

CAMBODIA'S **WOMEN LEADERS**

21 Stories of Grit
and Resilience



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KONRAD
ADENAUER
STIFTUNG

CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

21 STORIES OF GRIT AND RESILIENCE

2019



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FOREWORD

The evolution of women's roles in society is one of the biggest and most important changes we have witnessed in recent decades. This is a progress of which we are most proud.

Only eighty years after women were first allowed to vote, they not only readily and fully participate in the workforce, they actively seek positions of leadership and power. Women today are political ministers, governors, corporate executives, entrepreneurs, investors, engineers, inventors, and innovators. Societies advance through their successes.

These successes have not come easily, and many significant challenges for women remain. Many and various of these challenges are deeply ingrained societal expectations that dictate to women beginning at an early age what it means to be a woman, how she should lead her life, what her place in society is, and how she should interact with others.

At present, even in some of the most developed countries in the world, many young women are told that they cannot go far, because if they do, they will not be able to have, raise, or take care of their families. They are not told that many women like them have done it and are doing it well. This is exactly why our "Cambodia's Women Leaders: 21 Stories of Grit and Resilience" came to life. We want to show young women in Cambodia, and around the world, that despite all odds, they can have big dreams, and they can pursue them without guilt.

This publication brings together 21 of the many inspiring women leaders of Cambodia to share their stories of grit, resilience, failures, and successes. These true stories serve as precious testimony to the younger generations of girls documenting that women like themselves can lead and still be able to have a family, that women are as capable as men, that they can have a voice, and that they can have the authority to make important decisions which shape their future and their children's.

We deeply appreciate the successes and failures shared by our Cambodian women leaders. Because of their true stories, younger women will be empowered to think big, dream big, and achieve big.

We are also most grateful to Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, our sponsor and supporter in this very important mission of empowering women around the world.

Mouna Aouri,
Founder & CEO of Woomentum



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A NOTE OF HOPE FROM THE PROJECT INITIATOR

Ever since I was young, my aspiration was leadership. I told myself that I wanted a well-paid job and I wanted to be a role model for my siblings, while helping Cambodian women and communities to contribute to the regional and global economy. So far, in my life, I have been a student, teacher, author, women's rights advocate, NGO worker, business strategist, entrepreneur, and country leader of a regional trade association. I have found that our society needs genuine leaders who continuously transform their teams and society to achieve a better world. Throughout my career, I have been fortunate enough to work with many public and private organizations, as well as NGOs, whose robust leadership and firm commitment to promoting gender equality have greatly inspired me.

Without any hesitation, I approached 21 of the most can-do and fearless leaders I know to ask if they would contribute to this Women Leadership Stories project. Within these pages, they have graciously shared every flavour (sweet, bitter, sour) of their life and leadership journey. I strongly hope that this book will be a worthy source of empowerment for women and girls across different industries and countries. I dedicate this to my beloved mother, who always lifts me up, and to my equally supportive father.

I would like to sincerely thank all the women leaders featured in this book for their valuable time and for sharing their inspiring stories. Also, I would like to profoundly thank Woomentum, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, and the editorial teams who made this publication possible.

Socheata Touch,
Woomentum Cambodia President Chapter

ABOUT WOOMENTUM™

Based in Singapore, Woomentum is a membership-based collaboration platform that connects entrepreneurs, industry experts, corporate leaders and investors to share knowledge, solve challenges and access opportunities to grow their businesses.

Woomentum's mission is to help women entrepreneurs and women-led teams to start, build and grow sustainable and profitable companies.

Since its inception in 2014, Woomentum has become a one-stop shop for thousands of women entrepreneurs from over 45 countries in 5 continents to instantly access practical advice, business knowledge and capital.

In 2016, the founder of Woomentum visited Cambodia and met Socheata, a strong Cambodian woman who was inspired by the platform. Socheata made it her goal to enrich capacities of women entrepreneurs and connect women around the globe via the Woomentum community. Finally, the Woomentum Cambodia Chapter was launched in December 2018. It will work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Women Affairs, business associations, and other partners towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



DISCLAIMER:

The designated contributions do not necessarily reflect the opinions and views of the editorial team, Woomentum and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Hence, assumptions made in the articles are not reflective of any other entity other than the author(s) – and, since we are critically-thinking human beings, these views are always subject to change, revision and rethinking.

ABOUT KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG

Freedom, justice and solidarity are the basic principles underlying the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU).

As co-founder of the CDU and the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) united Christian-social, conservative and liberal traditions. His name is synonymous with the democratic reconstruction of Germany, the firm alignment of foreign policy with the trans-Atlantic community of values, the vision of a unified Europe and an orientation towards the social market economy. His intellectual heritage continues to serve both as our aim as well as our obligation today. In our European and international cooperation efforts, we work for people to be able to live self-determined lives in freedom and dignity. We make a contribution underpinned by values to help Germany meet its growing responsibilities throughout the world.

KAS has been working in Cambodia since 1994, striving to support the Cambodian people in fostering dialogue, building networks and enhancing scientific projects. Thereby, the foundation works towards creating an environment conducive to social and economic development. All programs are conceived and implemented in close cooperation with the Cambodian partners on central and sub-national level.

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FOREWORD

Gender equality is undoubtedly one of the leading and most pressing issues of our time. Not a single day passes by without women all over the world fighting for their rights and representation in economy, politics and civil society. The fight for more justice, equality and self-determination takes place in families, work places, parliaments, sports grounds, schools and also in the minds of people.

Rethinking society and innovating the way we organize our societies includes reflecting on the role of women and men. Freedom, justice and solidarity are not exclusive rights for men. That is why gender equality is a two-sided topic, which has to equally concern women and men. Both sides have to work together for more resilience and empowerment. Exchange about gender equality, platforms and dialogue has to be created to form better policies, campaigns and strategies as well as enforcement. But it is not enough to let experts and the elite shape the discourse about gender equality. It has to be a multi-party effort encompassing all levels, societal backgrounds and spheres. Gender equality starts and ends in the heads of the people.

Against this background, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is very pleased to publish the present women leadership book together with Woomentum. It is far more than compiling interviews about strong and successful women in diverse positions. It is about telling stories about lives lived by women, who faced many barriers and challenges in a patriarchal and hierarchical society and yet overcame them. It is their dedication to the next generations to show them that success is not anymore bound to gender or background. It is bound to strengths, wits and courage.

Deeply impressed and touched by these stories, I wish that this publication inspires young and old, women and men, rich and poor at the same time and leads to an open and meritocratic society.

Have a good read,



Dr. Daniel Schmücking,
Country Representative
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
Kingdom of Cambodia

H.E. Dr. Ing Kanthaphavi

Minister

Ministry of Women's Affairs



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I was born into a family where my father was a senior government official. My mother was a housewife who loved education. My parents, in particular my mother, played significant roles in sending me and my siblings to schools based on our learning capacities. They provided me with a golden opportunity to study, not only in Cambodia but also in France. I had seven siblings (four sisters and three brothers) and all of them are now professionals working as engineers, accountants, pharmacists, scientists and so on. I married an

economist and now have a daughter. I left Cambodia in 1972 to study in France. I hold two degrees: a Doctorate of Medicine (Paris) and a Brevet in Public Administration from the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA-Paris) completed by a short course in the executive program "Leaders in Development: Managing Political and Economic Reform" at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (2004).

I spent almost 10 years in France working as a private medical doctor, working initially in French hospitals and then in my own consulting rooms. I then became the Director of Drugs for clinical trials in a French company. In the 1990s, I was also Deputy Secretary General

“**Believe in yourself, in your abilities, and in your vision. Be down to earth and be receptive to feedback**”

and more innovative than the others, and the mindset and management style are more guided towards the financial benefits of the firm. Whereas in the public sector, you have different motives as you are working for the public's interests and benefit.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I first started my career in France and was well integrated. However, I encountered a few challenges at the beginning relating to the differences of culture and mindsets, also as a woman and a foreigner (physically different from the French natives). The difficulty was trying to establish myself as a manager and leader. I had to strive more to make myself respected among my peers and staff.

Finally I would say, with a lot of effort and perseverance, I was able to manage and succeed in my career quite well.

Since France became a member of the European Union, I noticed changes progressively coming in people's behavior, with more open-minded people accepting differences born of diversity.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

I'd like to share certain lessons learnt during my previous and current experiences both in the public and private sectors, to ensure success in your mission:

- Who we are leading? It is very important to know the people that you are supposed to lead and to provide them clear directives,
- Make sure you and your staff have a shared vision,
- Make sure they fully support you and trust you,
- Leaders need to carefully think about putting the right people to the right role based on an evaluation of their soft (communication, flexibility, adaptability) and hard skills,
- We need to establish two-way communications between leaders and followers,
- Leaders must clearly understand followers' expectations before

in the "Association des Médecins Cambodgiens" whose objectives were to provide technical and medical assistance to Cambodia, such as medical drugs, medical equipment and training all with a view to upgrade doctors' skills.

I returned to Cambodia in 1995 and worked as a Technical Advisor to the Ministry of Rural Development. During this time I was responsible for community development with a focus on rural health, economic women empowerment in reviving the silk sector and access to clean water. In 1998 I moved to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, serving five years as Secretary of State and was promoted to Minister of Women's Affairs in July 2004.

What I am proudest of is that I have had the opportunity of experiencing both the public and private sector. The working environment is more competitive in the private sector, you have to be better



making commitments. Leaders do not blame others when things go topsy-turvy, they are responsible to fix the problem. Accountability is important for any leader.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team/staff/family/customer is aligned with your values?

In family, husbands and wives are love and life partners. I never think about the role of leader or follower in the family because I always feel that my husband and I are equal. Before getting married, I discussed with him about my dream to be a professional woman not only a housewife. He agreed to allow me to have a career and we shared our career aspirations.

What are my core values?

- Never give up! Persevere with your efforts. Be down to earth! When you commit to do things, you do it despite challenges, obstacles or discouragement from others. Have the courage to continue.

- I value negotiation skills which powerfully smooth your way forward.

- Do not feel shy or ashamed to ask for support from others if you need to.

- Women can climb the career ladder when their husbands support them, when they share family responsibilities and household burdens and do not have any feelings of competition with their spouse. It can be stated that "happiness and success in family life can lead to success in professional careers or businesses". This can apply to both women and men. Having parents as good role models will have a good impact on the children's future.

- Women support women. Women should have confidence in themselves and provide support to other women in the company or in society.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Putting his/her own interests ahead of the general interest of the team, the company or the institution, being narrow minded and short-sighted, abandoning the commitment when obstacles occur, being indecisive and not taking responsibility for your actions.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

Believe in yourself and your ability.
Believe in your vision and commitment
Be down to earth and be receptive to feedback.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

The biggest risk in my career was to decide to abandon my profes-



sional and comfortable life in Paris in the 1990s and to come back, with the whole family, to Cambodia, a country I left 23 years previously. The situation and the comfort in Cambodia at that time were quite challenging and difficult, I was paid a salary hundred times lower than I used to get for my job in Paris, and this meant I couldn't afford even the schooling for my daughter. My understanding and relationships with people had to be re-adjusted to the new environment I found myself in.

Now, after more than 23 years of effort, patience, perseverance

and courage to continue with a goal in mind to contribute to the reconstruction of the country and to assist in building the human resources capacity, I am now Minister in charge of Women's Affairs.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think can Cambodia thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

I would say that Cambodia provides golden opportunities to local

and foreign workers, entrepreneurs and investors because there is a great need for development. The Cambodian population is young and eager to accept opportunities.

- Cambodian people came back from the genocide era, and they are now more resilient to difficulties, obstacles and crisis situations. Cambodians are more adaptable to different situations.

- Cambodian people are friendly, dynamic and innovative in their approach to a problem or to launch an initiative.

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Women should have confidence in themselves and support other women in the company or society

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

From my own perspective, many young Cambodian women are strong today. I would like to share some advice to those who are in business as well as in other sectors.

- Do not be afraid to have big dreams. Always keep hope that you will achieve your dreams.

- When you feel you are doing the right thing, please continue doing your job based on your goals and vision.

- Motivate yourself and others. Doing business is a long journey on a bumpy road. Have confidence in yourself and bring others on board for support.

- Do not regret the past if you need to change your path. Life is always moving forward with ups and downs but have faith in yourself. You will get out from the downs if you persevere. You have to stay strong and move forward to the next step! [w.k](#)

Oknha **Lim Chhiv Ho** Chairwoman *Attwood Import and Export*



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I was born in Sihanoukville on October 1, 1961. I had ten siblings but half of them were killed together with my father and other relatives by the Pol Pot regime. I have five siblings now and I am the third one. During the Khmer Rouge rule in 1975, my family was split up and I was placed in a camp with 275 other children. At that time, I was eleven years old and forced to work in the construction field of an irrigation system without rest. The Khmer Rouge randomly took people out every day and killed them, in particular those who had a Chinese background and were educated. Luckily, I was one of five girls in the group who survived. In late 1978, I was finally reunited with my mother, sister and young brother. At the time Vietnamese troops conquered Cambodia, my family and I started our first business venture by cultivating and selling rice and rice wine to Vietnamese troops and trading livestock for gold. My mother arranged my marriage to a fisherman who used his boat to carry electronics, liquor and cigarettes brought to the island of Tamor Sor by large merchant ships from Singapore. I recalled I was at home selling noodles at that time. My husband was imprisoned because he was selling motors from Thailand to Cambodia without a passport. That was the time I was very deeply involved in business. It was the foundation of my Attwood Import & Export Company, which was established in 1994. Until now, I have had exclusive rights to sell alcohol brands such as Hennessy and Johnnie Walker, and my other portfolio is in property and infrastructure development, hotels, hospitality and the Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone. Due to my success in business, I was selected as the Vice-President of both the Phnom Penh Chamber of Commerce as well as the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce.



When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

The greatest challenge I have faced while running my businesses is learning how to separate family and business. The nature of business is volatile, money can be earned or lost at any time so I have to pay

serious attention to it but my family also requires the same attention. Frankly, my brain is always switched on for business ideas.

My core values are to have a strong will and to turn vision into reality in a business. The vision itself should help the company to grow and create jobs for our country. When doing business

with investors in countries such as Singapore and Japan, my core value is integrity. When you get the right partners, you have to stick together if you want to get success. The same applies to your employees and customers. One must be a businesswoman who has a staff retention programme in order to maintain loyal customers.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

- Not walking their talk. Most ineffective leaders are talkers and order their people to do things but are not involved in the process. If they aspire to be a "great leader," it's important that they "walk the talk," meaning that they actually do what they have talked about. Then their team can follow their leaders.
- No clear goals and objectives. Leaders must have clear goals and directions for their people. If they do not have clear goals, they cannot drive their teams and they will not know when and what they will achieve at the end. In some cases, the company has clearly defined goals and strategies but they have not been effectively communicated to their followers and teams. This can be a disaster for the company.
- Lack of accountability. In team work, without a "culture of accountability," teams will never complete and achieve their assigned tasks because it is too easy for members of the team to get sidetracked "putting out fires".

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

- Create a culture of mentoring especially by successful women entrepreneurs to young start-up businesses.
- Understand my people and provide them opportunities to demonstrate their capacity.
- Give my people/teams incentives based on their performance.

“ Women should stand strong to face the issues and start their dream businesses

- In business, it is vital to select the right partners. I have to carefully study potential partners' business background and history. It is not always about money. It is about transparency, trust, and the good reputation of their businesses.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

I remember the biggest risk for me was to start my business when my husband was confined in 1985. As a housewife and newly starting to do business on behalf of my husband, there were many challenges. I stayed on the island for five years and worked with groups of men to transport goods from the ships to the coast. At that time, ships from Singapore could not come to the Cambodian shore directly. It was not safe because there were Vietnamese and Cambodian soldiers. Every night my group of men would take small boats and go to Sihanoukville to sell the products. My name became very well known on the island and people helped me to do my business and I would cook rice for them in the evenings. My success started from self-confidence and commitment to work with both men and women.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship and dynamic leadership.

Cambodia is a very good place for investments in the region because the market is very open and welcomes all nationalities from around the globe. For example, my company has received contracts



from the government to develop Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Sihanoukville and Bavet. Because of the free market, friendly people, peace and political stability in Cambodia, I can attract more investors. Cambodia has investment incentives under Cambodian investment laws and regulations. I have also recently signed a joint venture with Zephyr Co. from Japan in order to establish another SEZ close to Phnom Penh. With strong support from the government, these zones offer huge business opportunities, to name but a few, a nine-year tax holiday, exemptions on VAT and import and export duties for both local and foreign businesses.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

Cambodian women have to believe in themselves that they can do as well as their male counterparts. They have to sharpen their skills / networks, build a good pool of human resources and transform their family businesses to the standard that is ready for joint ventures with other investors as well as to boost Cambodia's industry in the future.

