

We Can Make this World a Better Place – A Delegate’s Perspective on the Forum

Shiyin Cai, Founder & CEO of Shiyin GmbH/Global Fashion Project and COO of the Dialogue in the Dark social enterprise, shares her experience of the Forum both as a delegate and organizer of the Dialogue in the Dark workshop.

“Making 1 million or giving away 1 million, which is more difficult?” – This question was asked to Bill Gates, whose answer, as reported by Professor Hans Rosling, was “surprisingly similar.” I believe most of the audience asked themselves the same question which was also why they were here at the 2010 UBS Philanthropy Forum in Singapore: finding the best way to use or give money away.

As a native Chinese growing up during the economic boom and market reform of the past 30 years, and then educated and working in the US and Europe, I struggle between the values of socialism and the West; as a corporate executive working all over the world for more than 10 years, I struggle between social responsibility and shareholder value; as an entrepreneur and second-generation family business owner, I struggle between traditional profit-driven culture and social mission; and, as I recently took on the role of manager in a 22-year old “Dialogue Social Enterprise,” I struggle between business professionalism and passion.

Wearing these multiple hats and filled with these doubts and questions, I came to the Forum and found myself not alone: I met many people transitioning from the business world to the social sector such as Patrick Cheung – from corporate executive to successful entrepreneur to social investor employing 25 visually impaired people full-time; also people being both entrepreneur and social leader such as Jason Li who has built 65 Hope schools all over China. As one of the social entrepreneur newsletters I picked up at the Forum says: *“Everyday is a different day to make a difference in somebody’s life.”* The participants’ enthusiasm and confidence inspired me big time and encouraged me to move forward.

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What touched me most was a participant at one of the “Dialogue in the dark” workshops: not only because of her beautiful voice, singing “Give thanks” in the dark, which brought tears to my eyes, but also because she asked us after stepping out of the dark room if she could keep a white cane – she had eye problem for a long time but was too afraid to show it. The experience in the dark helped her become brave enough to face herself and appreciate who she is.

The attentiveness and professionalism of the UBS staff also left a strong impression: Mathias, Andrei, Jenny, Nicole... Every one of them tried their best to make the

experience a memorable one for each participant. Not only did they try to fulfill every request, but also even the things that we didn’t ask for, such as ordering special food for our visually impaired trainers at lunch – it was very touching.

The forum also made the day for our blind trainers and encouraged them big time: they became the stars after the workshop – all participants were so impressed and were extremely thankful for what they’ve received from the trainers in the dark – a reverse role situation.

I wouldn’t say that I got answers for all my questions, but one thing is clear: people in this social world might work more and earn less, but they definitely receive a lot more in return in spirit!

I can’t think of a more perfect way to start my social enterprise life than this time’s UBS Philanthropy Forum. It confirmed my decision of transitioning from business to social entrepreneurship a right one and it made me believe that with the effort of these people, we can make this world a better place!



Dialogue in the Dark

Dialogue in the Dark

Forum delegates were offered the opportunity of a hands-on workshop to investigate and overcome the barriers between the abled and the disabled through a workshop held in darkness, during which participants were guided and supported by a team of blind enablers. These interactive workshops were aimed at those looking to challenge the way they think and act in unfamiliar territory. They provided participants with an opportunity to improve their ability to communicate and develop greater empathy and sensitivity.