

For Review Only

Timely insights and practical advice on how we can stay balanced in the face of challenges, sustain our best work in the long haul, and contribute to the larger world around us.

AS THE DEMANDS of a disruptive world grow and pull us in different directions, it has never been more important to be whole. Most people recognise this, but few know how to achieve it. Instead, we run on the treadmill of work and become ever more drained and burnt out, while the organisations that we are part of become ever more fragmented and unhealthy.

Wholeness in a Disruptive World aims to bridge that gap. Inspired by the author's realisation after a physical breakdown from trying to "do it all", this book draws on the combined wisdom of Eastern and Western thinking, along with extensive interviews with leaders and executives, to show the way towards wholeness – both for us as individuals, as well as for our organisations and communities.



"As the pace and intensity of modern life ratchet up, Wendy's emphasis on wholeness is more important than ever."

MARSHALL GOLDSMITH

New York Times bestselling author and leadership thinker

"A great read and encouragement for leaders embarking on this journey of awakening."

Dr LIM BOON HUAT

Managing Director, Rohde & Schwarz

WENDY TAN is a keynote speaker, consultant and co-founder of Flame Centre, a talent development and learning design company.

Check out free online resources at www.wholenessinadisruptiveworld.com

visit our website at: www.marshallcavendish.com/genref



wholeness in a disruptive world WENDY TAN

Marshall Cavendish Business mc

wholeness

in a
disruptive
world

pearls of wisdom from
east and west

WENDY TAN

"A practical path to the integration of Eastern values and Western thinking that is good for the soul and good for our organisations."
– Peter Block, author of *Flawless Consulting* and *Stewardship*

For Review Only

PRAISE FOR WHOLENESS

"This book, in its focus on wholeness, is a clear and compelling answer to the fragmented life we lead and the fragmented world around us. Wendy provides the images, the stories and a practical path to the integration of Eastern values and Western thinking that is both good for the soul and good for our organisations."

PETER BLOCK

*Author of *Flawless Consulting* and *Stewardship**

"Wendy's wonderful book is a compelling reminder to live in the present, aware and awake. As the pace and intensity of modern life ratchet up, her emphasis on wholeness is more important than ever."

MARSHALL GOLDSMITH

*Executive coach, business educator,
New York Times bestselling author, and
#1 leadership thinker in the world (Thinkers50 ranking)*

"Wendy's invitation into wholeness brings to mind another phrase, 'living completely', the idea of embracing life and its challenges while leaving behind what drains us. Filled with thoughtful examples, Wendy guides leaders and professionals on a path to show how work and family can provide meaning and harmony to one's life, whilst contributing to the larger good."

MAYA HU-CHAN

*President, Global Leadership Associates and
co-author of *Global Leadership: The Next Generation**

For Review Only

"While much of the leadership literature focuses on doing and leading others, Wendy provides an existentialist perspective of the leaders' personal inner journey towards Wholeness and Being. I read with joy that leadership is a journey of awakening – uncovering, unfolding and reclaiming the very gifts that have been all along within us. In this journey we become Wisdom, Peace and Grace. A great read and encouragement for leaders embarking on this journey of awakening."

Dr LIM BOON HUAT

Managing Director, Rohde & Schwarz

"Drawing on her Eastern heritage and Western education, Wendy's unique voice and message on individual and community wholeness are timely. The stories in the book paint a possibility of dealing with workplace realities while becoming our better selves."

TERRI EGAN, PhD

Associate Professor of Applied Behavioural Science,
Graziadio School of Management and Business,
Pepperdine University

"Wendy's book offers a refreshing perspective on how being whole as an individual is both a precursor and result of being whole as a community. We are not complete as people until we have connected with others around us. This can be as simple as noticing a stranger, sharing a smile, offering service to others or most importantly, by being simply present to one another. Through honouring one another, we transform the experience of being with one another into a broader experience of wholeness, connectedness and meaning."

MELISSA ARATANI KWEE

CEO, National Volunteer and Philanthropic Centre

For Review Only

"This book speaks to the magic of remembering what's important. Wendy's writing on Wholeness is a gift because it's not about being perfect or having all the answers. Rather, it strengthens our readiness to just be and to find a way to go towards what makes us, our families and our teams special."

ANDREW MATTHEWS

Chief Actuary, Medibank Private

"Fluent in the ways of the West and the East, Wendy tells through these stories a journey towards wholeness in individuals and organisations. Thirdness as a fusion of the parts is a creative idea to contemplate. Recommended for leaders who want meaning and success."

BEVERLY KAYE

Co-author of *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em*
and *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go*

"The Chinese believe the world is made of *yin* and *yang*. This book gives real-life examples of how different kinds of *yin* and *yang* come together in our life and at work to make a difference. The most intriguing *yin-yang* interactions definitely come from the different Eastern and Western cultural practices depicted in this book. Very insightful!"

Dr DAVID CHANG

Vice President, Roche Pharma Technical Operations, China

"Wendy shares her life-threatening experience that evolved into wholeness. She shares her passion to enrich other people's lives as hers has been from finding that rare balance and tranquillity in a hectic life. Take a moment, pause and reflect and feel the difference as you turn each page."