Taking this opportunity, I want to encourage all young Cambodians who must continue their studies both within the country and abroad to gain more experience and build their skills to increase the country's economic growth. More importantly, women entrepreneurs have to devote their time and efforts to start their business dreams. They should not care much about others' criticism and stand strong to face the issues. They must be brave enough to speak out and take action by showing their achievements to the public. [WIK](#)

Dr. Pung Chhiv Kek

Founder and President *Cambodia League for Promotion and Defense of Human Rights*



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I am the founder and President of the Cambodian League for Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO). I am a medical doctor, coming from a family of public figures. My father served in the cabinet of then Prince Norodom Sihanouk from 1979 to 1993. My mother was the first woman to sit in Cambodia's National Assembly in 1958 and served as Minister of Health and as Minister of Social Affairs and acting president of the National Assembly under Sihanouk during the 1960s.

I went into exile in France in 1971, after my parents left Cambodia for medical treatment and were not allowed to come back. In the 1980s, thanks to my family's close ties to King Sihanouk, I arranged meetings between the King and Hun Sen. The meetings took place as early as December 2, 1987. This started the process that led to the 23 October 1991 Paris Peace Accords. I returned to Cambodia in 1992 and founded LICADHO to promote human rights in the country. I am also the Chairperson of NGO-CEDAW and CAMBOW.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When I started as a medical doctor, there were very few women in the field. Old school traditionalists held all the positions of power and decision making. I had to be better than men doing the same job as mine to prove my competence and my value. Fortunately, many people, especially women, were very happy seeing women doing their part in the society. They eventually prevailed, bringing a new generation of talents from both genders.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

Over the years, I learned that we cannot take any progress for granted. There always will be forces of inertia or opposition counterbalancing leadership. In the new era as Cambodia enters a period of

acceleration, leaders need to constantly review their positions to be in harmony with progress taking place as well as with the external physical, human and operational situation.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Equality of all people, democracy, independence and fundamental liberties are my core values. I ensure my team is aligned with my values through recruiting and constant reevaluation, exchange of ideas and training.



What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I think that not listening to comments or critics has a negative effect on leadership. Allowing comments or criticism without considering the whole picture and without listening to diverging opinions adversely affects decision-making. Another point to avoid is not giving a good example in work or behavioral ethics. Of course, a leader has to lead and be able to make decisions; indecision is a weak point of a leader.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

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I had to be
better than
men doing
the same job
as mine to
prove my
competence

I strive to show women the importance of not letting obstacles of any kind discourage them; they must do all they can to persevere in their activities. I also try my best to help prepare for the future in promoting education, training and formation of the next generation.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

When I first started, it was very difficult for me to be taken seriously. A young woman was expected to just marry and stay at home; trying to get a career was not well accepted by society.

When I started making contacts to set up a meeting between Prince Sihanouk and Mr. Hun Sen, it was seen as an unwanted and inappropriate intrusion into international affairs by a private citizen. Eventually, against everyone except my parents' and my three daughters' advice, I persevered and that ultimately led to the October 23, 1991 Paris Peace accords.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think can Cambodia thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

Because of its history, ancient and recent, Cambodian culture has proved to be a very important part of the national psyche. Traditional values and modern ideas together form the core of actual Cambodian culture, like the role of women in society. After the Khmer Rouge, who nearly brought Cambodian culture to the verge of extinction, there was a rebirth in pride and an openness to the influx of modernity. New values from outside and from within Cambodia have been added to Khmer culture making it not only adapt to, but thrive in the modern world.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

I would advise Cambodian female entrepreneurs to persevere despite adversity and to make themselves seen and heard. Also, I would encourage young women not to hesitate to pursue a course of studies oriented towards entrepreneurship and leadership and to apply their skills to business or to their career path. [WK](#)

H.E Phoeurng Sackona

Minister

*Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and
President of APSARA Authority*



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I grew up in Cambodia while the country was going through multiple political changes. My father was in the army and my mother was a stay at home mom. Both of them shared a love for studies and it was very important for them to pass it on to their children. I had three siblings, all of whom I regrettably lost during the genocide, as well as losing my mother and my father. When the Khmer Rouge regime hit Cambodia, I was just finishing second grade. During this troubled time, no one in the country was allowed to pursue their studies. Education, arts and culture became forbidden. Nevertheless, having the chance to grow up for 16 years with two academic parents, I had never forgotten my love of studying and never lost my thirst for knowledge. In the 1980's, once the regime came to an end, I resumed my studies at the age of 20, and was selected for a scholarship to Russia where I graduated with a Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering.

Once I graduated, knowing that I did not have the necessary passion to start a business, it was logical for me to pursue a career in the public sector. I decided to join the ITC (Institute of Technology of Cambodia) as a teacher where I was rapidly promoted to Deputy Director in 2000 and Director General in 2002 after getting my PhD in microbiology at the University of Bourgogne in France.

Being DG of ITC opened up many opportunities for me, including being appointed Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education between 2008 & 2013. After this successful mandate, I was lucky enough to be chosen to lead the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts in 2013. It is a privilege for me to work for the preservation of Cambodia's heritage. I hope this will allow the younger generation to grow and to respect our culture and to share it with the rest of the world.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

As a woman, one of the main challenges during this period was to be taken seriously by men. It has been difficult, however, I never backed down from any challenges thrown in my direction. I have

always believed in my ability to learn and grow. I was lucky enough to be surrounded by so many amazing people who continuously taught me new things and helped me to adapt to new cultures.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

During all my years of experience I have learned three important lessons:

1. All effects have a cause. Solving any type of problem without focusing on its cause will not give you the right answer.
2. Caring deeply for the people who work with you. Empathy and sympathy are two simple human emotions you require in order to care for everyone who works with you.
3. As Lao Tsi once said, "find a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life". One's job will always be more meaningful when it comes from love and passion.

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Learning is a long life journey for women to know what is right and what is wrong and pass it on to a younger generation.



What are your core values and how do you ensure your team/staff/family/customer is aligned with your values?

- 1 – Believing in your team's capacity is very important. By being their leader, you need to believe that your team has the necessary capacity to accomplish the mission you set for them.
- 2 – Being a humble leader. Being strict but respect rules and regulations, by also setting the proper example.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

- Aggressiveness
- Too much pride
- Being selfish

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

- 1 – Sharing my experiences and stories to help the younger generation to understand that not everything is given.

- 2 – Continuous learning while knowing that "Wealth without work – Commerce without morality" is not the proper way to live your life.
- 3 – Having the courage to open yourself to the unknown.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Being in the public sector is not like the private sector where you need to evaluate all types of risks in order to make sure you achieve a return on your investments. Nevertheless, being in the public sector, our actions are accountable to our country and our people and we always have to keep in mind the importance of our work. My challenges come from one's character and different principles in life.

For me personally, as a Buddhist, I strongly believe that any crisis is the equivalent of the storm. Once it passes life can begin again. You need to take the opportunity to use your past lessons in life as best as possible to help you move on.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think can Cambodia thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

- 1- Khmer heritage is unique. We should be proud of our culture and what our ancestors have given us.
- 2- We need to learn from our past and not repeat the mistakes that we made previously as human beings.
- 3- Enforce a 'Win-Win' policy by the Royal Government of Cambodia. Building peace and prosperity without internal conflicts where the people have to pay the price.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

- Women have their own value whether they are housewives, leaders, or businesswomen.
- Learning is a life-long journey for women to know what is right and what is wrong and pass it on to the younger generation.
- Failure is a good lesson which allows you to move forward.
- Khmer women have to understand our own culture and values. Be open to other cultures without forgetting our own. [W.K.](#)

Dr. Eng Lykuong

President

Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I am the second of six children in my family, two males and four females. I married a businessman and we have a son and a daughter. I graduated in 1992 and became a dentist. I began my solo entrepreneurship in 2003, with my dentistry skills and knowledge. Cambodian people had lower awareness of health care and did not trust medical professionals. When the government was promoting the health care system and higher education in dentistry, I managed to continue my studies and completed my Doctor of Dental Surgeon (DDS) in 2002 and went on to become a post graduate in Periodontology in Phnom Penh in 2005. In 2008 I obtained my certificate of Oral Implantology from Germany.

I am currently a founder and Director of Master Care Dental Clinic which drives dental technology in the country with internationally qualified doctors. I am actively involved in social work to improve health care and am the co-founder of the Cambodian Dental Councils as well as being the third president of the Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association that serves more than 500 women entrepreneurs.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When I started my dental school and my business in dentistry, there were not many women joining this industry. It was a big challenge and a very critical time for me as a woman in a male dominated profession. At the same time, there was no motivation from my husband. The money he gave was only for the household and child care expenses. Being a female leader and entrepreneur in this field, I had to do two jobs at the same time by playing a man's role at my own clinic and as a housewife who takes care of my kids at home. I worked twice as hard as men and struggled to balance my businesses with my role as a mother and wife.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

Leadership values that I have learnt are as follows:

- Self-leadership: we have to have strong commitment and set our life goals. Then never give up your dreams and goals easily.
- Leadership in family: be a good role model for your children and other family members by not only talking but also by taking action.
- Leadership in company or society: give value and trust to employees and provide them with an appropriate salary based on their competency. More importantly, we have to put the right people into the right jobs at the right time. As leaders, we have to take more responsibility than our subordinates. The significance of the role is to produce more leaders who should have positive thinking and be brave enough to take on challenges.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

I have six core values for myself and my teams. They are:

- **Trust:** in working together and building businesses, trust in each other is vital,
- **Empowerment:** I always empower my teams to decide on the tasks that they are involved to,

- **Promotion:**



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I worked twice as hard as men and struggled to balance my business with my role as a mother and a wife

when they are capable of doing their jobs well, my team normally gets their salary increased along with other commissions,

- **Value and Appreciation:** appreciate and encourage the employees to love their jobs and want to stay longer with us,
- **Involvement and Mentorship:** If we start our business with our own skills, the success rate is higher because we know what needs to be done, and it is much easier to involve others to sort out problems together,
- **Challenges:** react positively and with confidence to all challenges that come our way as these will provide us with opportunities.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Negative Attitudes I could identify are

- Never giving opportunities to employees and teams to allow them to share their ideas and show their talents,
- Quick reactions to problems can potentially lead to making the

wrong decisions.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

- Continue learning by attending short courses and read relevant business documents.
- Approach and build your network with others whose knowledge and experience are better developed.
- Develop and update the business plan regularly e.g. every 3 to 5 years.
- There are no differences between men and women in fulfilling their jobs. Women can do as well as men.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

I am facing risks in recruiting well trained staff. My business is involved with people's lives so qualifications are essential. We have to be professional and skillful in the dentistry industry.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship and dynamic leadership.

The uniqueness of Cambodians is patience because they have gone through many wars and more difficult times than other citizens.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

The advice I would give to all youths is that they should be patient and try their best in doing their business. In order to make their business more successful, they have to spend more time in their business and put in more effort by reducing costs to allow for business expansion. They need to know how to master the habit of delaying gratification. [WIK](#)

Mrs. **Lim Solinn**

Country Director

Oxfam



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

My name is Solinn and I am happily married with a 3-year old son named Jyarann. I now work for Oxfam and we live in Cambodia. Like many women of my generation, I was born and raised during war-time, poverty, and a patriarchal society. Like them, I faced many challenges on a personal and professional level. I was raised by strong women in my family: my grandmother Seng Kim, my mother Thavy, and my aunts; women who survived because they were spared by the murderous Khmer Rouges to raise me, and my brother and sisters, the next generation of 'Angkar'. We were poor and we didn't have anything. My grandmother fed me, a newborn baby, with red-ants broth instead of milk. My mother and aunts had to work in the rice fields – a skill that they, as city dwellers, had learned to master during the three years they spent in a labour concentration camp in Kampot province. These self-determined women are my role models. They worked very hard for our survival and future.

I was educated in Cambodia, all the way to university level. When I was in school, I took on many internships; and I took my first paid jobs (two paid jobs and one volunteer job simultaneously) when I started university at 17, because I was really hungry for knowledge and wanted to earn my independence, at least financially. I had always been a hyperactive kid, in the sense that I would get really bored if I didn't work on several projects simultaneously. I wanted to

earn money so I could support my family and afford higher education.

Luckily, I was awarded scholarships to study overseas, and then I stayed on to work for international agencies around the world. I didn't have to come back to Cambodia since I had the job security that I always dreamt of; but for some very personal reasons, I decided to go back to my roots.

I had my own struggles growing up as a young woman, feeling the pressure to make choices that were acceptable to my family and society. I had to refuse proposals to marry at an early age, and I had to fight various forms of prejudice to be able to choose a marriage and a partner for life that I wanted. At times it was really tough; but looking back I have no regrets and I am glad I did what I did. But I am very fortunate. I have a progressive husband and dear friends and family who are very supportive, and they all push me to achieve my full potential. When I faced serious life struggles, they all stood behind me and told me to follow my convictions. Without them I would be a lost soul.

Even as a young educated woman coming from a dominant ethnic group, Khmer, I have had to negotiate for my space every day and everywhere, from community to workplace; so I cannot begin to imagine the daily struggle of a lesbian girl from a discriminated ethnic minority group who was born with disabilities. Gender, race and religion are not natural; societies construct them. This is why I keep reminding myself every day of my privileges, and I am very

grateful for where I am and what I have. More importantly, I want to do the best I can to contribute to improving the lives of underprivileged people, using my humble abilities. Maybe that's why I keep coming back to my roots, despite better career opportunities elsewhere.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I faced many challenges when I entered the job market. I was lacking experience. I was judged by my age and my looks, which made me feel so nervous and self-conscious. In the workplace, most of my colleagues were much older men. One day, after I shared my opinions in a meeting, instead of responding to the content of my comments, people chose to joke about the sound of my nervous voice and my appearance, as a way to casually dismiss my point of view. As a young woman, you have to learn to take the unfair blows. I felt as though I wasn't heard at all; ironically, if an older man had repeated my point of view, he would have been applauded for his creativity. I had to figure out constantly how to get myself heard. I tried to work very hard to overcome my lack of experience, sometimes at the expense of my health, to compensate for some of the daunting challenges I had to handle at a young age. Let me give you two examples.

At age 22, I took on a job as the executive director of an international conservation NGO in Cambodia. My predecessor and

mentor, who was an expat in her late 40s, was a very respectable and successful professional in the sector. The expectations were very high, and the NGO at that time had a unique role as it tried to negotiate sensitive policy issues with all influential stakeholders. Back then, public awareness and support was almost non-existent. Environmental preservation was not the government's priority and environmental violations were common. At first, as much as I wanted to, I didn't accept the job as I thought it was beyond my capacity. But when a few concerned colleagues told me that 'I was right not to accept the job because I was a young woman and that the job was too dangerous for me', I resolved to prove them wrong. I went back to my boss and the board of directors and told them that I was ready to take on the challenge, but that I needed their counsel. I took that job for four years and I grew the organization fivefold financially, before moving on to my next challenge.

Another example is a personal challenge. While I struggled to build my career, I had to make hard choices about whether to marry and have children, something Cambodian society pressures you to do. I knew from a young age that I wanted to be a mother, but I chose my career over marriage in my early twenties and gave myself all the time I needed to find Mr. Right and to one day be ready as a responsible mother. I decided not to let all the conservative and prejudicial noise affect my ability to pursue the life I wanted to lead, and I was lucky to have friends and family who stood by me all the way.

“ I had my own struggles growing up as a young woman, feeling the pressure to make choices that were acceptable to my family and society. I had to refuse proposals to marry at an early age, and I had to fight various forms of prejudice to be able to choose a marriage and a partner in life that I wanted.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

Listening to people attentively is the only way to truly understand people's underlying interests. Oftentimes, we all are bound by a lack of time and patience; thus, we don't really hear each other. Understanding who people are, where they came from and why they do what they do, helped me be more realistic in what I should seek from them and how to communicate my intent constructively. When I was younger, I was more result-oriented. As I told you, I was a somewhat hyperactive person, feeling that there was no time to waste, and because of this impatience I lost some people along the way. Now I am more process-oriented and I try to be as inclusive as I can be when listening to what people need and want. I want to listen to people with my heart, and try to capture their true essence without judgment and with compassion.

Compassion is an important way to connect to people genuinely and it helps me to truly understand what it's like to be in the other person's shoes. This allows me to think of alternative agreements that can move everyone forward from an impasse – even if it's just a tiny step.

When I was younger, I was afraid of being perceived as a weak woman for displaying my emotions. I felt like I had to defend myself all the time to be perceived as strong. I have come a long way since then. In Cambodia's social context, the boss has to be strong and you have to be on top of everything all the time. I recall that I was afraid of scrutiny and used to hide my vulnerability as I thought it was the best way to protect myself emotionally and hence professionally. How often I fought back my tears in front of colleagues. Too often, when I was in public spaces and overheard gender-biased comments that stepped on everything I stood for, I held back my emotions and forced a professional smile, because I was taught that it was the right way to handle myself. Allowing myself to be emotional would only invite more attacks on me personally, and more importantly on everything I represented.

