



Towards the 21st Century

by

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So many events happened last week both on the world stage and in Thailand which will affect the future of human resources and people's lives in general. With so much information flowing all the time, I sometimes wonder how we can digest it all, let alone make use of it. The media's responsibility is to analyse and sort the enormous amounts of information, but the public is not getting a fair deal if they have to rely on journalists alone. Therefore I hope that this HRI/Post project will be the prototype for many more cooperations in the future in which the media and academics can combine their resources to improve the quality of news, and thereby benefit the public.

Readers of our column have put it to use in a variety of ways, with managers using it to share ideas with employees, as study texts for students, and as a valuable source of insights into the business life of Thailand for overseas investors. In short, the column has become a talking point.

I think television could also learn from our example and involve more specialists to provide advice and help them diversify their range of products. Government departments should do the same to help them become more creative and do things which are of more benefit to the public. The government of former Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat is still remembered because he knew how to make use of talent outside the government.

This "strategic alliance" concept is one which I use every day. During the "vision seminar," which many senior government and state enterprise officials attended at the HRI last week, I told the delegates that I saw them as my partners in designing a "vision for human resources excellence." A small research organisation and think tank like the HRI can't do it alone, I said, but if we work together then we can do something of real value in the service of society.

Our politicians should re-examine their commitment to society. I'm sick and tired of hearing my political leaders repeat their old clichés about how well they run the country on the 7 o'clock news. I care more about the 58 million than these few people and care enough to spend my time teaching and disseminating ideas in the hope and expectation that the power of knowledge will eventually prevail. As I have said before, our political leaders must have "vision" if they hope to be around for very long.

Last week I was a bit worried to hear that the U.S. Senate had not yet ratified the GATT accords. U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor said they were 5 votes short in the Senate which has tremendous implications to Thailand and the rest of the world. Indeed, politics and economics do not always move in the same direction. The confusion I felt at hearing this news sprang from the fact that I had thought that free trade would benefit exporters, manufacturers and the middle class at the expense of ordinary workers, so why should Republicans block it? Perhaps it was just a tactic to embarrass President Clinton.

Meanwhile, also on the subject of philosophy and principles, here in Thailand we confronted the rather explosive issue of the land reform policy of the Chuan government. The press discovered that many rich people in Phuket had actually obtained land certificates issued by the government. Even though it may all be legal, the point is that the philosophy of the Democrats is supposed to be to help the poor, so how can they defend their principles in this case?

Of course, land reform is important to human resource development in rural areas, but as I said last week, land is only one factor in production. Production in the agricultural sector is not as important as generating steady income, so that the 60% of our population who rely on agriculture for their livelihoods can earn a decent standard of living, and have enough money to take care of their children. Unfortunately, land is not the whole solution, but it is still better than nothing.

At the "vision" conference last week, I specifically identified three ministries which need to acquire vision for the future—the ministries of Agriculture, Education and Finance—and then design policies and strategies which can achieve these goals. As a result, some of the ministries expressed a willingness to form a "vision workshop," but they also doubted whether their bosses were capable of demonstrating enough leadership to carry the vision through. As we have said before, vision cannot be attained without strong leadership.

Well, I hope all the readers of this column still believe in the long term prospects for Thailand, and that the bureaucracy will respond to the needs of the people. I believe that "inevitably" it is only a matter of time before the vision is achieved. In the age of globalisation the expectations of the people are rising every day because of the free flow of information. Unfortunately the bureaucracy is several steps behind the people. So please, let's speed things up!

See you next week!

Potential for Investment in Manufacture in European Executives View