ROBIN SPECULAND

Global pioneer and expert in strategy implementation

For Review Only

"In touch with the work dilemmas facing the current generation, this book articulates a cohesive approach to life and leadership. It holds out hope for all of us to become our better selves and the possibility for community at the workplace. An excellent book for leaders more intent on changing themselves than changing others."

GEOFF BELLMAN

Author of *The Consultant's Calling* and *Extraordinary Groups*

"Wendy's book is a refreshing reminder to organisations, leaders and individuals on what it takes to thrive in a fast-changing and increasingly inter-connected world – not to focus on parts but the wholeness from interconnected relationships."

LAU YIN CHENG

Advisor to C-level executives and formerly Chief of HR & OD,
Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore

"Like many books on leadership and personal mastery, Wendy shares some fascinating concepts and ideas, centred on the idea of wholeness and congruence. Unlike many other books, she also devotes much time to the actions, big and small, that we can take to make these ideas live and breathe. Anyone who cares about being a better person and leader will benefit from her wisdom and insight."

AARON MANIAM

Poet and civil servant

"In a fresh and vital new voice, Wendy enchantingly leads us to integrate Western and Eastern wisdom to create the world we wish for ourselves, our families, and our organisations. If you are weary of fragmentation and disconnection, reading and practising the tools in this book can help you regain your wholeness."

PAULINE ARNEBERG, PhD

Faculty, Masters of Public Administration,
California State University Northridge

For Review Only

wholeness

in a
disruptive
world

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM
EAST AND WEST

WENDY TAN



Marshall Cavendish
Business

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wholeness

noun

1. Individual wholeness: a sense of completeness and balance within oneself and with the community.
2. Collective wholeness: the well-being of the larger whole – family, team, organisation and community.
3. Cognitive wholeness: balancing opposites in our thinking.
4. Parts coming together to create something more expansive and life-giving – thirdness.
5. Not just a state but also a process of continuous balancing and rebalancing.

disruptive world

noun

1. Fast-changing business model that transforms the way the industry delivers value.
2. Uncertain, ambiguous, complex and potentially stressful landscape to navigate.
3. Requires organisations and people to respond in new ways.

WELCOME
WHY I WROTE
THIS BOOK

Lying in the hospital's intensive care unit for four days, I drifted in and out of consciousness. Amid the busy hum of nurses and doctors making their rounds, concerned check-ins, and the constant beeping of the resuscitation equipment, I found myself wondering, "Is this the end?"

My three young children, Pete, Finn and Sophie, came to mind. I felt deeply regretful. Perhaps I would not see them grow up. I would not help Pete transition into primary school or cheer for him in his swim competitions. I would not read to Finn or laugh at his adorable pouting. I would miss seeing Sophie, a tomboy, dolled up in dresses. I could not bear the thought of not seeing them grow up. What would they be like in the terrible teenage

years and as hopefully responsible adults? Leaning over weakly on the hospital bed, I choked at my request to my parents and godmother to take care of the three kids.

As an achievement-oriented and hyper-efficient professional and mother, I had lived my life constantly ticking off items on my “to do” list (only to have more the next day). I organised my life in blocks of 15 minutes. I struggled to do it all – deliver good work, manage my business and be a good mother. My time, energy and attention were fragmenting. My life was fragmenting.

While I lay on that hospital bed, I could see that it wasn't only me. My frenzied pace – with fragmented attention, energy and way of being – was a mirror of our larger world today. More than ever before, the pace quickens with 24/7 connection to our gadgets. Competition stiffens with lower-cost labour from elsewhere. Threats heighten as technology disrupts business models. Job security dips to new lows with increasing use of automation and artificial intelligence. Challenges mount as new skills are needed to survive in the changing landscape. None of these make us whole.

Thankfully, in the course of the week that felt like an eternity, the strongest antibiotics gradually helped my body gain the upper hand. My vital statistics returned to normalcy gradually. Discharged on New Year's Eve, I was relieved to be home. My life had been saved, but my energy was sapped. From zipping to and from locations or tasks in blocks of 15 minutes, I could only catch my next breath and pause. Without vitality, I stopped work and travel for more than a year.

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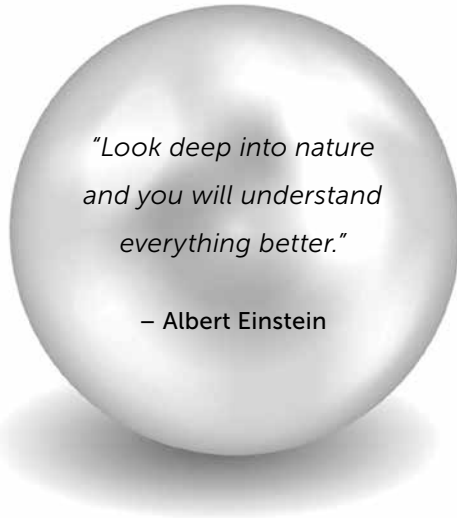
WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

To regain my health, I picked up *taiji* and *qigong*, and in the process got reacquainted with my Eastern roots. I saw that I had to find a different way of being. I still wanted to do good work, be a good mum and make my life count. Rushing around faster trying to “do it all” was just not sustainable. A question rang in my head: “What is the alternative to the fragmentation I experienced?”