But, that was wrong. I have now realised that being vulnerable and opening myself up to scrutiny is actually the best way to allow people and strangers to change their understanding at their own pace. I have had positive emotional breakdowns with colleagues and strangers in heated moments. To my surprise, those wonderful strangers showed me compassion and generously told me that I was being too hard on myself, saying that my honesty helped them better understand my passion and convictions. Since then I have allowed myself, every now and then, to be vulnerable, embrace scrutiny and stop being defensive. Being vulnerable allows others to connect to my genuine self.

Trust in organizational values and cultures that are above people and leaders is the key to collective success. I made mistakes by delaying some tough decisions when my gut feeling told me to go ahead. No one wants to make tough and unpopular calls, but delaying those difficult decisions eventually causes more damage. By being bold and tackling those difficulties head-on, as managers we have the upper

hand to minimize any negative impact. But of course, not everything is black or white, so I often had to guide my decision-making based on my core values and my responsibilities; and more importantly, I had to be ready to be held accountable for those decisions. I pride myself on being firm and fair in dealing with tough decisions. I don't mind people disagreeing with me at all as long as they know in their hearts that the decision was fair. I also do not shy away from taking full responsibility for my failures. My motto is that we all live and learn. But an important point here is that a good decision is a well-informed one. And often, a good decision is not one that will benefit you, but that will benefit the group and the values you serve.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core values are equality, justice, and integrity. One of the most important principles I value is equality; this goes back to my childhood, when I experienced unequal treatment because I was a girl, and poor, and I didn't have access to the right people or networks. Societies construct gender and class. I believe in universal rights and equality for all, irrespective of their socio-economic status, race, religious, political and gender backgrounds. I strive to promote a just space for everyone, wherever I am. This might sound idealistic, but idealism rhymes with pragmatism. With the work I do at Oxfam, we serve the underserved and underprivileged, and help them seek redress with those with more power and resources. This connects to my second core belief and the notion of justice, which has shaped the person I am today. Ever since I was young, I have strongly felt that every child should be able to enjoy all basic needs equally.

Above all, I believe it is important to model my behavior and lifestyle to these core values on a daily basis. As they say, you need to walk



Ministry of Mines and Energy and Oxfam discussed about the potential of mining in Cambodia, Blue Media. Photo: Oxfam

“ I was really hungry for knowledge and wanted to earn my independence, at least financially

the talk. I encourage colleagues and partners from all backgrounds, ages and races to be part of their own solutions. I remind myself and all of my colleagues and friends of our privileges and biases and seek to hear from others – those who don't believe, think or behave like “us”. We try every day together as a team to be inclusive.

The third value is integrity. I always preach the necessity of maintaining zero tolerance against any practices that undermine our individual and organizational integrity. It is equally important that I practice what I preach religiously. My team believes that if we don't

hold ourselves to the highest standard of integrity then we are defeating ourselves in the process, especially in our mission to fight the systemic challenges of poverty and injustice. We need to be honest with ourselves and admit that we are not yet where we want to be. We must not hide or cover up issues, hoping they will go away. We have to be prepared to deal with painful internal challenges if we are to succeed externally. We use external references to remind us of our core values and to be aware of our own weaknesses and strengths.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I think because of cultural and intellectual biases, there is a widespread misconception of what a leader is and what makes a good leader. Some people claim that only those who are highly educated are great leaders, and that because of their “pedigree” they will have all the answers. I find this so arrogant! I know many inspirational leaders who barely finished primary school, and who have devoted themselves fully to people and society without needing any higher education.

Also, what is misleading is that some think that leaders are like ‘parents’, and therefore followers or ‘children’ should not question them because they should be above all norms. This attitude is naïve and complacent.

I believe in collaborative leadership, where each individual offers their leadership and no one is above a nation's or an organization's agreed code of conduct. Leaders shouldn't pretend to have all the answers – and better yet, they should know how to bring together the best minds and hearts to find consensus and the solutions that are most sustainable.

But if you insist on me picking the most negative trait of all for a leader, I think it would have to be leaders who are not able to accept criticism, and who let their hubris and personal interests take priority over their duty.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

I am not sure that I am excelling in anything. To be honest, I don't consider myself a leader, but a catalyst who supports and enables those around me to achieve the best they can. I strongly believe in collaborative leadership. I strongly believe that everyone can lead and should lead from where they sit, irrespective of where they are within an organizational hierarchy. I continue to learn from everyone around me and to push myself to be more helpful to those around me -- be they our receptionists or drivers or managers. I try to create an equal and enabling space where leaders can enjoy their mission and achieve their best potential. I believe in supporting managers and leaders to devise their own solutions and realise their strengths, as well as be aware of their weaknesses. It gives me tremendous satisfaction to see people performing at their best.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

There are two things that come to mind now. After ten professional years in the environmental sector, I decided to go back to school, not knowing what would come next or whether I would find a job since my savings were limited and I had to continue to support my family. When I finished my second degree, I was offered a PhD scholarship and a junior job in a new sector at the same time. I decided to take the junior job for my own learning, and it turned out to be the right decision. It was the riskiest thing I did but it turned out alright in the end.

The other thing that happened was that at a time when I really enjoyed my job and was at the peak of my career, my husband had to relocate to another country. It was important for him. After much deliberation, I decided to choose my family and left my job and responsibilities. It was a tradeoff, but it was a moment in life I chose to prioritize family. As I told you, I started to work from a young age and I was always busy, so the prospect of leaving my high-flying job and looking for something else without any certainties was not pleasant. But I was happy with that choice.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

Cambodians value the wisdom of the elders who came before us. Cambodians, for better or worse, always think about whether everything we do today would mean greater preparation and more success for the next generation. I have seen the women who raised me and now I see this in myself as a mother. Cambodians are not laid back and are competitive. In this regard, the Cambodian culture that I know is proud of its own identity but selfless and hard working. With this, I am hopeful. I have always been a very optimistic person, and I believe in Cambodian youth in all spheres – be they entrepreneurs, civil servants or social workers. They will transform Cambodia and nothing can stop them. But for this to happen, my generation cannot be complacent. This generation owes it to the elders who came before us and who made

their sacrifice in sweat and blood to get to where we are today. Thus it is our duty to further pave the way for the next generation to excel in the leadership of our nation.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

You can learn and lead at the same time. If anyone tells you that they were born to lead and that their leadership journey was smooth and that they never make mistakes; trust me, they are ly-

ing. Believe in yourself and create your own leadership journey. Don't be overly upset with your own or others' mistakes and if you feel that you can't get to where you want immediately. Be generous with yourself (something I've started to do myself). Adjust your milestones as you go along your beautiful life and career journey and try to enjoy them as much as you can and give yourself encouragement to keep going. Your journey is not an easy one. You will doubt yourself and you may despair, but you must rise above those challenges and lift others up with you! As you go along this long-winding development and leadership journey, you may ex-

plore new things along the way and this could help you understand your real overarching goal in life and what it really means for you. And above all, don't lose sight of that overall goal. I hope your goal is one that will contribute to the betterment of the people around you, especially other women and girls. That is the only way, I believe, for all of us women to contribute to building a more equal and just society, especially for those who are less privileged. Compassion is key. Combined with your self-determination, you can do anything. I mean it, anything! [W/K](#)



Leaders representing marginalized workers from Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, Siem Reap province. Photo: Oxfam

H.E. Chou Bun Eng

Secretary of State

Ministry of Interior



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I was born in May 1956 in Battambang province of Cambodia. My mother was a teacher when she was young, but after she was married she became a housewife, while my father was a goldsmith and also a farmer. My mother had ten children to take care of and my family was not wealthy. Two of my siblings died at a young age. That made me the third of eight children in my family. My sisters and brother did not get a higher education. My sister dropped out of primary education at the request of our parents, because our mother's health deteriorated and no one else was able to take care of her while my father went to work away from home. My eldest brother also needed to give up his education after he graduated from lower secondary school. He became a soldier and died of illness in 1973, during the civil war. I was the only one in the family who was able to finish high school, which I did in 1974 at my homeland of Battambang, (my school was Battambang High School, formerly known as Preah Monivong High School). I continued studying at university in Phnom Penh, majoring in mathematics.

Unfortunately, because the war continued, I was not able to attend university and I decided to apply for a job at a Seng Thai Company. There, at the age of 19, I was given a senior leadership role as Chief of Warehouse and was in charge of four companies' warehouses, under name of "Tissage Mechanic Seng Thai", in Russey Keo district.

I like writing stories. During my high school, I wrote a couple of story books and sent them to the Department of Information in Phnom Penh. Those stories were been selected by Mr. Mao Bun Thorn, editor of the National Radio, to be broadcasts weekly, as part of a series called "Legend Tales". One of my story books recently attracted the attention of a movie company, that would like to purchase it to turn it into a film.

My bright time was over by the 17th of April, 1975. The regime of Pol Pot blocked my hope during my teenage years. I experienced working very hard, from place to place, time to time, not only in the community, but also at Pol Pot's prison in Phnom Baseth, which was known as Prison 32nd Region. Even then, I was assigned to be a leader of women prisoners, perhaps because I was found to be honest and have leadership capacity. I finally entered into an arranged marriage in 1978 during the Pol Pot regime.

In 1983, I applied for a position as a school teacher and I went back to study mathematics at Phnom Penh University for a year. I began my career as a mathematics teacher at Daun Penh High School, (formerly known as Sisovath High School) in 1994, taking the time in the meanwhile to complete my Bachelor's Degree at Royal Phnom Penh University. In 2010, I graduated with a Master's in Political Sci-

ence from Chamroeun University of Poly-Technique, and now I am an PhD candidate at Royal Academia.

After the first General Election in 1993, the Secretariat of Women's Affairs was established and needed technical staff to run departments. I was selected to be Vice Director of the Department of Information, and I left my career as school teacher and began working at the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) in 1994. In 1998 I was promoted to Inspector General.

In 1999, I was elected as member of the Commission for leading a Women's Association, called the Cambodian Women's Association for Peace and Development. Then I was selected to be Secretary General and I fulfilled the role of Executive Director from 1999 and ran this association, until 2005, when I was recalled to work for



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We women can be great leaders if we want to. So be courageous and let others know, hear and see your achievements

MOWA, as Director General, in charge of three departments: Women and Education, Women's Health, and Legal Assistance to Women.

At the 4th mandate of the elected Government, 2008-2013, I was appointed by the Royal Government to be a Secretary of State at the Ministry of the Interior and I have remained in this position until now, in the 6th mandate, 2018-2023.

In this regard, I would like to share my opinion that education and leadership with performance can promote us to take steps forward. As for myself, I was able to move from being simple teacher to be

a head of department, fulfilling a leadership role in both a government ministry and civil society at the same time. Finally, I was able to be promoted to be a Secretary of State, and several other roles, such as a Vice President of the Cambodian Women Association for Peace and Development (CWPD), a Vice Chairperson of the National Committee for Countering Trafficking in persons (NCCT), a Vice Chairperson of the Cambodia National Council for Women (CNCW) as well as Vice Chairperson of the National Committee for Promoting Social Ethic and Family's and Women's Values. It all required extensive effort and time.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

- The leaders and subordinates did not understand each other. Our team was not fully aware of what we are doing.
- Fast decision making, the need to be a role model and to mobilize others.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

I have my own life principles. I have to make my best efforts to overcome obstacles, and I prefer facing challenges and solving them. I have accepted that others have different ideas and I have learned to adapt to the situations I live in. In that way I am able to gain support and respect from others, in particular those I lead. I strongly believe that we must put trust in ourselves, ensuring that people around us realize that we can do our jobs. I was advised by my teachers that

everyone has an obligation to be a good citizen. Good citizens are fundamental to building a good society. When we have a good society, our country will be prosperous. We can lead the society forward, if we build a united society. We can challenge each other, but for a clear direction and a common goal.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

- Honesty with what you do and whom you work with.
- Be brave in doing what we think it is right, and that will not damage anyone.
- Persistence with assigned tasks.
- Art of negotiation and convincing skills.
- Responsibility and accountability.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

- Selfishness.
- Forcing others to respect you.
- Lack of responsibility.
- Lack of leadership manners.
- Looking down on others.
- Unfairness.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?



- Know who you are.
- Understand and accept reality.
- Be fair and equitable to all.
- Manage challenges by putting gender sensitive issues at the core of work.
- Build trust, confidence and encouragement.
- Hold to ethics and courtesy.
- Create a culture of unity and recognition of doing good for society.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

We always think that entrepreneurship is not our Cambodian background. If we talk about business or entrepreneurship, we always think of the Chinese. But we Cambodians have to build entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship can assist our people to be smarter in business, as well as unite them to assist each other in eliminating

poverty. We need leadership skills in order to promote ourselves in international trade, and to upgrade our country's economy to be better and better.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

Cambodia is a matriarchal society. However, it is not always women who hold the highest positions. Whether women or men get the power to lead, it is vital for them to promote women's values and human values. I always say that leaders must have a mother's heart. Women have to prepare themselves well and make sure they are ready to take up roles and leadership positions. They have to know the direction they should follow and and share it with their followers or subordinates.

All women can be good leaders and entrepreneurs if we want to be. Be courageous and let others know of and observe your good performances and achievements! [W K](#)

Mrs. Khieu Mealy

Partner

*SokSiphana & Associates
and a member of ZICO Law*



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I was born in a middle-class family who treasured education. I was the seventh child in a family of nine. My late parents believed in education and they were of the view that all their children, both daughters and sons, should receive a proper education. My mother felt particularly strongly about this especially since she herself did not get a chance to go to school due to conservative social traditions. Throughout her whole life she worked hard to make sure that all her kids got educated. We had the benefit of both formal education as well as a very rigorous traditional upbringing which taught us good soft skills. We were brought up to respect people for their good nature not because of their material wealth or their position in our society. As a fervent Buddhist family, my late parents taught us also to adhere to the four Buddhist principles of loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity. Their caring behavior toward the family, the neighbors and the community have left a deep impression in my life. I could say the same about my other brothers and sisters. We grew up in a very harmonious environment, even during the darkest period of time when the country was engulfed in war, genocide and starvation.

Aside from my parents, another great role model that has shaped my life is my husband, Dr. Sok Siphana. I am a lucky

woman to have married him, especially through a traditionally arranged marriage. He too values high education and hard work. He holds a Juris Doctor from the United States and a Ph.D in Law from Australia. He is currently finishing his thesis for another Ph.D. at the Université de Paris Panthéon-Assas in Paris, France. Since our marriage in 1993, he has encouraged me to pursue higher education. In his view learning should be a lifelong journey. I was very inspired and I did follow my dream of learning, despite being in the later stages of my life. Last year, I finally received a dual Master's Degree in International Law from the University of Libre Bruxelles and from the Royal University of Law and Economics. It took me two years of taking night classes to finish the program. I am blessed to have two kids both of whom are follow-



ing in our footsteps in terms of education and values. My daughter, Rosette, graduated from McGill University in communications last year and is pursuing her Juris Doctor at the University of Sydney. My son, Samithi, will graduate from high school this year. He is a prolific writer and at a very young age of twelve, he started publishing sci-fi novels. He had four novels published and sold. What touched me most was that he donated some money from the proceeds of his book sales to Kuntha Bopha children hospital. As a mother, I am very happy to see our children growing up with caring feelings toward the less fortunate.

Aside from raising a family, I have the personal experience of running a law firm, as a Partner. As a matter of fact, my husband and I started the law firm, Sok Siphana & Associates way back in 2009. Over the years, the law firm has grown to become one of the leading law firms in the country. Our law firm has been for the last seven years, part of ZICO Law, a network of law firms in all ten ASEAN countries. Last year, we opened our branch in Siem Reap province to cater to the needs of clients in hospitalities. Most of our staff are female and young. I've spent quite a bit of my time coaching and guiding them. I believe in staff empowerment and I like to motivate my female staff to believe in themselves. I groomed them and inspired them to work hard so that someday they can become partners. In the firm, we have different practice groups, such as corporate law, intellectual property rights, banking, etc. and I have coached many senior staff to lead the practice groups. In my view, all of us are leaders, no matter where we are standing or what we do. I grew up believing that a leader was someone who could do big things, but actually, after going through a lot in my life, as a wife, a mother, a student and a law partner, I realize that a leader is anyone who is in a position to influence another person. In this sense, every one of us is a leader and every little thing we could do could make a big impact on the lives of others. As a leader of a family we could influence our own kids to be good kids and good citizens. We could teach them good values, to help our communities, and at some point our nation. We have to teach them the value of giving back to the community.

