
DOING BUSINESS WITH MORAL LEADERSHIP AND FAITH

用道德领导力和信仰经商

Mike Thompson 盛万堂 interviews Dr. Johnny Hon 韩世灏

In each issue of *The MRI Journal* we feature an interview with a scholar, a business leader and other professionals who express their vocation and their expertise on one or more of the three platforms of the Journal: social innovation, moral leadership, and comparative spirituality. In this issue we report on our interview with Dr Johnny Hon, a Hong Kong based investor and businessman and leader of a range of business, charitable, diplomatic and political activities. In 1997 Dr Hon founded the Global Group in Hong Kong which invests in business ventures all around the world helping innovative companies with their international expansion and financing strategies. Dr Hon has helped numerous companies and individuals to raise funds and has been particularly active in assisting a growing number of Chinese companies to list on the London markets. In July 2015, he was awarded the Medal of Honour from the Government of Hong Kong for his dedicated community service.

— Mike J. Thompson, Co-Editor, MRI Journal

Mike J. Thompson (MJT): Dr Hon, what's your personal mission in life?

Johnny Hon (JH): My personal mission is to try to do good things, to try to help people, to make an impact and to develop things that are positive. I travel to different countries and work with different groups of people to help young companies develop. As a venture capital company we invest in start-ups and incubate them into big companies. We work as partners and as friends to

try to make a positive impact in society.

MJT: What do you mean by positive impact?

JH: We try to change the world a little to make things better and, at the same time, we make good products good for consumers. I think everyone, big or small, can make positive contributions to the world.

MJT: How do you regard success?

JH: I think it's to have an interesting journey. You should be able to learn and become a better person while you are doing what you enjoy doing and doing it successfully. I measure success based on those points rather than just purely on financial gain. Based on my experience and the partners that we work with, people who are actually successful in business don't just do it for the money. They do it because they are passionate about what they want to do, to gain knowledge, to pass on the knowledge and to actually build something important. And I think that passion is actually the secret of success for a lot of entrepreneurs.

MJT: And how does that passion work itself out in the kind of projects that you would invest in?

JH: We love to invest in technology. We think that bringing technology to the developing world can help to change things. By working with a lot of smaller governments we try to help them develop the idea of entrepreneurship and innovation with IT and biotech-products and to build businesses that are sustainable.

MJT: How do you demonstrate care and respect in your business?

JH: Being in a venture capital business is actually the human capital business. What makes a business venture successful is the people around the business, so you have to do a lot of training, caring about people who work for you and learning from them. You create positive outcomes by growing together, the human side as well as the

business side. Actually all my staff and partners have become friends.

Sometimes, when you face a problem or a difficult business decision, there has to be leadership. People have to take the lead to make decisions. But the big element of a successful business is communications with people who work for you, work with you and you find common goals and achieve them together.

MJT: What are the challenges of business now from your perspective?

JH: Things certainly happen much faster and more short-term since the last few financial crises. One of the problems is that business leaders are very tempted to make short-term decisions and not to have a long-term aim. When I first started out, an investor expected wait 3 to 7 years expecting to see returns. Now every 3 or 6 months you have to report returns and people give up on a deal so easily and so quickly. So, I think one does have to walk with the pace of the market and you do have to make fast decisions. Business leaders need to understand their own values and what they want to get out of a deal and stick to that. One of the hardest things is to try to be a good person and sometimes you pray to have the will and the power to be good given the fast changing world.

MJT: How does prayer help you?

JH: It gives you time to reorganise things in the fast changing world. When I pray the main theme is that I want God to give me the energy to be good. It's very easy to make mistakes and to go with short termism. But every day is a new beginning and if you make mistakes, and the partners around you make mistakes, then forgiveness and understanding is a big part of it as well.

MJT: We can find it difficult to learn about forgiveness and to push back the ego. Our ego can get in the way of building quality relationships. What advice can you give our readers from your own experience?

JH: I think compassion, kindness, forgiveness and honesty are the important qualities for any business leader. When you work with people, you only want to work with people that, despite any mistakes, are underneath honest people with integrity.

MJT: How do we judge with practical wisdom? How do we judge when someone has got the values that you talk about?

MJT: I guess that as you work with many of these companies and invest in different kinds of companies, you've been let down by people. How should a responsible business leader deal with such people?

JH: If you do a lot of business it's inevitable that you will meet people who will betray you, who will bad-mouth you and who will kind of grab what they can from you. At times, I have to admit that one gets very angry. But I think that

I think for a Christian doing business, making money shouldn't be the end goal, it's what you do with the money.