Perhaps the Eastern perspective, with 5,000 years of history, would have something to offer. With its roots in the *Dao De Jing*, Confucianism and *yin-yang*, Eastern thinking *integrates* rather than *separates*. It focuses on the whole rather than individual parts. I contrasted it to my largely Western-based education in Singapore and the United States. A hallmark of Western management is to isolate and manage the *parts*.

It dawned on me that perhaps we can respond to this fragmentation with a new way of thinking – the integration of Eastern





*"Look deep into nature
and you will understand
everything better."*

– Albert Einstein

and Western thought. Pearls are formed at the intersection of land and sea. Imagine for a moment that the West is the land and the East is the sea. In the merging of ideologies between East and West, what are the pearls? How might these help us integrate work and life in a sustainable whole?

To answer these questions, I talked to leaders and executives who seemed to be at ease in both Eastern and Western worlds. They helped me understand how to stay whole and balanced in spite of the conundrums, conflicts and challenges we face in today's disruptive world. I researched how individuals and organisations can be healthy and deliver good work. Wholeness came as an alternative to this fragmentation. Wholeness is a sense of completeness and balance within oneself and with one's community.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book brings together the pearls of both East and West so that you can be, think and act whole, and live your life and do your best work in the world. As Einstein said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

This book explores the why, what and how of having more wholeness at work and in your life. It is written for professionals and leaders searching for greater alignment and harmony in today’s fragmented world. If you have picked up this book, you probably identify with the experience of fragmentation, dilemma, and tension when leading yourself and others. Experiencing wholeness during holidays or in meditation retreats is good but insufficient. With challenges in everyday life, the quest is to be whole despite the tension we experience. My goal is to point to an alternative way of being, thinking and behaving that will allow you to be more whole – for yourself as well as for the greater good.

This book is also a cross-cultural book, relevant for executives and leaders who straddle the worlds of East and West and want to better understand the nuances of or resolve the conflicts arising in East-West interactions in business life. Thus, it is highly relevant reading for coaches and leadership development facilitators as well as people in the human development industry.

What will you discover in this book? Here is an overview:

Chapter 1: When Wholeness Is Missing

In this first chapter, you'll read about real-life examples of the lack of wholeness in individuals, teams and organisations that culminate in negative consequences at work and in life. This chapter guides you to reflect on what drains you and keeps wholeness elusive in your life.

Chapter 2: The Joys of Wholeness

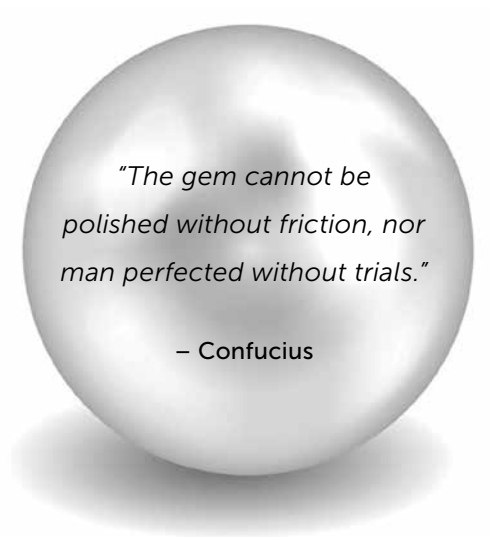
Included in this chapter are stories of professionals, leaders and business owners who share their journeys toward wholeness. These stories give us clues on the pathway towards wholeness, highlighting the nourishment and wisdom that wholeness offers. You're encouraged to reflect on moments of wholeness in your own life.

Chapter 3: How Wholeness Works

"Wholeness" is one of those words that everyone seems to know the meaning of but no one has the same definition. This chapter pulls together ideas about what wholeness means. You'll think about what wholeness means to you personally.

Chapter 4: Anchoring

Anchoring is the first of the ABCs of wholeness. Anchors keep us rooted. Your anchor is who you are as an individual and who you are in relation to your community. Awareness of your anchor gives you clarity, courage and commitment. The deeper



and wider your anchor, the more positive your impact. In this chapter, I invite you to clarify the dimensions of your anchor.

Chapter 5: Balancing

Is balance like a scale – when one side is up, the other side is necessarily down? Or is balance a 50:50 split, like a compromise? This chapter argues for dynamic balance being 100:100 over time, creating a *thirdness* that is more expansive and creative. You'll find 100:100 answers to any dilemma using the Mobius Insight™ Tool.

Chapter 6: Clearing

Clearing is about emptying yourself so that you can purposefully *be*. We are useful when we are empty – empty of judgments, ego and mental clutter. You increase your capacity to

reflect in the moment, to be aware of your impact on your environment and to sense what's needed in any situation. This helps you act in wisdom. You are encouraged to experience an activity to empty out.

Chapter 7: Integrating the ABCs in a Disruptive World

This chapter integrates Anchoring, Balance and Clearing in the disruptive world that we live in today. You will think about how you can use these ABCs in your life and at work.

Epilogue: Wholeness Beyond "I"

Ultimately, wholeness is the larger community – your family, team, organisation, community or even the world at large. The sense of community refers to our capacity to be contributors rather than consumers, to care for strangers and to take responsibility for our impact on the world.