In terms of personal achievements, I am proud to be recognized and respected as a partner of a prominent regional law firm. I was also recognized as a leading lawyer in Intellectual Property by AsiaLaw and I was awarded a Leadership Award by CMO Asia recently in Bangkok. In terms of national duty, I was very honored when I was proposed by The Honorable Madame Khuon Soudary, Second Vice President of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia to be her advisor. In the confines of my law office, my staff usually addresses me as "Ming", a Khmer language reference to "Aunty", a cultural reference of respect.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When I started out my career as a lawyer I was confronted with both external and internal challenges. One of the first external challenges was difficulties in accessing legal documents. For legislation and government decrees (Sub-Decrees), it was not the case as they are published in the Official Gazette but for ministerial regulations (Prakas) they were hard to find and required a lot of follow up with government ministries. Moreover, there were no translations in the English language. We had to translate them for our clients. Apart from laws and regulations, our court judgments were also not published. As a consequence, we had to do a lot of research and double checking before we could issue or provide legal opinions to our clients. Another challenge is the language barrier. English is not my mother tongue.

My internal challenge was my introverted nature. I was reluctant to reach out to people, especially to government officials. I was always stressed when I was asked to set appointments with them, even though I knew them. I admit that back then I was not good at dealing with other people, especially in areas of networking.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?



The valuable lessons I learned as a leader are to be mindful of my environment and to be proactive in dealing with issues. Constant communication with people with whom I work, particularly with clients, is important. In my firm, as the years go by, I've learned to accept the blame when I did something wrong, as much as I've learned to give credit to my colleagues and staff. I understood well that I could not do things alone and that I need a team to work with to achieve the objectives of the firm. I need to make sure that all of them are on the same page with me, in terms of vision and mission. I've learned to scrutinize detailed legal transactions; micromanage the budget as well as monitor the market trends. I've learned that continuing education for staff is very important, particularly for specific sectorial knowledge. Improving the soft skills of the staff is another task which I take seriously. When opportunities arise, I've never failed to send staff on overseas training or as secondees at our regional headquarters.

When dealing with staff, I am very conscious about the face saving aspect. I do not blame my staff in public but privately I tell them where they have not performed well. On the contrary, I always praise them in public. I empower them to make decisions and inspire them to take risks. Another lesson I've learned was how to treat the staff and colleagues fairly and to be ready to lend a helping hand when needed. As a leader I make it my business to know and to identify the issues and the problems in the firm and to seek solutions, sometimes on my own, and when I could not, to reach out to others. In the workplace, we've created an open, friendly working environment and staff are encouraged to support each other. I believe a lot in team building exercises and brainstorming staff retreats. By working directly with them, they have known me as a fair leader,

keen for their welfare and wellbeing. I strongly believe that a leader is someone who is not afraid to help their staff or colleagues to do a better job than you. Leadership is not about managing your staff. It is about guiding them, empowering them and giving them the space and the opportunity to do their job better.

The other important lesson is that I can't please everyone and I realized that I have failed many times also. I used to blame myself when I failed on something but I have learned to be zen. I did yoga and meditation regularly three to four times a week and it did help me to cope with these difficult moments. I've learned to accept the mistakes I make and to analyse what I did well or why I didn't do well. I've learned that success should not be a destination and that life should not be all be about winning or losing. The essential thing to do is to get up after I fall and I know that, as a human being, I will fall again and again in life. I need to learn from my mistakes. I've learned to understand the feelings of others and to observe. By now, I can feel or spot when my staff are not happy. Successful leadership is not about being very smart or very educated but about how to treat people with respect, and to inspire and give a helping hand to those in need.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

In our firm we have the following core values: lead; trust; connect; integrity; innovation / pioneer and care. When we recruit people, we are not focusing only on professional experiences or education but also on interpersonal character or behavior. We clearly divide be-

“ I believe no one can stop you from learning or thriving except yourself

tween mistake and choice. If they mistakenly did something wrong, we can accept it once but if they continue to make the same mistakes over and over, we do not tolerate unprofessional or negligent behavior. Our market is too small to lose our reputation. Integrity ranks highest in our core values.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Behaviors that could negatively impact leadership are arrogance, narrow mindedness, nepotism, favoritism, jealousy and the “know it all attitude”.

As a leader I believe that one should earn respect from colleagues and staff rather than demanding it of them. The main characteristics of a good leader are being a visionary, role model, and having a sense of humility and fairness. Fairness is important in a competitive work environment as the leader must learn to give equal opportunity for advancement to others.

I recall that when I was younger, I did apply for scholarships to study overseas two or three years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. At that time, we did not have a chance to select where we wanted to go or what we wanted to study. At that age, I thought that favoritism was acceptable and was good. So, I asked my older brother to help me to go to a good country like Germany. Instead, I was sent to study in Russia. I further asked him to get me into a good degree program, I ended up studying to be a sewing machine mechanic. Upon my return, I was sent to work at the international trade department of the Ministry of Commerce and there were two positions available: one was at the export and import office and the other one was at the commodities pricing research office. I had high expectations that my brother would help me to get the position at the import / export company because I could get more lucrative benefits, but unfortunately I was sent to the commodities pricing research office. I was upset because my brother did not want to lift his finger to help me. I pitied myself and it was hard to take. Later on, when the economy of the country started to open up, I decided to join the private sector. There, I challenged myself and I kept on learning. Occasionally, I look back and I must admit that I am thankful to my brother who did that to me. The lesson from my own experience taught me how to be strong and to value fair opportunity. Later on my brother mentioned, not directly to me, that had he lifted his fingers to help me get what I wanted, his act would be seen as family favoritism and it would affect the feelings of others.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

To excel as a leader, we should not stop learning because we live in a knowledge based society that requires constant creative thinking to deal with emerging technologies and change. Change here means change in the way of leading and change in the way of working. I believe no one can stop you from learning or thriving except yourself. Apart from that, we must be keen to improve our soft skills, whether they be communication skills or interpersonal relationship skills. A successful leader is someone who creates good relationships with the people around himself or herself. Of course, I recognize that we have to embrace technology but Artificial Intelligence can't replace the human instinct and interaction.

My tips for women in business are to know the market trends that affect their business and to join business networking events, either inside the country or outside. They should keep their eyes and ears open for new business opportunities and learn to differentiate from others. They should be proactive and be ready to seize opportunities when they arise. Furthermore, they should dare to move out of

their comfort zone and build more self-confidence. From my experiences, most Cambodian women lack confidence and are not assertive. They must change this mindset. They have to put trust in themselves first and build self-respect. They should overcome the fear of social judgments or criticism and take risks. As long as they believe their actions will not harm others, they should just do it.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

I took a risk by agreeing with my husband when he decided to return home from Switzerland, when at that time he had a good career and a well paid job working for the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. That was my biggest risk. When I got home, I had no job and I was afraid because I was a full time housewife for nearly four years in Geneva. I had two kids going to private international school. My husband did not want to work for anybody and so we decided to reactivate our law firm, Sok Siphana & Associates. We started in the confines of our own home with the two of us, and now we have about 38 people and have now moved out of our home to a nice building on the main boulevard of the city.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think can Cambodia thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

The role of women in the family is what makes the Cambodian culture unique. I could say that generally Cambodian women play a big role as natural leaders due to their traditional role in the family, but culturally often they just cannot and do not want to admit it. One good skill that women possess is the listening skill. Cambodian women have also a strong spirit of entrepreneurship. The tremendous growth that Cambodia has experienced in the last two decades is due to local entrepreneurship and the openness of the economy. Back in the early 2000s, when my husband was a Secretary of State with the Ministry of Commerce and he led the negotiation to get Cambodia to join the World Trade Organization, I was exposed to a lot of discussions on how open Cambodia is, economic policy wise and private sector wise. Now that we are in the ASEAN Economic Community, Cambodian entrepreneurs can have access to technology, markets, financial support, and technical expertise. Moreover, the young Cambodian population who is very dynamic can also compete with others in the region.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

My advice tips to young Cambodian female entrepreneurs is to know their self-worth; what are their strengths and what are their weakness. At the same time, they must do a self-evaluation on what areas they should build upon. As I have mentioned ear-

lier they should be on the lookout for new and better business opportunities and they should not be afraid to grab them. They should reach out to professionals for advice when they are facing challenges, whether for legal, financial or consulting advice. Professional advice is often not cheap but well worth it. They should embrace technology and automation. That is the future that they can't avoid. They should make a habit of loving education and continuing to learn. They should read one business book a month, if they can, or at least read the daily business news.

They should not be afraid to speak up if they believe they are right. I want to see all young Cambodian women be in a position to say "yes I can" locally, regionally and internationally. [WIK](#)



Mrs. Hun Boramey

Country Director

Action Aid



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

My name is Hun Boramey. I am currently the Country Director of ActionAid Cambodia. I was born in Battambang province. My parents moved to the capital, Phnom Penh, when I was three years old with the hope that I and my siblings would get some education. I have two sisters and four brothers. I am the second eldest, and married with one son. When I think about my education, I always think fondly of my time at Toul Kork Primary School where I happily enjoyed my early years of schooling before going on to Indradev High School for my secondary and high school education. I am a proud Institute of Foreign Languages graduate in 2001. In 2005, I completed my Master's Degree in International Affairs at Ohio University in the United States. In 2012, I was awarded an Executive Award under the Australian Government's Endeavor Award Programme to work with the Australian Human Rights Commission in Sydney for three months.

In 2016, I was appointed the Country Director of ActionAid Cambodia which rather took me by surprise. I had never envisaged taking on such a high and demanding role, and it has been quite a journey. Senior positions come with a lot of responsibility, but I was fortunate to have a strong team that is highly committed, dedicated, technically sound and passionate about the organization's vision, mission and goal. It was their confidence, trust and support in me that enabled me to undertake the role. One of the things I am proudest about is being able to contribute to supporting the struggles that community members, particularly women and children, face and see them overcome injustice bringing with it positive changes in their lives and that of their whole community. It is the people we work with and for that keeps my motivation alive. I also have to acknowledge and thank my family and in particular my mother who has continued to teach me, coach me and support me through all the good and tough times I have faced throughout my life.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I think I had to really prove that I am a leader who is mindful, selfless and compassionate. I am involved in so many decisions on a daily basis, and I always have to keep asking myself if those decisions were

the right ones. Did I do it the right way? Is it for the right purpose? Above all, did I use my power rightfully?

My other challenge has been the need for me to always make a conscious effort to speak up and prove myself and to show that it is possible to be a leader of an International Non Governmental Or-

ganisation (INGO) despite my gender, my age and also my ethnicity. It has been a constant challenge to be taken seriously.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

Love yourself. Self-love is not selfishness. If you cannot take care of yourself you cannot take care of others. Self-love is love for others. When you take good care of yourself, you become a healthy leader. A healthy leader creates a healthy team. A healthy team creates a healthy organization. A healthy organization will no doubt succeed in delivering its mission. This is easier said than done. I am learning every day.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Working with ActionAid, I hold deep in my heart the values and principles of the organization. Four of the values include humility, mutual respect, equity and justice and courage of conviction.

Humility should be present in our behavior and we should recognize that we are part of a wider alliance against poverty and social injustice. We should not claim credit on our own. Mutual respect requires us to recognize the innate worth of all people. Particularly, we are committed to serving people who live in poverty and exclusion, and we value diversity. Equity and justice require us to work to ensure equal opportunity for everyone, irrespective of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, HIV status, ethnicity, disability, location and religion. Courage of conviction requires us to clearly take sides, be creative and innovative without fear of failure – in pursuit of the greatest impact.

These values are embedded in our programme design, daily operations, our procedures and policies. With the rest of the senior management team members, we try to lead by example – to walk the



Female migrants are prone to sexual abuse in Cambodia. Photo: Supplied

“ The challenges built up my experience and confidence which led me to where I am today

talk. The decisions we make need to reflect these values both in personal and also in our professional lives.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I just read a great book. The author reminded me that ego is an enemy of good leadership. We acquire more power as we move higher up the ladder of an organization. So, if we do not constantly take a step back and reflect, our ego can get the better of us if we fail to learn from our mistakes that lead us to make decisions that are harmful to ourselves, our team and the organization as a whole.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing businesses and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

I am trying to take better care of my soul. Self-care is very important and something that I need to do more and better. Self-care is one of the core mental qualities that a leader needs to excel.

To promote the economic empowerment of women, the success indicators of it should not be just about how much women earn. It is not enough. It should also be the quality of life that a woman leads. In our experience working with women of different groups, we witness them taking the front line in claiming their rights, protecting their land and community's natural resources, but they badly need self-care and love. I am hoping that I can do much more to support the women we work with to adopt these mental qualities. BUT I have to start with myself!

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?



Women attend the launch of Charter to End Violence Against Women in Cambodia on Sunday in Phnom Penh. Photo: (Leng Len/The Cambodia Daily)

One of the risks was to choose to work in the development sector after I completed my Master's Degree. Instead of selecting another field, I consciously chose to be in this sector, working with poor and excluded people, because I believe in a human rights-based approach. It has turned out well, despite the fact that I have not been able to change the world as I had envisaged when I was a fresh graduate. I think I have gained so much knowledge, self-consciousness and self-awareness through this work. Even though I still have a lot to learn, I am grateful for who I have become thanks to the choice I made back then.

Another risk I took was back in 2011 when I decided to change gears in my career – from being someone who manages fundraising portfolios to managing and leading a programme department. I

was quite uncertain about the change. I had no confidence in myself and I was so cautious about how others saw me. Despite my lack of experience and lack of self-confidence, I took on the role and it turned out fine. As I look back, I think I made the right choice. The challenges built up my experience and confidence, which have led me to where I am today.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think can Cambodia thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

Cambodian entrepreneurs really strive to promote their national product and identity. I think this deep-in-the heart push has really been a factor that has made entrepreneurship thrive in this country.

They are not just looking to make a profit but also to produce things that would make the nation proud and address social issues at the same time. Some have even gone on to think about how they could contribute to addressing gender issues and place women empowerment at the heart of their businesses.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

The success of your business should not only be about how much profit you make but how the profit you make, big or small, contributes to a fair and just society for all, especially for women and children. [WIK](#)

H.E Tekreth Kamrang

Secretary of State

Ministry of Commerce



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I am married with 3 children. They are 14, 11 and 8 years of age. My husband is a doctor and a Health Administrator working in the private sector. In terms of education, I graduated from the University of Health Science in Phnom Penh in 1996. With the support from the US Fulbright Scholarship Program, I further pursued my studies at the University of Oklahoma School of Public Health in the United States and earned my Master's of Public Health in 2004.

Before that I also completed a one-year training program in Australia in 2000, with a Diploma in Human Resource Management. In addition, I've participated in many short course training programs in Leadership and Management, International Trade, Economics, and Finance among others. My most recent formal training was on Public Administration at the Royal School of Administration, Cambodia, in 2016.

Overall, I would say that all of my education and training programs have been very valuable to me, to allow me to excel in my career. I am very proud, that as a woman, I've been given opportunities to learn and apply my knowledge and skills to serve my country and contribute the best I can to the development of the nation..

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

My first and most significant challenge was how to turn my knowledge into real workplace practices. How to adapt myself from the ideal world of the school lab environment to the complexity of the day-to-day work environment was a big test for me. Sometimes I felt even finding a straightforward solution to a seemingly simple problem was so hard in the context of uncertainty. I think your first step is always harder than the next one, in the journey of life. Trying to address people's needs and meeting their expectations is always



challenging, but at the same time, they always teach me good lessons and make me more mature in dealing with people in different settings, and working more effectively.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

I think as a leader we need to have a strong will and a strong mind to lead people, to encourage your team to execute any policy or any tasks to achieve the common goal.

The second lesson for me is being fair. This quality in a leader will bring unity and create harmony in the workplace. People will look up to you and follow you as long as you can be trusted to make fair judgments.

Third, leaders need to have a big heart: respectful, caring, and thoughtful. Leaders also have to treat people with dignity, regardless of differences. Having compassion and understanding people's needs are very important for a leader to gain people's hearts. Working with people and making time and effort to reach out to them with empathy are the basis for trust and long-lasting relationships and mutual respect.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team/staff/family/customer is aligned with your values?

I could say being loyal, honest and having perseverance. I believe that being loyal to one's cause, one's commitment and one's obligation are great qualities. Being honest, to me, means to know oneself, to walk the talk, to be sincere about one's actions or reactions to all stimuli around us. One more important thing: to achieve anything

in life we need to persevere in whatever we do personally or professionally. Without strong commitment, discipline and hard work I do not think we could succeed in life.

To get people to align with our values is not an easy task, given that people have different backgrounds, views, and expectations. However, through constant communication people can learn something from you when they see you as their role model and see you being productive. That's the reason for us, as a leader, to lead by example; walk the talk, and only then can you earn people's respect and trust and help them to follow or align themselves with your shared values.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I believe that selfishness, lack of self-confidence and lack of courage are probably not helpful for any leader. I feel people would not like to follow a leader who always thinks about him/herself, who does not care about others, who is not clear about his or her vision or direction, and who does not have the courage to confront reality and accept responsibility.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

For me leadership is like an art, and skill, which can be learned, applied, improved and mastered over time. It is an ongoing learning process, which never ends. If we stand still, we'll surely not just lose what we've already gained, but we'll become out of date and obsolete in our fast-changing world! Therefore, constant learning and growing is important to ensure we are more productive, effective and efficient in every endeavor. I consider every setting a learning opportunity for me to excel personally and professionally.