JH: I would say most people that we come across have those good qualities. It's just that in a world when things move so fast sometimes people get lost. But I think if they come to you, and if they know that you believe in something, it's very easy for them to be affected by you. As I said, I work with a lot of young entrepreneurs and young inventors and I try to help them with their business. They're looking for guidance, not just on the capital side. By working with them, you actually influence them and that is also how you make a positive impact.

MJT: Tell us what you are called to do in your business, Dr Hon?

JH: I studied medical science and I was going to be a doctor. My PhD is in psychiatry and the reason why I made a big change to get into the business world was because I believed that if I became a successful businessman, I could influence things and help more people than I could do as a doctor. That's what I set out to do and that's always been my core value. So, I don't mind going into a difficult situation or difficult developing countries. I try to work with people who need assistance or business education or help. If you look at my career path, I've been to a lot of strange places. Making money is important because we need it to sustain things, but that is not the angle. The angle is to do good, that's my strong belief.

forgiveness is important. One should also try to be more understanding, maybe to look at things from their point of view. You can get carried away with only thinking from your own perspective. I try to put myself in their shoes and try to find why. Maybe I've made mistakes myself and need to find some reasons behind all these actions. It's much easier for you to be able to forgive someone and realise that you yourself have made some mistakes and that you need to become a better person.

MJT: *The Vocation of a Business Leader* talks about the divided self, the part of me that wants to go for glory and be big, and then the other that wants to be more thoughtful and caring in life. The divided life can be the tension between my beliefs and my business life. Some people say business is business and we just have to be tough and I have to be two people. How would you respond to the idea of the divided self?

JH: As soon as you feel, "I'm good, I'm very good at what I do, I don't want to listen to others", then you stop learning. So, everyday what I try to say to myself is that I'm not good enough. I need to learn more and I need to become a better person. Having that attitude stops the ego from taking over what you want to do in your heart.

MJT: Dr Hon, what does practical wisdom and

making a good judgment really mean in practice in your professional life?

JH: When I look at business, I always look at the person behind it as a psychiatrist. My strong belief is that you need to look beyond the business plan and understand the entrepreneur. I actually believe that if an entrepreneur is a good person and he has good goals or values, then that is more important than the business plan. If you provide capital for young entrepreneurs it's very important to look at the person, not just the business plans. I normally leave my accountants to look at the figures and I just go and interview the principal myself.

MJT: You are motivated with a social purpose not just a business purpose. But many would say, "The business of business is business". How does social motivation fit with doing business?

JH: I think if you look at the majority of successful business leaders in the world they have a philanthropy side to them. They would like to make money not just to keep the money but to try to do good with the money. I think that this is a fundamental secret for a business person to become successful because if you just focus on money you will miss out on so many things. By having the passion to do what you do, to enjoy what you do and to try to do good, you will get through the difficulties.

MJT: But here we are in Hong Kong, and there are many wealthy business people and there doesn't appear to be a lot of philanthropy.

JH: I think that if you talk to a lot of the billionaires, they've made money and there are signs that they want to help. Hong Kong, if you look at the figures, has the highest number of charitable donations in the world. There are a lot of charity functions being run here and people are trying to help. I think maybe you don't detect so much from looking from the outside but actually there are so many charitable activities in Hong Kong and I think that's also one of the secrets of success.

MJT: What charities do you work with or support?

JH: I act as both the donor and fundraiser to help charities in the country to raise money from other individuals or corporations. I am chairman of 乐善堂 The Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society Kowloon (LST) and help to run things and to raise money. LST has about 1,000 staff, 18 schools and 4,000 volunteers.

MJT: So we may be confused in thinking that many business leaders aren't caring about society but, based on your experiences, many of them are caring about the world.

JH: Yes, certainly. When you look at Hong Kong as an example, it is a successful city on the whole. It has its problems like everywhere else, but when people talk about the core values of Hong Kong, they are basically Christian values. When kids go to school they are being taught that they need to be honest, they need to show kindness, they should do good. I think that this makes Hong Kong special because from those values, people will emphasise the rule of law and see the importance of justice. That's the fundamental reason why Hong Kong is so successful.

MJT: You talk about Christian values, so what is a distinctively Christian position on business?

JH: I think for a Christian doing business, making money shouldn't be the end goal, it's what you do with the money. I think it's a perfectly acceptable thing for any Christian to make money and then use that money for good causes and at the same time to try to pass experience on to try to influence younger people or younger generations and to do charity.

DR. JOHNNY HON is Chairman of Global Group International Holdings Ltd., Hong Kong.