For Review Only

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

At the end of every chapter is an applied section, “Over to You”, where you’ll discover tools and exercises that will help you apply wholeness in your own work and life. Use these tools to generate new perspectives and responses to your existing questions. You can also refer to www.wholenessinadisruptiveworld.com for additional resources. I invite you to treat this book as a companion for reflection. There’s no need to rush to the end of the book. Talk to friends about your thoughts and what ideas you might try. Better still, create your own wholeness community and support one another on your individual journeys.

As I reflect on my own life six years after my illness, I am grateful for these lessons. Today, I enjoy being with my children, appreciate simple meals with my family, challenge myself to contribute through my work, find fulfillment in making a difference in people’s lives, and take time to listen to the wisdom of nature. I sincerely hope these ideas will be of service to you as you live your own life of wholeness.

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PART I

THE MEANING OF
WHOLENESS

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WHOLENESS IS ONE OF THOSE WORDS which everyone knows the meaning of, but which is hard to express in words. I define wholeness as a sense of peace and being complete within oneself and with the world around. This sense of wholeness is dynamic and experienced in the moment. Wholeness is the "thirdness" created from the integration of polarities over time. When we are whole with our communities, we are authentic, adaptive and abundant.

In exploring this topic, I first look at situations where wholeness is missing. Lack of wholeness over time impacts one's productivity, physical and emotional health and capacity to contribute, ultimately to the detriment of the community around us. I also learn from leaders and professionals who seem whole despite the challenges they face – what does wholeness mean to them and what helps them be whole? These individuals have a different way of being and thinking, an ability to embrace polarities and act in context.

Learning from these stories and drawing insights from East/West thinking, I explore the what and why of wholeness in the following chapters. This notion of wholeness is different from therapy or the religious sense of wholeness; it is a wholeness that acknowledges all the realities of the modern world and embraces the role of work in our lives.

For Review Only



CHAPTER 1

WHEN WHOLENESS IS MISSING

*"Mastery does not mean having a plan for the whole,
but having an awareness of the whole."*

– Peter Senge, *The Dance of Change*

Consider these scenarios:

- A leader, caught in the ceaseless scurry of activities, runs even faster knowing that impending organisation changes will bring about even more work. He knows he needs to shift his focus to longer-term strategic priorities given the rapidly changing environment; however, he feels depleted by today's demands.
- A site director wants to build a high-performing organisation where people innovate for the future. But

preoccupied by business challenges, she unknowingly distances herself from her people. Spending long hours at work, she finds there's little to talk about at home with her family beyond the functional necessities.

- A smart, ambitious finance director is in line to succeed the managing director, but struggles to be a career woman and a mother to her two young sons. Feeling conflicted, she quits.
- A Chinese leader with impeccable technical skills is now the only Asian among a group of Westerners in the top leadership team. He realises he needs to make his presence known by making a "show", but he hesitates – he has always "led from the back".
- An American leader, posted to Shanghai for the first time, feels the pressure to show results and tries to drive change by defining strategies, KPIs and reward systems. His people respond with a verbal "yes" but nothing changes. He takes it personally and becomes more aggressive.
- Despite feeling stagnant at work, a manager doesn't leave his job because his family depends on him to provide for them financially. Being practical and responsible, he stays on but wonders if he needs to take some risks and venture into new areas to remain relevant in the digital age.

For Review Only

WHEN WHOLENESS IS MISSING

- A young professional with great potential lands a plum role – good career prospects, comfortable paycheck and big title – but yearns for the adventure of being his own boss and creating his own products.

These are composite examples drawn from the stories of professionals and leaders I have interacted with. Was there a scenario that resonated with you? If so, which one, and why?

These are examples of lives in which wholeness is missing. When this happens, we can still function in our lives and even be successful by external standards. But we may not feel happy or fulfilled. The lack of wholeness comes from:

- A conflict between who we are being and our true self
- Fragmentation in our attention, focus and energy



- Artificial compartmentalisation in our thinking
- Losing sight of what's truly important

This fragmentation creates a variety of unwelcome feelings. A manager describes it as being spun around in a washing machine by external forces and losing one's sense of control. You may also find yourself describing the feeling as:

- Lost
- Confused
- Conflicted
- Dissatisfied
- Burdened
- Uncertain
- Incomplete


Let's dive into the worlds of a few people and examine the factors that led to their circumstances. These stories are based on real people I have met at work.



Alan – Cares but exhausted

Staring out of the window from his workstation, Alan ponders, "Fifteen percent year-on-year improvement..." A manufacturing site director, Alan faces relentless pressure to lower the production cost of goods. Meeting all targets in one fiscal year results in even higher targets the following year. Meeting the challenge of beating those key performance indicators (KPIs) risks dissipating the creativity that makes it happen.

Looking at his calendar on the computer, many thoughts bombard his mind. "Operational meeting at 3 p.m., quarterly strategic review, Edwin's request, change in attitude in Lian, survey results, boss visit in two weeks..." His train of thought is interrupted by an urgent email arriving in his inbox. He clicks on it.