Thanks to the RGC, under the leadership of Samdech Prime Minister, women have been given the opportunity to participate in every

“ Women need to equip themselves with knowledge and skills, to set goals, and to come forward courageously

level of socio-economic development in the public and the private sector. Many women have taken leadership positions in the government. I treasure this role and responsibility and use all my abilities to serve my country and my people.

For instance, as Cambodia is an export-led country, I think promoting trade and the diversity of our markets and product base is one of the most important components needed to maintain economic growth. We need to work together to make it happen. In addition, since women play an important role in economic development, we have to continue to encourage other women to actively participate in national development. We need to help them to build entrepreneurship and to strengthen their economic power through integrating gender equality and women's empowerment into national policy formulation and implementation. To support women, we need to understand the barriers for women's economic growth, by listening to what they need for support, by networking more with women groups, women entrepreneurs and by trying our best, in our capacity as women in a leadership role, to bring about more changes to women's lives.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

I think you have to take risks to change from one job to another or to move from one job to another. I always had mixed feelings and needed a lot of courage. It also happened when I took time off from my work to further my higher education overseas. I could say that it was a big challenge for me. I risked coming back and losing my post or facing uncertainty. Fortunately, it turned out well for me. I have learned that risk taking makes me wiser, stronger, and able to work more effectively.



Now, I've become more and more confident in what I'm doing in my job and I feel very thankful to the Leadership of RGC and to the Ministry of Commerce, who have shown trust in me and have given me new assignments and the opportunity to serve to my full potential.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think can Cambodia thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

I think Cambodian culture is welcoming, open, friendly, accepting and supportive of innovations, development and growth. In addition, Cambodia has now become an island of peace and a famous tourist destination. Under the leadership of Samdech Prime Minister, Cambodia has maintained its economic growth at around 7% over the last 20 years. In addition, the RGC considers the private sector an engine of growth and has put in place several strategies to support the private sector.

Those favorable conditions will allow entrepreneurship to prosper. New ideas or innovations could be tested, new products developed and adopted, new networks of distribution established; and eventually when the models are proven to work in the marketplace, expansion and growth will follow.

However, in order for all of that to happen, there is no doubt that the public and private sectors should work together, hand in hand. And businesses need to understand the market demands both domestically and internationally, and to have the ability to mobilize resources in order to respond to the market in the right way. That said, entrepreneurs and business leaders should have a clear vision, direction and strategies in place to guide their day-to-day activities towards success.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

In my opinion, Cambodian women are privileged to be in a culture which treasures women. Not like in the old days when not many women were encouraged to study and work away from their home. Women now have more freedom and more access to good education, professional employment and to our own world of creation. There are more opportunities for women in the younger generations to learn, excel and prosper than ever before. I think what young women or young female entrepreneurs need to do is to equip themselves with knowledge and skills, set their goals, and come forward and act courageously! We have to break the negative old-fashioned norms, which prevent us from being active and creative in social and economic development. We need to empower ourselves to be leaders! We're innovative, we're creative and we're strong and capable of doing things and pursuing our own dreams. Let's just do it and keep going until we succeed! [w|k](#)

Oknha **Keo Mom**

Founder & Owner

LYLY Food Industry



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I love eating and spending money - that's why I want to run businesses, so I can earn money.

I was born in 1975, and after I finished high-school at age 15, I started to help in my parents business. My mum was sick then, so this is why I had to take care of the family business. I was the third child among seven siblings. At the time, my sister got married and moved to Canada and my brother went to Thailand. So I was the one who had to take charge of the business.

I married in 1993 and gave birth to my son in 1994, and in 1996 my daughter was born. In 1997 my second son was born. After the birth of my first son, I went to work for a Singaporean business owner (importing crackers, cigarettes, soft drinks, and other groceries). I worked as an accountant initially, then as a stock controller before moving to become a salesperson. I found I had a natural ability when it came to sales.

At the time, I had an idea that I wanted to run a business for myself and I could produce crackers myself, save the transportation fees and provide jobs for my people, while providing for my children. So I decided to start producing my own crackers and began looking for investors but I was not successful at finding any. I also searched for machines for many years.

Before starting LyLy food company, I imported many products from neighboring countries, but the business was not good. I ran another business selling second-hand clothes but it failed too. However, in 2002, I started my business, Lyly, without really having any business knowledge. I sold my house for \$70,000 to buy machines and I faced many issues such as human resources and production, including food tasting. My business started growing when I created trust among the locals by encouraging retailers to sell local products like mine.



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Take calculated risk and take responsibility for what happens

In 2005, I received a great deal of support from the Ministry of Industry, and many NGOs such as JICA, APO, UNIDO, JODC. I finally gained confidence and was eager to learn as much as I could from other people.

I am now so proud as my company is now recognized by the Government and markets abroad.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

- General business knowledge
- Finances
- Experience of leadership
- Production methods
- How to access the the markets
- Trust from customers about local products

I handled the challenges by working closely with my team. I was constantly thinking and using my brain all the time. The important

point is to have more ideas and think ahead. I began to believe that there is nothing on Earth that I cannot do. I finally realized that I could succeed just as others have.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

- Understand people when I try to lead them
- Learn from the issues we face when the business is growing, and when the issues increase as well. When I face challenges, I can handle them by listening and finding the root causes.
- I used my knowledge that I gained from studies of how other countries manage businesses
- Understand the mindset of people and work with them in tackling any issues
- Have a good work/life balance. I was lucky as my parents and my parents-in-law helped to take care of my children.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team/staff/family/customer is aligned with your values?

- Be a reasonable person and have confidence in myself
- Long-term thinking / vision about the advantages or disadvantages of the directions we set
- Take calculated risks and take responsibility for what happens. I dared to sell my house to run my business while others thought that it is was not the right thing to do because I had no knowledge and experience in business.
- I have no remorse for what I decided to do. No one can change my decision making because I am accountable for what happens to me. I feel I am doing the right things. I do not use my money to gamble; I use my money to create more money.

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I have dared to
sell my house
to run my own
business



What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

- Uncertainty of direction
- Not delivering on promises with customers
- Being too aggressive and proud of their achievements
- Not respecting others' opinions
- Looking down on others when they become leaders
- Looking down on the tasks and carelessly treating the jobs

Being a good leader means we respect people, not make them scared.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

- Give people respect
- Be patient
- Maintain your core values
- Be confident and believe in yourself
- Ensure that your ethics are maintained and that your actions will not negatively impact others
- Help yourself then others will help you
- Do not care too much about what others say, be strong and confident in your decisions.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

- Risked everything by selling my house
- Trying to sell products in while in debt

- A few fires happened in my former factory in 2008 but I managed the situation by asking people to help. Never be afraid to ask for help. As a woman, I was strong enough to control my panic and manage the incidents, and thankfully no one was injured.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership.

- Culture of sharing business experiences. It can help the new business owners to handle the business challenges. It contributes to economic growth
- Support from Government to handle the issues faced by SMEs such as tax incentives, GPSF-Government Private Sector forums where SMEs can raise issues and ask the government for help. These meetings take place twice per year
- We are born from the wonderland of our ancestors who built

Angkor Wat. We have to be proud and do things more like our ancestors

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

- Be strong and believe in yourself
- Give value to your own self-worth
- Do not care too much about what others think. If you think it is a good idea, do it!
- Take the initiative to sort out issues. If you cannot do it today, try to do it tomorrow and never give up
- Manage stress
- Manage each situation as it arises. It is okay to fail. Just pick yourself up, learn from it and keep going [WIK](#)

Mrs. **Suy Channe**

Managing Director

InSTEDD iLab Southeast Asia



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I was born in Kampong Cham province and grew up and lived in Phnom Penh. In 2003, I received a scholarship from the Indian government to do my Master's degree in computer applications in Bangalore. I am now married and have a three-year-old son.

For the last ten years I have been with InSTEDD. My current role is managing Director of iLab Southeast Asia. I remember I was the only woman in the Cambodia team when I first joined. Now, we have seven women on the team. I feel privileged to work with a diverse team at InSTEDD globally. We are an unconventional technology, non-profit organization, flat in terms of hierarchy with a culture of openness for new and inventive ideas from anyone on the team. I must admit that I have learned and grown a lot in these years at InSTEDD.

I feel grateful for these years' opportunities to work with such an amazing team, as well as visionary people and change makers from international agencies, governments, NGOs and frontline workers. I feel very proud of our achievements in helping to strengthen the public health system, the bottom up approach of incubation solutions driven by frontline workers, as well as our new avenue to help strengthen the public education system with coding classes and technological capacity building.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

The biggest challenge for me was when I returned from my studies abroad. For a year I worked for a tech company, but I was not feeling satisfied, as there was something missing, a value connection. It took me a year to be clear about the kind of work I wanted to do, the kind of work with values that I cherish. I found that self-discovery was the biggest challenge right when I started my career.



Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

Over the years I have learned that if a good leader builds a great team and culture, success will follow. It is about empowering the team, giving opportunities for the team to grow and take responsibility, at the same time standing by our values and making tough decisions.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Trust is the core value of my life in work as well as in relationships. In the aspect of work, I communicate to my team to let them know that I have trust in them and if there is any doubt, I would pull them aside and talk to them about my doubt or concern. We cannot work together if there is no trust.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Probably the "police and thief" behaviour in an organization. If the leader does not have trust in the team and focuses on creating rules and finding fault, the team will not give their best or utilize their full potential for the organization.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

Leadership is not a degree certificate, it is proven by the quality of the team you lead and the success that results. Every day, I am learning to be better at getting the best out of my team, and I hope I can contribute by helping each member to be a future leader.

We currently have more women in the team than men which is a different concern to have in our unequal world. Going forward we want to balance the numbers (future recruitment perhaps giving more priority to men) so that we can have balanced gender input into our work in order to impact society equally.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

A few years ago, I raised a new idea to my HQ management to adopt the startup incubator concept to explore new potential and incubate social impact solutions with frontline implementers. I was not able to secure the buy-in of my HQ but luckily they did not stop me either from fundraising to try it out. In the end, one of our existing funders agreed to support it as they believed in our past work with them. I was very happy that we got funding to work on that idea but I did have butterflies in my stomach at the same time. What if the result did not turn out well? The trust that my HQ and the funder had placed in me would fade. Somehow the result turned out well, and the funder even agreed to fund another round of the program and in the end my HQ was happy and supported our program.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership.

Cambodian people are hard working. With our dark history and limited public services, people tend to have lower expectations for external support and need to rely mostly on themselves. If you ask Cambodians what they wish to achieve in their life, a very common answer is to own a business. Cambodian people have a strong entrepreneurial spirit. People are eager for the opportunity to start a new business and be their own boss. I am very optimistic that Cambodians have a good entrepreneurial trait that will thrive in this age.

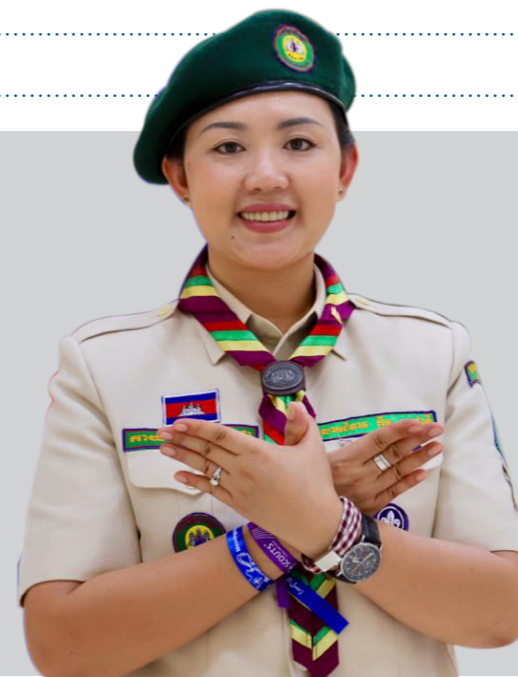
What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

For young Cambodian female entrepreneurs, especially those who have just graduated from university, I would advise them to spend at least a year working for a successful business that they admire. You may have a great idea but you need experience in order to understand the dynamics of how business works. Operating a business is going much beyond having a great idea. [WIK](#)

H.E. Kim Sethany

Secretary of State

Ministry of Education



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I would like to share a brief description of my life in four parts: family, education, marriage and career.

Firstly is my family life. My parents have two daughters, and I am the eldest sister. I was born on 12th January, 1979 in Kratie province, where my father was a former Director of the information department and my mother was a former Chief of Cabinet of the provincial city hall. My mother is currently serving as a National Assembly member representative of the Kratie province constituency.

Secondly is my educational life. I graduated and received my high school diploma in Kratie in 1995 with the best ranking scores of all Kratie province's candidates. In 2000, I received my Bachelor's degree in Public Law at the Royal University of Law and Economics in Phnom Penh. In 2002, I graduated from the Royal School of Administration (RSA). In 2010, I obtained a Master's degree in Public Administration and Policy from Western University. In 2014, I achieved a Certificate of Leadership, Governance and Public Policy for senior officials at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. I participated in the Reform Communication in World Bank-Annenberg Summer Institute at the University of Southern California, in 2015. In 2016, I attended a 100-hour training course on "Women in Leadership" at the Royal School of Administration and a training course on Governance at Harvard's Kennedy School.

Thirdly is my marriage. In 2003, I married Mr. Nouth Pouth Dara, who is currently the Governor of Dangkor District in Phnom Penh; We have three daughters born in 2004, 2007 and 2009.

For my career, I was raised in a civil servant family. I always dreamed of becoming a good and full-time civil servant since I was in high school. My dream was a driving force for me to go to college after graduating from high school. With great support from my family and my personal commitment, I was accepted by three universities: Faculty of Law and Economics, the National Faculty of Man-

agement, and the Royal University of Phnom Penh in Khmer Literature in 1995. With my dream of becoming a civil servant, I decided to study only Public Law at the Royal University of Law and Economics. Public law is the basic requirement for becoming a good public official, and many opportunities were provided for RSA's students. By defining a clear career goal and putting a strong commitment to my learning, at that time, I faced criticism from neighbors. They felt that young women should not live alone in Phnom Penh, far from the family, facing inconvenience and inability. It was felt that a woman doesn't need higher education, because later in their life they would become a mother and stay at home to take care of the kids and the family.



In 2000, after obtaining a bachelor's degree in law, I passed as a high-ranking public administration officer student in the Royal School of Administration, which was a huge pride for both me and my family. I was also accepted to three other major universities. There were thousands of candidates with higher degrees and greater experiences, yet only 30 were selected, and only two of them were women. I had already made it half-way through my journey of becoming a real senior civil servant.

After graduating from the Royal School of Administration at the end of 2002, I started to work in the Phnom Penh Municipality as a senior public official, but I did not have the opportunity to take up the position as a Director yet.

On the first day of work at the municipal, I asked the staff there, "Which is the room of Her Excellency Deputy Governor of Phnom Penh?" Before returning home, I looked up to her room with confidence and committed to myself that someday in the future I would have the opportunity to sit there and become a woman with the largest role in the Phnom Penh municipal.

Through the commitment of achieving this dream, I worked for eleven years with the Phnom Penh Municipality. I worked so hard, I had little-to-no holidays and faced many struggles to receive the best results from my work. I was working in the area of Decentralization and Deconcentration and was promoted to Deputy Director of the Local Administration Unit for seven years, and in the areas of the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Unit for three years as Director, the youngest and only woman Director of the Phnom Penh Municipality.

My biggest challenges included satisfying the high responsibilities (of work) as well as being occupied with the roles of a housewife, a mother of three daughters, combined with the need to spend time studying for my MBA degree. All while experiencing pregnancy and giving birth again and again.

This caused me to have some problems with my husband. We would argue because I was always busy, rarely home, and because we had different perspectives on my work life balance.

