help or add value to your life. Let's make a time to have dinner!

How can others add value to you?

George: This is all about having what is popularly known as having a 'growth mindset'. With this mindset, you come to realise that you have the opportunity to learn from people around you all the time. All you have to do is open your mind and your heart to the fact that we are on a life-long learning journey!

Due to space constraints, I had to leave two questions out but these are available in full at verticaldistinct.com.



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