*"Only through experience of
trial and suffering can the soul
be strengthened, ambition inspired,
and success achieved."*

– Helen Keller

Alan's routine, on top of frequent travel in the region, is both gruelling and draining. He is caught in an endless flurry of activities, a race without a finish line. Knowing that impending organisational changes will mean more work and uncertainty, he runs even faster. He needs to shift his focus to long-term strategic priorities. The waves of technology changes could impact or even erode their competitive advantage. However, he is depleted by today's demands.

Alan genuinely cares for his team. He wants to build a workplace where the employees learn and grow together. He knows he has good people, but all isn't rosy. The employee opinion survey shows only 40 percent are "emotionally and mentally engaged", one-third "disengaging and open to other opportunities" and the rest "on the fence".

A recent integration announcement signals change and uncertainty for the short term, compounding employee stressors. Some employees are worried about keeping their jobs as an automation project moves forward. Many employees put in long hours on the job, and including the long commute, they spend 12 to 14 hours on work. Two high-potential executives recently resigned, citing “family reasons”. But we know that’s a diplomatic way to say quits.

Alan gets home at 8 p.m., a typical time for him. His family members have already eaten. Fatigued but still preoccupied with work, he asks his two children in passing, “Have you done your homework? Anything to sign?” They answer in monosyllables without raising their heads from their gadgets.

“There’s a late-night teleconference with the global team tonight,” thinks Alan, as he eats his late dinner alone. After the meeting, he finishes some paperwork and goes to sleep at 1 a.m., exhausted but at peace that he has checked off most of the items on his list. A similar routine repeats the next day.

What is happening in Alan’s situation? His situation is typical of many modern-day executives as organisations continually restructure, resize and re-strategise to survive. Studies show that 41 percent of organisations either recently completed a significant transformation initiative or are currently undergoing one. Another 47 percent are preparing to do so.¹

The average lifespan of a company listed in the Standard & Poor’s 500 Index of leading U.S. companies has decreased by

more than 50 years over the last century – from 67 years in the 1920s to only 15 years today.² Planning horizons are shorter, strategy implementation has less lead time and people are repeatedly asked to do more with less. In addition, a Tower Watson worldwide survey shows that 50 percent of employees say their workload has increased in the past three years.³ Eighty-three percent of American employees are stressed by at least one thing at work, especially workload and pay, up from 73 percent in 2012.⁴

In our globalised environment, many people operate across multiple time zones. Conflicts between work and personal lives deepen as conference calls take place in the late evening or early morning hours. Additionally, we find it hard to switch off from our gadgets – 80 percent of smartphone users check their phones first thing in the morning⁵.

Alan is worn out from this treadmill mode, which doesn't give him time or space to reflect on long-term or strategic issues. Despite his good intentions about creating a workplace in which people thrive, his subordinates are also experiencing the stress, and some are opting out physically or mentally. In addition, Alan feels emotionally disconnected from his family, which further reduces his support.

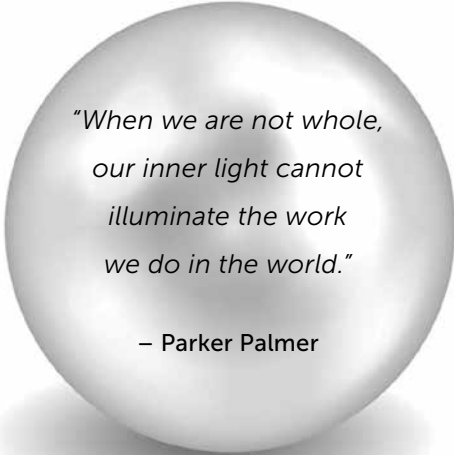
These issues accumulate, contributing to a sense of meaninglessness. What happens if Alan continues this cycle? Burnout, not to mention suboptimal performance, are often the consequences. He also misses the opportunity to connect meaningfully with his colleagues and family.

Let's meet another professional, who's facing a different challenge:

Maggie – Successful but conflicted

Maggie, a smart and achievement-oriented manager, is expected to succeed as the managing director in a few years. She will be the first woman to helm the organisation. Strategic-thinking, assertive and yet gracious, she has been mentored by the current managing director and is well respected by the employees.

One morning, Maggie comes to work with puffy red eyes. She thinks, "I can't do this anymore. Laura needs me." Maggie has two children, Edwin and Laura, who are seven and four years old, respectively. She has been struggling to balance work and family demands for a while. She has managed to avoid travel that would take her far from home by sending her managers with the intention of developing them too. She has also tried



*"When we are not whole,
our inner light cannot
illuminate the work
we do in the world."*

– Parker Palmer

working at home on two afternoons each week, and when she's at the office, she leaves promptly at the end of the workday. "I am doing everything I can, but it's still not enough!" she laments.

The previous night, Edwin complained, "Mummy, why does Carol's mother help him with his homework in the afternoons but we always have to do it at night? I am tired at night." This morning, Laura wailed when Maggie dropped her off at pre-school, screaming, "Mummy, Mummy, don't leave me here! I want you to be with me!"

Maggie feels conflicted. She wants to spend her best energy with her children and has considered resigning many times. Her heart is with the kids, yet she doesn't feel like she's a "good mum" to them. Her mind, however, focuses on the pragmatics of living expenses and giving the best to the children. Her professional role is also part of how she sees herself and she doesn't relish the thought of giving up her career, her income – and her identity.