At that time because of the pressure from work, study and family, I almost decided to give up my work. But after many family discussions I found a way to improve the balance between my life and work, and my husband understood how important both were to me and was able to provide more support to me when I faced these challenges. In 2012, her HE Deputy Governor of Phnom Penh retired. As a result of my solid work performance it was proposed that I could be a suitable candidate for this position. This was the attainment of the dream position for me. Unfortunately, according to the Municipal and Provincial Organization law, a member of the Governors' board is required to be at least 35 years old. At the time, I was seven months away from being that age. This caused me to miss out on a great

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The principles
of success can
never be side
stepped
regardless of
your gender



opportunity, even so my passion was still there, and my determination never faded. Instead, this became a motivation that fueled me to work even harder and take more responsibility. Hence, when another opportunity came along in 2013, I was ready for it. In 2013, I was officially nominated to be Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, one of the top and most desired positions in national politics, a position I could never imagine for myself.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I worked as Secretary of State at the Ministry of Education in 2013 in the 5th Government mandate. In 2018, I was also appointed as Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for the 6th Government mandate. There were several major challenges during my career. My first challenge was the transformation from the Sub-National administration to the politicians in the field of relevant national education and educational activities. I never dared to dream I would have this opportunity, rank or role. The second challenge was the skeptical ideas of others in my ability to work as a young leader in field of education. Furthermore, in the 5th Government mandate, the Ministry of Education introduced and implemented deeper educational reforms requiring a higher degree of leadership to ensure the reforms were successful and effective. I was new to this job, which required hard work, commitment and obtaining new knowledge. Therefore, I slept for only three to four hours per day, especially during the first year. I forced myself to read countless pages of documents daily, even though it is not one

“ To succeed, you must be willing to fail

of my preferred hobbies. I read for 5-10 hours just to be able to lead a technical meeting effectively that lasted for only an hour or two.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

In our government today we need leadership more than ever before. And especially, we need leadership to take us into the future. We need people who have vision and courage, people with the ability to charge new seas and break new grounds. We need two types of leaders;

The first type is the most important or 'foundational': the transactional leader, which is the person who gets things done by collaborating with others.

The second type of leader is the transformational leader, the person who is the 'path-maker'. This leader is the visionary, who motivates, uplifts, inspires and empowers people to perform at levels far beyond anything they have ever done before.

What I have found is that leaders are made, not born. Nobody comes into the world as a natural leader. Leadership is the ability to get followers (not the ones on social media). Today, the type of leadership that comes from position, money or authority is short-lived. The only kind of leadership that is lasting is where people decide that they are going to follow the direction, the guidance, and vision of someone else. In other words, it is the voluntary form of following that makes our best leaders today.

If you want to be a leader or a better one, remember that it's all up to you. It's in your hands or even more importantly, in your mind. You are what you think. Your self-image determines your performance. You can become a much more effective leader by changing your self-perception, the way you think about yourself as a leader.

As a leader, the most important quality you can have for yourself is to be the best you can be, and that same principle must apply to your business or your organization. You will accept nothing less for yourself or your company than to be the best at what you do.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

A good leader needs to have a clear vision and determination of the values of his/her mission for the institution, There must be common values for everyone. For instance, the visions and goals of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport are:

1. to support the cause of reform launched to improve human resources,
2. to support socio-economic development for the future generation of young people and the prosperity of the nation.

All educational staff are proud of the part they play in achieving the goals of the educational reform with the great support from students, parents, and the public.

According to my work experience, there are some ways to recognize people's contributions to their work place, such as:

- Encourage and support all staff in the institution for their hard work and quality of their work to achieve the institution goals,
- Allow them to share ideas and to take part in implementation.
- Continue to give incentives, through rewarding and fulfilling roles to all staff in the institution, make them more committed and understand their value to the organization.

- Paying close attention to every voice in the workplace is one of the most important points of being a good leader. People will give up their determination to work toward the institution's goal

if they do not clearly understand it. They don't consider themselves to be an important key person in an institution if they only receive orders without any opportunities to provide input and receive feedback for their work.

- It is also important to be friends with your colleagues. I personally have found it to be much easier while working with them. I have developed tight bonds and very special relationships that I feel could last a lifetime. We've understood and put our trust in one another. As a leader, I know what is suitable for them, and as my subordinate, they know what I want. By doing this, we've developed an amazing team spirit.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Leaders need to have initiative, practice entrepreneurship, problem-solving skills, and practical assignments. Initiatives or innovations mean carrying out new things without waiting for these to happen independently.

Active leaders today are thinking about the future, thinking of what's new, implementing it, and constantly improving what's wrong. Failing to make clear decisions, immediate responses, and instead making time-consuming analysis are not keys to success. Therefore, it is necessary to begin to apply these step-by-step towards the defined goals. "Do not hesitate and spend months and years on the analysis, do something, move forward". Most people fail because they do not act to reach their set target. This is one of the greatest mistakes of leadership.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

For leadership in business and women's promotion, I will put my efforts on self-development to greater satisfy the requirements of this position. In addition, I will continue to learn great lessons from successful people to help improve the quality and effectiveness of my leadership skills.

As a woman leader, I will provide opportunities to support and encourage other females to strengthen their leadership skills and to develop capacities and roles in decision-making in educational management at all levels from schools, offices, Department of Education and the Youth and Sport and National Structure.

Furthermore, I will promote the implementation of policies on gender equality in education as a key factor in giving women the opportunity to develop their skills, enabling them to have the courage to take on economic, social and political authority. I will participate more in relevant forums and women in leadership and entrepreneurship to share lessons learned from successful women in business and in politics for all girls and women in Cambodia.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Challenge 1: Finding the balance between Family and Work

My solutions to this challenge are as follows:

- Set priorities between responsibilities which can be changed according to the circumstances. Remember that family always comes first. Don't be afraid to utilize your working time sometimes to take care of loved ones, spend time with them, comfort them to make them feel loved, and fulfill their basic needs.

- Find some time in your work time to connect with family time. Try to find ways to involve your family with what you do. Bring them to work events to let them better understand and support you. It can be a great learning experience for them as well. For me, I like to take my kids to sports events and educational fairs. Whilst there, they have fun and experience new things, and we also get to spend quality time together.

- No matter how hard, how tiring it gets, how busy your schedule becomes or when any obstacles come your way, you must face these problems head-on, as there are no shortcuts to achieving this balance. You have to solve them step-by-step, remain true to what is important, and you will soon get the hang of things. Even though family and work might become unbalanced at times, as these things are inevitable, don't be discouraged and always give it your best.

Challenge 2: The lack of time and resources in the workplace, the limit of team spirit and common interests.

My solutions to this challenge are as follows:

- Take full advantage of available resources. Make sure you know what you have at hand and use it to the best of your ability. Find the most effective and efficient ways to use all available resources.

- Try to manage your time by setting monthly, weekly, and daily activities to help achieve the defined goals. Do whatever you can today, without waiting for tomorrow. Balance between time and resources (including people and money) both of which will have a great influence on your goals.

- Set up good goals and remember, a clear sense unifies everyone in a common cause. Resolve any conflicts of interest between individuals in institutions which could impact the institution's goal. Continue to cultivate the spirit of solidarity and the benefit of the larger institutions, regardless of their own interests, especially to be exemplary in sacrificial self-directed leadership, regardless of difficulties and personal benefits.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership.

Driven by garment exports and tourism, Cambodia has sustained an average growth rate of 7.7% between 1995-2017, the sixth fastest-growing economy in the world. As global demand peaks in 2018, economic growth is expected to reach 7%, compared to 6.9% in 2017. This growth impact of increased fe-

as the best country for women entrepreneurs in Asia.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

To be a successful young female Cambodian entrepreneur, I would recommend:

1. Believe in yourself!

The fundamental key to success in business is self-belief and women are naturally known for underestimating their own abilities. To succeed in business, you must believe in yourself. This is very important because no one will believe in you and your products or services if you don't first believe in them yourself. No investor will invest in you if you lack self-confidence and your employees will not perform at their peak capacity because you lack the spirit to inspire them.

In fact, without self-belief, no amount of effort in your business will yield positive results. So, boost your self-belief today; develop the belief that you have something valuable inside of you that the world wants, and it will be so.

2. Have a strong mission

Why do you want to start a business? This question may sound casual, but it is a silent factor that determines whether you will succeed or fail as an entrepreneur. Take a look at the world's most successful women entrepreneurs and you will see that they all have a strong reason for going into business and that reason became their business mission.

3. Prepare your mindset

Success in business is highly dependent on the mindset on which that business was started. To become a successful entrepreneur in general, you must put your mind in the right place. For all the women entrepreneurs out there, you must never look at yourself as being the 'weaker sex'. You must have the mindset to deal with whatever inconveniences come your way. Success will never be handed to you just because you are a woman, nor can it be taken away from you because you are a woman. You must be strong minded even if it means putting yourself on the line.

4. Be willing to fail

The principles of success can never be side-stepped regardless of your gender. This means that to become a success, you must be willing to fail. Business is a risk, but its reward is worth it. I have observed that the most successful business women are women who acted without giving a care if they fail. So, if you are going to be among the few women who make things happen; then you must be willing to accept failure as part of the journey to success.

male entrepreneurial participation is significant and holds the potential to continue to be a major driver of economic growth. Furthermore, I am very proud to say that Cambodia has very enthusiastic female entrepreneurs. Cambodian women represent 51% of the country's population and are a potentially powerful source of growth. Based on this, the government has worked hard to support them. With the efforts to support business leadership through training, providing access to credit, creating networking opportunities and connecting Cambodia's female entrepreneurs to local and international companies and professional networks, it can empower them and encourage them to move forward. These connections can help Cambodia's businesswomen break down barriers, lead to world-class training opportunities, and pass along best practices. With continued support from all stakeholders, Cambodia could market itself

Failure isn't a bad thing either, and should never be looked at in a negative light. Instead, try to take note of what lead to it, and keep these things in mind as areas you need to avoid while re-building your way to success. It is never too late to try again. The more you learn, the easier it will be to pick yourself up, and the faster your journey will get before you arrive at success.

5. Increase your business skills

Some entrepreneurs were born great; others made themselves great through hard work. If a business empire wasn't handed over to you by your family then you have to make your own way to attain it. You will need to develop the required entrepreneurial skills. What do you do in your spare time?

The answer to this question will determine if you will succeed or not. Instead of watching a movie or shopping in your spare time, why don't you attend a seminar or read a business book? You will never know the situation you will find yourself in tomorrow and the knowledge you acquired in your spare time may turn out to be a life saver.

6. Understand your business to the core

How well do you understand your business? Are you running a business you are passionate about? Or did you jumped into an industry for the money? Regardless of the type of business you are engaged in; make sure you understand the ins and outs of it. And yes, you do pick up a lot of knowledge from running a business along the way, however, before hopping on this train you must at least educate yourself on the basics of what you want to achieve.. If you already understand the basics, then ask yourself again, do you understand your business to the core? If you don't then always remember that there is no limit to knowledge and there is always room for improvement. Of course, no one can know every single detail, but try to learn as many things as you can. Once you've trained your brain, solutions to problems will comes easier as you get used to figuring things out while trying to understand your business.

7. Manage your time effectively

One of the major business challenges women entrepreneurs face is time constraint. Business women are usually strapped for time because of the multiple responsibilities they face. Women entrepreneurs must attend to their business needs while still raising a family and taking care of their personal needs. Certainly, it is much more challenging than one may think. If you are ever going to overcome this challenge and become a successful business woman, then you must master the act of delegation. Learn to give out tasks to other people, the ones that are not too big of a deal, this will give you time to focus on the ones that are.

8. Take care of your customers

I believe women take care of their customers better than their male counterparts. Remember that your customers are the reason you are in business. No woman ever became successful in business without the loyalty of her customers. So never look down on these important stakeholders as they significantly determine the direction of the business.

9. Stick to the process

Statistics show that 90% of all businesses started to fail in their first ten years. The reason is because not all who start a business have the guts to stick to the process. The entrepreneurial process of building a successful business is challenging; you will have to bounce from one problem to another without losing your enthusiasm. If you can do this, then you will end up a successful business woman. Last but not least, I want to let it sink in that building a successful business or becoming a successful business woman is not an overnight venture; it's a perpetual process that requires countless dedication. If you can persevere and solve business problems as they arise, slowly but surely, you will arrive at your desired destination. [W K](#)

Mrs. Chhay Sivlin

President

Cambodia Association of Travel Agents



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

- I am Chhay Sivlin, and was born in November of 1972 in Siem Reap province. I am the youngest of five children to a Cambodian mother and a Chinese father. I hold a Bachelor of Management degree, and I am currently married with three beautiful children. My experience as a President to the Cambodia Association of Travel Agents (CATA) and Vice President to the Federation of ASEAN Travel Association (FATA) has been quite a fulfilling journey in terms of receiving the opportunity to meet many friends from all around the world and sharing ideas and experiences revolving around tourism development.

- The achievements that I am most proud of include being an influential women's role model in leadership and making changes to the development and advancement of our country's tourism industry. Not to mention, having the honor to showcase Cambodia's treasures to an international audience on many levels is beyond what my younger self could have imagined. Last but not least, Cambodia finally has a voice in ASEAN-level meetings and I am beyond proud to have the opportunity to be the speaker on behalf of Cambodia amongst FATA members.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

At the start of my career in the tourism industry, I faced stereotypes against women in leadership roles. Despite my prior years of experience in running my own travel agency, my ability to lead CATA was somewhat undermined. I had to earn my acknowledgement the hard way by putting more effort into proving my legitimacy in maintaining the role of leadership.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

Valuable lessons that I have learned as a leader include:

- Being decisive is a very important aspect of being a leader, because my organization would suffer if I could not make decisions quickly enough.
- As a leader, being inspirational is crucial because getting things done does not take one person, it takes me and my whole team; therefore inspiring them to have the same goal is critical.
- Having empathy is crucial to leaders because we are constantly



dealing with people, management and communication. When we are able to see things as the other person does, we tend to be able to come up with a solution that the other person is invested in.

- Being able to control my emotions has a huge impact on my judgment. As a leader, it is also my responsibility to manage my emotions mindfully, otherwise my decisions could be biased and unjust.
- I have learned that no matter how successful or how much experience one has, humans should never stop learning and seeking advice. The world evolves every single day, therefore there are always new things to be learned.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core values are to incorporate ethics, compassion and integrity in every decision that I make. I strongly believe that as a leader, if I want my team or followers to truly accept and exercise the same core values, the leader has to do it first and set an example for them.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Based on my experience, leaders who exercise power with arrogance usually have followers that have the same traits. Also, leaders who are not open to changes and new ideas tend to not accept anyone else's opinions but their own, and this could gravely affect the whole organization / establishment.

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I consider every setting a learning opportunity for me to excel personally and professionally

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

I am glad to share my leadership tips including:

- Maintaining dignity and integrity by being an honest and ethical businessman/woman
 - Learning to accept and overcome new challenges and ideas in society
 - Treating my employees fairly and with respect, as well as urging them to share opinions during meetings as it is critical for the business to have all team members actively involved
- Promoting women's economic empowerment by:
- Attending workshops and seminars enhancing female empowerment
 - Organizing workshop raising gender equality topics to the participants
 - Being brave when the opportunity to voice your ideas arises
 - Continue to empower women by encouraging them to leave their doubts and pursue their passion

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

When I first started my career in the tourism industry, I had to be the one to explore new destinations abroad in order to bring back new

products for my clients, and being a woman traveling to different, then-unexplored countries alone was somehow a risky experience. Fortunately, every trip was a beautiful memory filled with amazing people I met along the way. Additionally, my business journey has not always been a success story as the first few businesses of mine did not work out very well and I had to start from ground zero again. It was not a bad thing, however, because those failures taught me valuable lessons as well as prepared me for the next big challenges.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship and dynamic leadership.

Cambodian culture is unique due to our proudly strong history, which stretches back to the mighty Angkor Empire era. Apsara Dance, Traditional Arts and Swathe of Artisanal Crafts are parts of what makes Cambodian culture unique and they distinguish us from our neighboring countries' cultures. Cambodian people are naturally resilient, compassionate and hard working. Therefore we will continue to thrive in this age of entrepreneurship and dynamic leadership. Especially the younger generation, which is getting more education, and striving to create its own footprint in society.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

My advice for the young generation of female entrepreneurs:

- Never ever undermine your own abilities in making changes
- Step out of your comfort zone and pursue that career you have been dreaming about
- Disregard all discrimination and stereotypes against women, we are a member of this society and we deserve to be treated with the same mutual respect our male counterparts are getting
- Celebrate your success, but never lose your compassion as a human being.
- Be strong-willed, but never be stubborn. Be gentle, but never be weak. Be disciplined, but never be merciless.
- Be confident, be strong, and most importantly, be happy! **W K**

Mrs. Noun Phymean

Founder and Executive Director

People Improvement Organization



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I was four years old when the Khmer Rouge seized power in Cambodia. For four years we were living in the dark with very little food and no access to school. My family and I worked hard in the camps and miraculously all of us survived the regime. After the fall of Khmer Rouge I was finally able to start school. My mother taught me that education was the key to my future and I studied hard to get good grades and was always aiming for the top.

When I was 15, my mother died of cancer. My sister had left her two-year-old daughter with my mother so the child became my responsibility. Everyday from there on I had to work very hard to take care of my niece while also putting myself through school. After several years I was recruited to join the United Nations and my life was turned around. My hard work paid off. I became a Finance Manager. Still I wanted to keep learning and continue my education. Later on I was able to get a full scholarship to go to a university in the USA. I now have my family who consists of my husband Steve and my two children Angie and Alex.

My experience as a leader was both challenging and rewarding. My biggest accomplishment is that I opened my school, "People Improvement Organization", to help over 1500 of the poorest children in Cambodia have a better future.