According to the American Psychological Association⁶, Maggie is one of the 55 percent of employees who say that job demands have interfered with responsibilities at home. On the home front, it's increasingly challenging to raise a family and have a thriving career, especially with dual-income families. In a hyper-competitive world, we often worry about our children's future. From a young age, we expect them to perform well in academics, sports and music. Then we throw in expectations such as manners, values and cultural sensitivity. What happens? Full-blown performance management at home. On top of parenting, many also have the load of taking care of their elderly parents, as life expectancy increases.

Choosing either personal life or career is not a holistic solution. Not only is it a less-than-optimal choice for Maggie personally, there are also missed opportunities for the organisation to lose its talent. Why should the decision be *either* family or work anyway? Why not *both* family and work? Perhaps a different way of thinking can help us find creative new solutions rather than be trapped in unfulfilling compromises?

Let's meet our last example:

Dave and Liza – Culture clash

Relieved to be out of the sardine-packed subway and striding towards his office skyscraper in downtown Shanghai, Dave thinks to himself, "I don't understand why they can't just get it done. It's so straightforward! They are probably playing games here!"



Dave is an integration manager from America. His company, a Fortune 500 company, has acquired a software engineering company in China. Integration efforts have been ongoing for some time without significant progress. On paper, the harmonisation on job titles, organisation structure, headcounts, reporting lines, systems and processes is ready.

But he is frustrated by the speed of transition. He's under pressure to deliver savings on this acquisition, which will, in part, come from downsizing and eliminating duplicate resources. The local management team in China has verbally agreed to the changes, but the implementation has been much delayed. He has told Liza, the HR director, to go ahead with the redundancy plans.

Liza, a Taiwanese-born Chinese, earned her MBA in the United States and worked there for a few years before moving to

China. She understands how work in Western culture is seen as professional (which really means “don’t get too personal”) and plans are implemented in a logical and structured manner. At the same time, she knows that retrenching people on short notice goes against the implicit contract between the management and the employees. Requiring existing staff to re-apply for their jobs does not give the employees “face” or recognition for their years of experience and contribution. So although from a Western impersonal business perspective these processes are fair and efficient, they can also destroy the relationship and loyalty in the process. She wonders how she can bridge the gap in understanding.

This example is about the clash between Eastern and Western cultures in organisations. Just as a typical three-course Western meal usually proceeds in a step-by-step manner (starter, main dish, dessert or coffee), so does Western management thought. Leaders define strategy, key performance indicators are set, departments receive priorities, employees develop work plans, and we measure obsessively. Balanced scorecard, management by objectives, and business process re-engineering form the backbone of modern organisations. The output is systematic structure and processes to achieve results efficiently. These enable continuous improvement and have paved the way for the development of the present multinational mega-corporations.

Employees are also expected to be professionals, and relationships are transactions governed by contract – an exchange of time and expertise for money. Westerners prefer clarity in black-and-white terms and are less comfortable with ambiguity.

For Review Only



CHAPTER 4

ANCHORING

He who knows others is learned;

He who knows himself is wise.

He who conquers others has power of muscles;

He who conquers himself is strong.

He who is contented is rich.

He who is determined has strength of will.

He who does not lose his centre endures.

He who dies yet (his power) remains has long life.

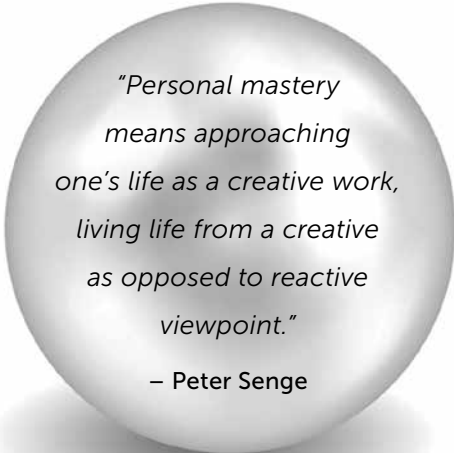
– Dao De Jing, Chapter 33

How does a tree grow tall and strong amidst the elements?

You're right, it's the roots. The deeper and wider the roots go, the taller and stronger the tree can be. The roots anchor the tree.

What is the parallel for individuals? What anchors you? For me, what anchors me is my role as a mother, as a professional, joy in making a difference and contributing. Anchors give us clarity about what is important, and help us stay grounded in what matters.

Early in my career, the birth of my first child, Pete, provided an extension of my anchor. I was pondering whether to return to the “safety” and “predictability” of corporate life and abandon the entrepreneurial experiment of my training and consultancy start-up. I loved to do the work, but I did not like to sell or promote. It was tough not knowing what was around the quarter, whether we would have enough work. I gave birth under subsidised care as I was worried about our cash flow. That meant I had a different doctor attending to me with every checkup. There was no continuity of relationship or someone I could build long-term trust in to deliver my child. It added to the stress of being a first-time mum.