In recognition of my contribution to children's welfare, I was bestowed the prestigious CNN award in 2008, and in 2015 I received the World Children Prize Award from the Queen of Sweden.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

My most significant challenges were financing. When I started my organizations, I left my day job as a finance manager for the UN and put all my funds into creating a school for impoverished children. At that time, I was the breadwinner of my family and when I decided to pursue my dream of opening the school it put a strain on our family's finances. However, I continued working towards what I believed in and I have achieved it.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

I have learned that perseverance and passion are the keys to success. I think that while working with my team, letting my team members voice their thoughts and have creative freedom allows us to have a good team dynamic. It is also imperative to understand that as a leader it is okay to make mistakes and keep moving forward as long as I trust that I made the best possible decision. My belief is that when setting a goal, I must meet it. After all, actions do speak louder than words.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core values are honesty, integrity, respect (to yourself and to others), fairness, always learning and improving, and to work hard. To ensure that my team aligns with my core values, I showcase my values through my actions. I believe that in order for my team to follow my core values they need their team leader to show them how and this way I would be able to in-grain this into my whole organization.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Having a closed mind will not only negatively impact your team, it also impacts yourself, and it does not allow you to grow. In every leadership position it good to keep an open mind to ideas and solutions. Another behavior

leaders should avoid is micro-managing; dictating every single action your employees take will put stress both on you and the employees. Instead, you need to be clear on what the goals are and make sure to get relevant updates on the milestones.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

Since the love of learning is one of my character strengths, I constantly seek ways to gain knowledge and continue to excel as a leader. Positive relationships are a key part of this. I have a large international network and have many trusted people around the globe to whom I can turn for advice. I always do everything I can to help people without expecting anything in return and I think that people can sense that and are willing to support me because they know I am being honest and genuine.

If I would give advice to young women who are looking to excel as leaders I would say that they should learn from others with more ex-

perience but always be aware that people will give advice based on their own values. I want to encourage young women to be true to themselves and follow their own path.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

To leave a well-paid job to go out and build a school on a garbage dumpsite was a very risky endeavour. I saw that children were suffering and that they did not attend school. It reminded me about my own childhood when Khmer Rouge had closed all the schools. The first day, 25 children came. Today we serve 1,300 children and I have gained international recognition for my work. This was a risk I never hesitated to take because I knew in my heart that it was the right thing to do. Because I acted to protect what I truly value, all those children will have a better future.

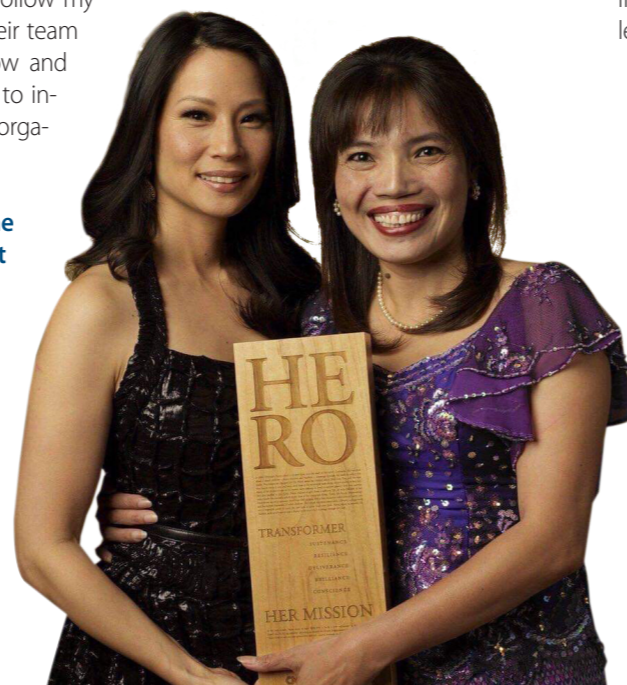
What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think can Cambodia thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

Cambodia is a growing country with a young population. We continuously want new innovative solutions and products. With the introduction to other countries' technology, I believe many young people will be inspired to become entrepreneurs. We are a country filled with talent and will soon catch up with the rest of the world with innovations and in entrepreneurship.

Cambodian culture is also a culture where people are focused on gratitude and how we can make the most of what is given to us. A Swedish friend of mine is currently studying what impact gratitude has on entrepreneurship and she has found Cambodia to be a good example of a country where young people leverage the power of gratitude to be more entrepreneurial.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

My advice is to have a dream and no matter what, keep working towards that dream. If you fail, keep getting back up and try. Dreams are not achieved in one day and you learn from your failures. [WIK](#)



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I have learned that
perseverance and
passion are key to
success

H.E Chea Sundaneth

Under-Secretary of State

Ministry of Information



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS



Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I was born in 1958. My parents were business owners and I married a man who was a public servant and who died during the Pol Pot regime. From 1970-1975, I did my Bac II at Indra Tevy high-school. Between 1979 and 1981, I worked as a protocol officer for the Kampuchea newspaper. One year later, I was appointed writer and reporter for the state newspaper. During this time, I was actively promoting media work at my organization. As a result, I was promoted to Chief of Information Bureau at the Kampuchea newspaper in 1992. I was also given a significant role in running a women's program at UNTAC. As a talented government staff member, I was given training by international media experts at a time when there was no formal journalism education in Cambodia. With four other committed women from the media industry, I established the Women's Radio Station of the Women's Media Center (WMC) in 1995. It was considered the first neutral radio station in the country after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. The radio obtained its broadcasting license from the Ministry of Information in 1999. Our WMC received technical support from British expert Roy Head and two other American consultants. Then the national team expanded from radio to gain expertise in TV, networking, and other forms of media campaigning. In 2009, I was responsible for the directorship of the Radio-TV production department. Then, from 2011 to 2018, I was an Executive of WMC. I stopped working at WMC at the end of 2018 and I converted Women's Radio

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When women receive leadership training, they can flourish in their business

102 into a social enterprise, of which I am a managing director. I have contributed extensively to the promotion of democracy and women's rights in Cambodia. I was recently assigned to be Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information. Being a senior public servant, I am in charge of monitoring radio FM's sub-committee. I am also involved in the Children's Rights Committee in the Ministry. Adding to my roles, I have been appointed to be a Deputy President of the Women's Association for Peace and Development. I am very proud of being a woman serving many Cambodian women. Women's rights promotion is a corner-stone of my work.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

- Women's families, particularly men, often do not value jobs in the media because they consider that the work is challenging as well as

perilous, and does not pay well.

- Women working in the media do not have much time to spend with their families and look after household work. I am facing huge difficulties with recruiting women for my enterprise as well as at the Ministry of Information. I have to provide them with on-the-job training by myself, although some of my team can also be sent to have training abroad.

- Another challenge I face is fund raising and proposal writing. To lead the organization, I have to mobilize funding and investment to sustain its operation and future growth. On top of that, when I started my career, I did not have the leadership skills to manage many staff, both foreigners and Cambodians.

- After resigning from the NGO to set up a social enterprise in 2018, I faced many challenges in leadership and in generating income. Meanwhile, I was assigned to be Under-Secretary of State for the Ministry of Information. I have had to learn and handle all the tasks professionally.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

- Challenge yourself and others by continuing to learn (leadership courses, financial management, change management, and so on). Over the decades, I have learned to be an effective leader who leads the complex tasks of media including radio, TV, and online content. Meanwhile Cambodian women are still under pressure to play an important role as a good mother and wife, and to take proper care of their families. I continuously work to change traditional perceptions and to be a role model.

- Build good pools of female human capital. I am trying to recruit more young, talented women and build their capacity to advance gender equality and women's rights in society. It proves to men that a woman can do more than they ever expected.



What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

- My core value is to work for women, whether through what I am doing privately or for the Ministry of Information. Women's rights and gender equality are my focus. We openly and proactively promote knowledge and experience of women's rights and ensure our team has a good understanding of our core value.

- Self-accountability and social accountability. Everyone is accountable for their performance for the benefit of the company, the Ministry, and society. We take action and produce radio programs in order to help society and the government by having a strong partnership with the private sector.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

- Keeping things too simple and too easy. A good leader has to be flexible in leading people. However, he or she should not be so easy and simple that followers and subordinates can do everything in the company or organization. Some rules and guidelines / discipline have to be in place and they have to be well enforced.

- To be too proud of what they are doing. It is a motivation to be proud of one's achievements. However, if leaders are too proud and show off to others too much, they may miss important things being brought to their attention by their teams or others.

- Poor communication skills. Good communication is, by far, one of the most important skills for a leader. It doesn't matter how impactful a plan the leader develops. If they cannot communicate the plan to their employees or followers in a way that is easy to understand, then the outcomes tend to be reduced.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

- Understand the business you are managing.
- Leadership competency. Leaders have to be capable of leading people and inspiring them to complete their assigned tasks.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and what were the outcomes?

- The main risk I have faced so far is the failure to recruit talented and committed staff, in particular marketing and sales people.

- The second biggest challenge has been in seeking sponsors. I have had to go about this by myself and many clients and organizations require me to work directly with them.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

Cambodians are friendly and innovative in facing challenges, as can be seen in the huge achievements of our Khmer ancestors during the Angkor Wat era. We are rich in culture and geography, in the area where the largest fresh water lake in Southeast Asia exists. Cambodia has comparative advantages for businesses in the region. The government provides incentives and investments to local businesses to help maintain the annual economic growth rate of 2018, which was 7 percent. While the government provides support to entrepreneurs (tax incentives, for example), it has also built the capacity of public servants to offer better public services to the general public. Equally importantly, local business owners can expand their businesses abroad and make joint business ventures with investors. Of course, entrepreneurs have to continuously learn about leadership and entrepreneurship. Their companies will be strong when they provide high quality products and high standard services to clients and the public. If we have more Cambodians buy and use local products, it leads to economic growth and poverty reduction.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

Women entrepreneurs have to be brave enough to show off their achievements and be proud to be strong women. Equally importantly, they have to contribute to society by sharing their expertise and experience with the next generations. Meanwhile, women have to seek support and attend capacity building programs to leverage their leadership skills. I notice that when women receive leadership training and other relevant business courses, they can flourish in their business and there is a noticeable change in the way they do business. **WK**

Mrs. Seng Takakneary

Founder and Managing Director

Sentosa Silk



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I am married with three children. My supportive husband is the one who inspired me to run my own business. My eldest is a fine young lady, a graduate of fashion design who is focusing on her own fabric collection line. I also have two sons, one who is now working as a manager, while my youngest is a university student. My mother lives with us and has helped raise my children while my husband and I have been working on our businesses. Overall, I am a happily married and contented family person, working on how to become a better person to help others.

I am a college graduate in Business Administration, and my first job involved working for a Japanese company. This experience gave me a lot discipline and motivation.. But I have always had an entrepreneurial spirit, so when I saw some nice silk at an airport duty free shop during my travels, this gave me an idea. I said to myself: our country is very strong in silk, so why I don't help revive the silk industry?

I started to follow my passion and love for our culture, by creating SentoSaSilk in 2004. We started operations in a small flat located in the busy streets along Phnom Penh's riverside. From the beginning, I was committed to giving opportunities to disabled local people and to help improve their well-being by providing them with a job. SentoSaSilk started with two employees with physical disabilities, sourced from a Cambodian national organization for disabled persons (NCDP). Since then, the two have become trainers and teachers at SentoSaSilk, and have their own tailoring business and services. We also became the first team to be assisted by IFC/World Bank under their project called "CraftNetwork", which gave us access to the international market. As the company grew, more disabled people were given the chance to get decent jobs. On top of that, young aspiring graduates from poor families were given opportunities to get trained by SentoSaSilk, more young citizens were able to acquire professional management experience. Moreover, craftswomen and weavers



in different provinces were developed as entrepreneurs, providing sustainable income to their communities.

We aim to make an impact in Cambodian society by promoting Cambodian silk and culture, as well as providing opportunities to women and to less fortunate people by improving their living conditions and bringing thousands of families out of poverty. Producing high-quality silk products and uniform services is a platform for fulfilling our dreams. I am very passionate about developing Cambodian people's skills and working on a sustainable path to expand and provide work for them.

Due to perseverance and passion to promote our country's elegant products, we have acquired a lot of awards locally, regionally and

internationally. I am very proud that we are the first company to have our Ikat collections registered in the Ministry of Handicraft for "Intellectual Property". SentoSasilk is the first woman-owned business in Cambodia to become a member of the International Silk Union (ISU).

One of my most unforgettable moments was when I was selected to represent my country in the WTO Public Forum in Geneva. Likewise, I have represented Cambodia and women entrepreneurs of Cambodia on different ASEAN panel discussions. I was one of the 14 co-founders of the Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association (CWEA), and the first elected president of the Women's Business Association, and Association of Artisans of Cambodia (AAC).

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

My first challenge was when we got our first bulk order from World of Goods. In 2005, we weren't used to receiving many orders and we didn't have the technical knowledge yet, so getting a bulk order seemed like an impossible challenge. But thanks to the World Bank's support, we became one of the first five companies included in the pilot run of "Exporting goods to USA", called CraftNetwork. This program was our gateway to new markets, and helped us refine the quality of our fabrics.

Since it was my first time running a business, I also found it difficult to train the staff as I myself did not have any spare time. I was constantly occupied with different inquiries and, production issues, and didn't know where to start in terms of building up the staff's technical knowledge. At the time, we didn't have people with the right management skills that could help me structure our operations, and we also had to deal with a lack of staff discipline.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

I believe in "no pain, no gain". You have to use critical thinking before deciding. Leading means giving and not taking. The most fundamental lesson about leadership is to be humble and to get feedback so you can be better. With humility, you can help other people sincerely and be honest with them. It's also important to make your people part of the decision-making process. My clients, friends and staff are all my business partners. We should be building a long table where everyone can sit and eat, and not a tall fence that keeps people out. Building fences between yourself and the people who need you will separate you from reality, and you will be alone on the pedestal created by your own illusions. Transparency and diplomacy will set you free. Always seek the opinions of other people and do not take credit if you are not the one who made it. Always acknowledge the people who helped you succeed.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

For us, quality is imperative to not just attract new customers but also to retain our good reputation in the market. We believe that all successful businesses are built through the cultivation of long-term relationships based on mutual trust, professionalism and understanding. We also believe in creating job opportunities for underprivileged women, teaching them how to weave or tailor garments while providing a good work environment.

Our Core Values are:

1. Integrity
2. Growth & Innovation
3. Compassion & Teamwork
4. Respect for People, Culture and Environment
5. Adherence to 10 Principles of Fair Trade

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I think leaders should be visionary. See the bigger picture of where you want to go. Trust people and delegate jobs as necessary. If you make yourself too busy, you will lose sight of your vision. It's also a bad idea to compare your own leadership style with others. Everyone is unique and everyone is trying to learn for the better. Leaders should always maintain a professional attitude, focusing on business goals and avoiding personal gossip.

Don't stop learning. Every day is a new day and you will always have a lesson to learn. Don't be too proud of yourself. Always put your feet on the ground and learn humility. You should know how to listen and to not talk too much yourself. We must have the ability to see things from other people's perspectives.

Do not repeat the same mistake twice. A good leader learns from every mistake and experience. Acquire expertise by getting exposure to solving daily operational issues and making decisions. Indecisiveness will delay the task and will cause you to lose opportunities.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

I used to run CWEA and was the first president of the Association. I fought for the association to stay firm, in spite of turmoil, wrong stories and lies. There were hard tears and hardship but I never thought of giving up, as I had my vision of this association being a good channel in developing good women leaders in the family. Now my vision to stay and continue until my term without giving up gave a very nice continuity and channel for new leaders to get trained, develop and be given the opportunity to exercise their leadership and get experience with proper guidance and correct mental attitude. I believe CWEA through the continuity of new leaders and active committee leaders became the number one and most active businesswomen association in the country and highly recognized by different ministries.

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The most
fundamental
lesson about
leadership is to
be humble and
to be receptive
to feedback

Leadership does not stop and has no term. One has to move on and continue to take leadership on other fields and not stop leading, and must always be aware. Now, I am a mentor to the next generation, especially the women's youth. I support those women who are working while studying and looking for an opportunity to get a job to pay off their own tuition fees. I give opportunities to young people and put them into training to gain proper experience. We need to continue supporting and educating women in different levels who are interested in entrepreneurship to create more jobs and income generating opportunities for women.