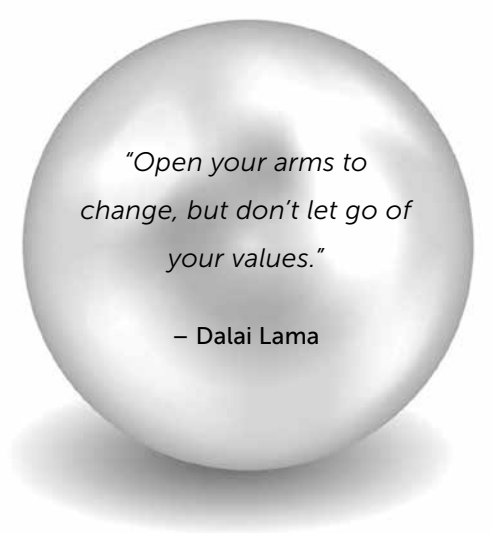
*“Personal mastery
means approaching
one’s life as a creative work,
living life from a creative
as opposed to reactive
viewpoint.”*

– Peter Senge

I never expected a little life would change my life and perspective so much. Being a mother added a new dimension to my anchor. I wanted to spend time with Pete, watch him grow, and be available to him. Clarity of this anchor made me stronger and braver. I decided failure was not an option. I had to make my experiment work. So I learnt to market, sell, write and hone my craft. This is a story about my anchor – what about others?

Aaron Maniam, a director in the Singapore civil service, talks about how people can bring their whole selves to a public service career.¹⁶ "Given my highly mixed family background, I have learnt to transcend easy labels and categories and realise that each of us is more than the sum of our component identities." Beyond ethnic identities, Aaron identifies the different dimensions of himself coming together in service of the larger whole. Being a poet, volunteer university lecturer, activist and leader in not one but several community organisations all contribute to his current role. Perspectives gained from one dimension add depth to the others.

But how does he juggle all this? Does he compartmentalise his different roles? How does he stay whole? "By seeing the big picture from the parts together. It took me a while to figure out, but now I am clearer that my greater self is about growing and contributing to others' growth. There are days where I even wonder if I would be a better teacher than policy-maker, but on most days I realise that one of the most important things we can do (as public servants) is to teach each other and ensure knowledge, skills and experience are shared and reinforced. So my different roles are aligned to this purpose."



Aaron maintains coherence between these roles and the fuller picture of his wholeness. Rather than compartmentalise behaviours in different situations, this personal clarity helps him stay congruent and be whole.

THE ASPECTS OF OUR ANCHOR

One tiny seed contains the possibility of a majestic tree. Similarly, our anchor captures the essence of who we are. There are two dimensions to our anchor:

1. Who am I, as an individual? This relates to our identity and values. What matters to me? What do I want? This is also about being comfortable with who am I as an individual.

2. Who am I, in relation to my community – my family, organisation, neighbourhood, country and larger world? This refers to our relation to the people around us, our responsibilities and purpose.

To explore your anchor, consider the following questions:

1. **Values.** What do you value in your life and work? What kind of person do you want to be? What is important to you? Values guide your behaviours and help you make decisions. Are you clear about your values, or do you flow according to societal norms? For me, I make decisions on work assignments based on whether I will learn something new more than on how much pay I will receive. Learning, wisdom, generosity, compassion and relationships matter more to me. What about you?
2. **Identity.** At one level, identity is about the roles we have – job title and family role(s). These are important, but we also need to go one step further and ask, “Who am I without all my roles, job title, and expertise?” How you see yourself determines how you think and what you do. A key element of my identity is an explorer. I am curious about ideas, people and the world out there. This drives me to venture out in search of new experiences, ideas, cultures and people. What about you? What is a key word that describes your core identity?
3. **Purpose.** If you had only six months to live, what would you say is most important to you? For most people, family

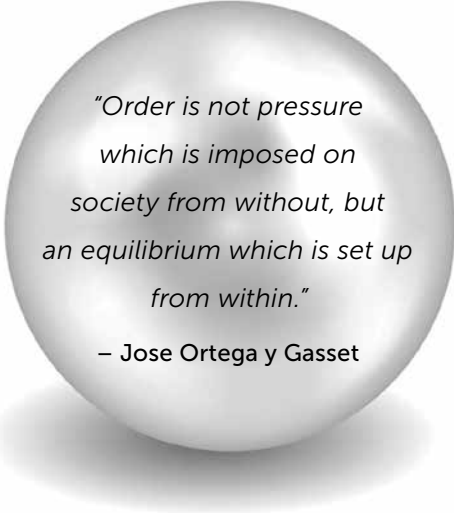
is paramount. Beyond that, this question prompts you to consider what you are on Earth to do, what is meaningful to you. Some people might consider this a spiritual question, but it's as practical as it is spiritual. Knowing or deciding what you are here to do puts you on task. For example, part of what I am here to do is to be a good mother and to be of service to others. What is your purpose?

4. **Responsibility.** What are your core responsibilities? Who are you responsible to? Your existence, as well as your loss of existence, has an effect on your family, organisation and community. Responsibility can easily be seen as a heavy load preventing one from simply taking off or focusing on self-centred interests. However, the act of carrying this load also sustains life for others. Our role in relation to others around anchors us. My key responsibilities are to my children, parents and the people I work with. What about you?

Ang Peng Siong – Portrait in Anchoring

Let's hear from Uncle Siong, as we call him at the swimming pool, on how these four elements come together for him. He was the world's fastest swimmer in 1982, a managing director of a swimming school and club, former head coach of the Singapore swimming team and now a behind-the-scenes builder of Singapore's sporting culture.

Seated in a meeting room in the swim club with the coaches' sharp whistles and water splashing in the background, I ask



*“Order is not pressure
which is imposed on
society from without, but
an equilibrium which is set up
from within.”*

– Jose Ortega y Gasset

Uncle Siong, “You have achieved much in your life. How do you see yourself, your identity?”

Uncle Siong is awkwardly silent for a moment, evidence of his self-effacing nature. Searching for the right words, he eventually says, “I would define myself as someone who has found my purpose through sports.” As the conversation continues, I find myself learning much more about what it means to be a sportsman than I ever did from the years of dropping my children at the swimming pool.

Uncle Siong has sports in his life. Being an athlete and coach is a pivotal part of his identity. He learnt to swim at the age of five from his father, a pool warden at Farrer Park, and only retired from competitive swimming at 30 years old.

With an unmistakable sense of gratitude, Uncle Siong says, “My

father was my first coach and also my inspiration. I remember bringing breakfast to him in the early morning. He would be coaching at the pool at 5.30 a.m. In the evenings, he started his second shift as the coach and president of the Judo Club. Even though we didn't talk much, I saw the years of dedication and the impact he had on the club and the judo players."

In 1982 Uncle Siong was the only non-American to qualify in a major international competition and subsequently became the fastest 50m freestyler in that year. In spite of this, the Olympics medal eluded him. In the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, there was no 50m freestyle event. In the 1988 Seoul Olympics, while every athlete was training hard, he was in National Service (compulsory military conscription for all Singaporean men). He came ninth in the heats, just one place short of qualifying for the finals. He was so sad that he cried.

"Everything happens for a reason," Uncle Siong quips with a distant look in his eyes. The loss made him committed to developing future athletes and the sports ecosystem. The club played an integral role in promoting paralympics and nurtured swimmers such as Yip Pin Xiu, a world record holder in 100m backstroke.¹⁷ He sees himself as playing a role in influencing the sporting scene in Singapore, so athletes have the support to maximise their window of opportunity into sports at the highest level. This is a responsibility he carries seriously.

"We are here not to create champions but an environment where champions are inevitable," Uncle Siong tells me, repeating the words of Forbes Carlile, Australia's first post-WWII Olympics

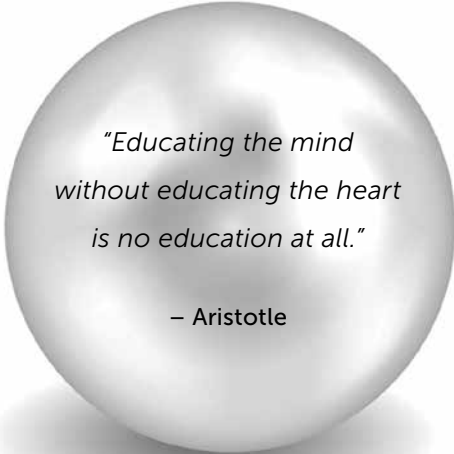
For Review Only

ANCHORING

swimming coach and the only person to have coached and later competed at the Olympic Games. "These words represent the purpose of my work," he says.

In competitive sports, winning a medal is often the final performance indicator. We remember the champion or at best the top three winners, but rarely the others. But Uncle Siong disagrees: "Although not everyone can be an Olympic medallist, we can all be champions in our own life. Our work is to create an environment for everyone to be champions in their own way." A champion trains hard, learns from failure and examines how he or she can do better. Many athletes have gone on to have good careers in their lives. Sports builds their character and habits to be successful in life.

"Sportsmanship is a value we hope to cultivate in our athletes," he tells me. "Sports has the potential to bring people together



*"Educating the mind
without educating the heart
is no education at all."*

– Aristotle

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendy Siew-Inn Tan is an explorer at heart. Led by curiosity and care, her work is about learning and bringing forth ideas to help us act with wisdom for the greater good. Being a Chinese with a Western education, Wendy draws from both wells to find insight and inspiration for us to be better human beings.

Wendy co-founded Flame Centre in 2004, a talent development and instructional design practice based in Asia. Flame Centre's work in integrating pedagogy and technology for learning advantage recently won the InnovPlus Spark and HRO Today Thought Leadership Awards.

Wendy is a Certified Professional Speaker (CSP), a designation conferred by the National Speakers Association as the international measure of professional platform competence. Wendy

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



has conducted keynotes and presented widely in conferences and organisations. She connects with her audience through her authentic, heartfelt and thought-provoking disposition.

As a consultant and facilitator, Wendy enjoys partnering with clients to bring about an alternative future where people and businesses thrive. Flame Centre also represents the work of Dr Beverly Kaye in career development and talent engagement solutions and Peter Block's Flawless Consulting workshops in the Asia Pacific region. Wendy has worked with many multinational corporations and government agencies in her career.

Wendy holds a Masters of Science in Organization Development (MSOD) from Pepperdine University and graduated from the National University of Singapore in Psychology with honours. She is based in Singapore with her husband Kang Yam and three children, Pete, Finn and Sophie.

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