On the other hand, as a business leader, we are expanding our silk operation to Seri Culture and weaving center on top of working with our existing weavers in different villages. We are nurturing our community workplace. Likewise, I will keep on helping my staff to fulfill their dreams while they are with me, and create more opportunities for them to learn and get the experience they need. I will keep on evaluating information with a critical eye and judgement. I will try to always embrace the truth to lead and be trusted by my family, friends and colleagues. And most of all will find time to read books and join workshops to enhance myself and be corrected, professionally, personally and spiritually.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

There was a time I invested in an imported fashion boutique shop and landed up with a wrong business. I used to have an imported fashion shop selling imported dresses and shoes, but I ended up with big inventory and non-moving stocks. The shop was built with very expensive building renovations and high-end showroom, but it was not enough to call the attention of the people. Now the business is closed and it was a big lesson for me. There is also some price miscalculation that I sold the products negative GPM, so now we developed



a proper costing sheets rather than using guess work. Before, there was big staff turnover but at the end, they returned to Sentosa Silk. So I ended up focusing on silk and expanding my business on its value chain to sustain my supply of raw materials and offer more affordable prices to my clients.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think can Cambodia thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

We have unique cultural norms and backgrounds. Women are perceived to be elegant and beautiful with good shape. And that is also because, until now we are still carrying our traditional dress which is handwoven silk – the most elegant fabric in the world. Since there are so much good stories behind our fabrics, and it is getting popularity of its own, now China is seeing the potential and working in developing the Seri-culture of Cambodia to continuously develop the supply since the country is basically agricultural by nature.

Cambodia being strategically located beside Thailand and Vietnam and midway between China and India enjoys economic spill over from the growth of our neighboring countries' economies. Cambodia has many natural resources and famous and popular tourism sites, mineral deposits, off-shore oil and gas reserves and lots of fertile land for agriculture that are still untapped. Population: Approximately 15 million (2.2 million in Phnom Penh). We have strong GDP growth at an average 6% per annum for the past decade, where the key industries

are in tourism, textile and garment, natural gas, agriculture, construction, and timber, providing ease of access to maritime trade.

We have young, inexpensive, willing and trainable work force and rising productivity. We have stable politics, improving transport connectivity and railroads are rehabilitated, we have lower costs of internet. Our demographics ensures rising domestic demand (61% of Cambodians are under 25 years old; median age: 21),

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

"I believe from my own experience, leadership starts with a small group and that is your family. You cannot lead a bigger group if you fail to lead the small group closest to you"

Challenge yourself. Take the risk. Focus and make your dream come true. Believe in yourself. Do the work that you care or are passionate about. Choose businesses that fit your skills and passions. Have a vision. Develop entrepreneurial spirit. Find good people. Develop good people. Join Business Associations that can help you grow and where you can find good mentors that will walk you through your way. Face your fears. Be brave and courageous to take a risk, and don't be afraid to experiment. And most of all there is always room for improvement, be open to change – and find out how to have a good balance of life and spirit **W K**

Mrs. **Dam Chanthy**

Executive Director

Highlanders Association



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

My name is Dam Chanthy. I was born in September 1955 in the Taum-paun indigenous group of Talao Commune, Andong Meas District, Ratanakiri Province. I married Mr. Loung Sothea, and we had six children together. I was raised in a poor agricultural family that depended mainly on traditional rice planting and wild vegetables. When I was small, I was sold to be a domestic worker in a rich family. During the Khmer Rouge regime, I was assigned to be a medical worker in region 101. From 1979 to 1995, I was a member of a women's association. In March 1996, I was selected as a translator for an NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Products) organization, and later, for other projects that focused on gender and health. In 2000, I established the Highlander Association (HA). I have continued my leadership journey because it has always been my dream ever since I was young. More recently, I have been active in leading communities to claim their rights and have received extensive support from indigenous communities, my beloved colleagues, and the international community. Between 2003 and 2005, during a time of massive land grabbing issues, I ran educational campaigns for Indigenous People (IP) in 18 communes, to encourage them not to sell their land to outsiders. Thanks to our campaign and to support from King Norodom Sihanouk and Prime Minister Hun Sen, we reclaimed the land for the Veat Kloe and Chhroung Communities through his Excellency Noun Phea.

When you first started out in your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I have faced many challenges in the leadership positions I have held. I have faced difficulties with resource mobilization and also with communication in English in order to support the mission of the organizations. I did not know many development partners or donors. Most importantly, I was not able to write proposals and or write fund raising reports. In addition, I have received death threats from anonymous

people because of my land campaigns with IP communities. For example, I received a threat to my life in public in 2016. Our Highlander Association was recently threatened with closure because of our campaigns with IP communities. However, I am trying hard to promote and protect IP land rights and natural resources. Significantly, I have worked with IP women on economic empowerment programs.



Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

I have had good life experiences as an IP leader. The most valuable lessons have been:

- To trust my teams, donors and the IP communities who have engaged in our IP land rights promotion.
- It is of good value to be transparent when leading organizations. I am so proud that my organization can adapt and follow the requirements of both local donors and international development partners even though we are an IP led organization.
- Strong support from my board of directors and my team are my

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Female business owners should share more of their experiences and skills with women in rural areas

main drivers in leading on IP land rights.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

I believe in acting with transparency and accountability in order to ensure that the interests and rights of indigenous communities are respected. To achieve this, I and my colleagues always aim for:

- Respect. As human beings, we are born with dignity. We have to respect each other, regardless of identity, culture, or gender.
- Passion for gender equality. In everything that we do, we have to ensure participation of both genders in community development activities and we have to promote gender equality through job opportunities.
- Commitment to building resilient IP communities. I have a robust commitment to assist IP youth and IP women with their land rights.
- Perseverance. I will never give up my dream of being a community leader. Even though I have received death threats many times, I am still working and still exerting influence for the benefit of my IP communities.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think can negatively impact leadership?

Traits that are not desirable in a leader are:

- Lack of understanding of the people and mission of the organization or of their team.
- Lack of team spirit or abuse of their powers with their subordinates or team without consulting the board of directors or other relevant parties.
- Lack of goals or direction for their team. Poor communication of strategy to the team.
- Lack of transparency. Leaders have to be fair and transparent with their team. Lack of transparency can result in a lack of trust.
- Ego. Good leaders need to listen carefully and accept what is right and what is wrong. In order to be a true visionary leader, we need to let go of our ego and focus on our people because without them we

would be nowhere.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

To advance my leadership capabilities, I have to strengthen myself and my teams to work in a transparent manner and be honest with the organizations, donors and IP communities with which we work. I will provide opportunities for and encourage my IP women and youth to make their own decisions. They will be given capacity building programs in leadership and community development. I will empower my internal teams. I will delegate power and the important tasks in the exploration of IP land rights and in policy dialogues with different stakeholders, both within the country and abroad. I tell myself all the time, I have to be a social servant for my communities and keep learning from others in order to develop my skills and my people. I will keep using my critical thinking in order to be calm enough to handle hazardous challenges.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Some of the risks I have faced include:

- Accusations of being politically involved in an opposition party.
- New laws and regulations, for instance, an NGO law that affects the daily operation of my organization.
- Intimidation because of my engagement with IP communities in relation to big land concessions and other economic land concessions.
- The threat of closure of my organization

Together with my teams, we come up with ways of mitigating the above risks:

- I have built a good network and work closely with NGO Forum and UNHCR. When there is a threat to my life, I can be moved out of the country for a short period of time.
- I have met with leaders of the relevant political parties, line ministries and provinces about the missions of Highlander Association in order to reduce tension and confusion.
- I have shared my knowledge and experience of working with IP communities with local and national governments.
- I strictly follow government rules and regulations and always consult my board of directors and development partners before engaging government. We also celebrate International Women's Rights day, IP day, and other national events with government.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

Cambodia's constitution recognizes diverse cultures and has national policies that motivate women's leadership in both the private and the public sectors. The government has specific quotas for women political leaders in both local and national government, such as women village chiefs, women governors, women



ministers, and so on. The government has established the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which has a vital role to play in promoting women's leadership in communities, companies, and the government sector and in formulating gender sensitive policies and budgeting. On the NGO side, we have developed many initiatives to promote women in leadership positions and to advocate for placing and promoting gender equality and equity. Every year, on the 8th of March, we all celebrate our achievements by

organizing "International Women's Rights Day".

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

I have a few recommendations for women entrepreneurs. They should manage their businesses by promoting more women to leadership positions without any discrimination, in particular to women

from rural areas. They should provide more opportunities for and tolerate IP women and youths. I would request that female business owners share more of their experience and skills with rural and poor women. I would also like to see strong intervention from government to shut down KTV and human trafficking across borders. Finally, it is my wish to see more women in government and civil society who can help other women in rural areas like mine. [W.K.](#)

H.E Chea Serey

Assistant Governor and Director General

National Bank of Cambodia



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I am Chea Serey. I am married with four children, of which two are adopted. I met my youngest son during a trip to Takeo Province that I made with the Raksa Koma Foundation, a Foundation that I co-founded which focuses on the welfare of underprivileged Cambodian children and raises awareness on mental and physical disabilities.

I am also actively involved in many charity works, including being a board member of Smile Cambodia that provides free surgery to cleft and burn children, and Khmer Sight that provides cataract surgery for underprivileged people.

I have a MBA in Banking from SOAS, University of London (UK) and I am currently pursuing a PhD degree with the University of Adelaide (Australia) focusing on balancing financial inclusion and financial stability.

As an Assistant Governor at National Bank of Cambodia, I am in charge of five departments and sit on many policy driven committees within the bank and also at the national level. I have also been chairwoman of the Cambodia Credit Bureau since its establishment, a member of the South East Asia Advisory Board of Women's World Banking. And before that I was a member of the Gender and Women's Financial Inclusion committee of the Alliance for Financial inclusion. Before I was appointed to this position, I worked my way up from a cabinet officer to deputy director general of the banking supervision department. I was coming up at the time when they were restructuring the banking system, in which the central bank wanted to strengthen the banking supervision function. So, I am proud to have taken part in the building of confidence in the banking sector in Cambodia as well as the significant positive development of this sector. I am also honored to have contributed to the closing of the financial inclusion gap at a national and global level and was recognized for this effort with the Gender Advocacy Champion Award 2018. I was also awarded as an honoree of the Asia 21 Young Leaders in 2017, Young Societal Leaders in 2018 and ZICO ASEAN 40 under 40 in recognition of my progressive leadership in the Cambodian banking industry.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

The main challenge when I started work was building confidence in the banking sector, particularly when 17 banks were liquidated at that time and five were not able to repay their depositors. So we needed to convince the people to save in a bank and allow the financial sec-

tor intermediation to take place and contribute to economic growth. I have learned a considerable amount from this experience. On a personal level, I was having my first child and she was exclusively breastfed. There was no pump available then, so I had to run between office and home to feed my baby. In addition, back then I was amongst the few staff having an international degree so there was greater expectation on me to deliver. That was an additional pressure but also a great opportunity for me to do more and learn more.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

There is a view that we share among the management at the National Bank of Cambodia. It is that titles can be given and taken away but the relationship that we build with our team will last a lifetime. I have learned that leadership is not about managing our team, but it is about inspiring them to believe in and share our vision. We get the

best results from our team when we believe and work to achieve the same common goal. Leadership is also about building and nurturing a respectful relationship with your team. As a leader, you need to be willing to invest your time in building and nurturing good relationships with your team as they are your biggest asset.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

I live my life by a simple quote that I stumbled upon and it says "Work for a Cause, not for Applause. Live life to Express, not to Impress. Don't strive to make your presence noticed, just make your absence felt." I find it too exhausting to dedicate my life to appease everyone. We should try not to let the desire for recognition lead to an action that conflicts with our conscience. We need to be happy with who we are, because at the end of the day we go to bed with ourselves.

I never impose my views on my team. But I do, however, try to lead them by example. I believe that everything can be done better when the people who get it done believe in it. I believe that as a leader, you need to create a working environment that allows your team to use their creativity to strive for a better result. So, rather than giving them an exhaustive to-do list, you need to provide clear objectives and empower them to figure out how to achieve those objectives. However, you also need to know each of your team members' strengths and weaknesses in order to effectively assign them roles.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Hot-temperedness, lack of compassion, pride, and ego.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

I believe that information is power. A good leader is a great reader and

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**Have a clear goal
and be committed
to it: there is no
substitute for
blood and sweat**



“ Failure is part of success. So, learn from it

listener. For women business owners, a strong commitment and dedication are important to reach success. Never fear failures as these are the paths to success. But most importantly, one must believe in oneself and have a clear objective. Effort without a clear objective is of no use.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Most of our decision involve some degree of risks and could turn out bad or good. And you need to take responsibility for your decision making. If it is good, appreciate it. If it turns bad, accept it and learn from it.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

Cambodians went through many stages of bitter history. But we never gave up. We are a very resilient people. That we were able to transform a war-torn country to one of the fastest growing economies in the world and an over-achiever of the UN Millennium Development Goals is a testament to this resilience. We also made the list of the top 10 most friendly people in the world despite this traumatizing experience, which shows our positive attitude to life.

Broadly speaking, as a late bloomer, Cambodia is able to leap frog many stages of development. With an enthusiastic and thriving young population, increasing fluency in English, stable macro-economic indicators and positive economic growth prospects, Cambodia is a good candidate for investment.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

Take risks: Failure is part of any success. All medications had many failed trials before they succeeded and saved lives. Do not be afraid to fail. Learn from your failures.

Have a clear goal and be committed to it: There is no substitute for blood and sweat.

Leadership is a skill and not a gift. We might be born with a talent but leadership can be developed over time. [WIK](#)



Mrs. Tang Gech Lieng

Board Director

H&L Group



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

My name is Tang Gech Lieng. I'm 37 years old and I am on the Board of Directors of H&L Group Co. Ltd. I am so lucky to have been born in to a wealthy family whose parents were business people where I had an opportunity to manage the company since the age of 17. For the sake of my parents' business, I decided to quit my studies in grade 7 and started managing their business.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I was a brave and friendly girl, someone who liked to improve myself and things around me, dared to take risks and use highly-creative ideas so I could use these talents to help make my family's business, TANG PHENG POR Company, grow both goodwill and product branding and expand to have many branches across the city and provinces as a result during the period 2000-2005.

After I married my husband, whose favorite business is in property, we started investing in properties. We have been very successful in this business since 2006; as friends and others have acknowledged us for our achievements. In 2008, there was a world economic crisis as we all know; however, luckily we saw this downturn coming and sold we most of our land and properties in areas far away and in the provinces and used the proceeds to buy land and properties in the city. That protected us from most of the crisis. However, we did suffer some challenges. But, we both tried to stand shoulder-to-shoulder, and we solved the problems together. Fortunately, there was a clear blue sky after the storm and we were able to overcome those tough times and together we continued our business.

More importantly, we did not waste time during our hard times; in contrast, we spent it on both local and overseas training, to gain more knowledge and experience. We also founded more companies, which in turn, increased our income. We learned valuable lessons and implemented change at the same time; made mistakes, and corrected them.

“ We learned and implemented at the same time; made mistakes, and corrected them

We faced challenges, we solved them. We always support each other, inspire each other, understand one another, learn from each other, and always find more opportunities to catch up and grow together.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

We have learned a lot from everything we have done and from the people around us. Because we are leaders, we commit to being role models.

In the whole family, my husband and I are fully committed to being the "Example Couple". In society, I commit to being a good example as a mother, friend and a good woman. This includes the way I wear my clothes, my attitude, my words in communication, as well as my respect towards people. I always learn good things from others and try to do better myself. Being a role model inspires me to love people unconditionally, not only those people around me but to all people in general.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Being humble, soft, friendly, respectful, valuing to people and sharing, are all the qualities that make people recognize me, love me, and respect me from their heart.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Here are negative traits to avoid:

- Too demanding
- Too bossy
- Blame others for unexpected results
- No clear guidance or instruction
- Not giving enough value
- Not giving opportunities
- No inspiration
- No appreciation of others
- Not being open to new ideas

These will not make you a good leader, but will negatively impact your leadership ability. You will not be able to grow yourself or the people around you!

What we should do:

- Don't correct others, correct yourself.
- Stop demanding.
- Don't look for others' mistakes.
- Patience, forgiveness, and giving people chances are the good qualities of a leader.
- Moreover, there is always one sentence in my head which I always tell and remind myself of: "Their destiny is in my hands, so what can I do for them?" This question really inspires me to do more!

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

Leadership is not only for men; women leaders are needed, everywhere.

- In a family, she is a mother who takes good care of the children,

leads them by example, teaches them, gives them advice and many more tasks which all mothers cannot avoid.

- In a company, she plays an important role in coordinating tasks from all sides through thick and thin, and is also a positive force toward progression. Maybe women are more patient than men?

- In society, only women can understand women, inspiring them, taking care of each other, sharing with each other, and learning from each other... It is what we always do.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Trusting people too much created a very big loss during the years 2007-2010. At that time, my husband and I helped each other to solve the problems one by one, solve them with understanding, and create 'win-win'-solutions. We have never wanted others' property. We were willing to suffer a loss and treat it as a lesson learned. We operated on the principle of "Lose to Win." We didn't create any argument nor fight back.

By our own principles we aim to keep a good bond among friends and relatives. We today have and make more friends as well as have good relationships among them.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

- Women are a force that family and society cannot do without.
- Everyone has his or her own inner leadership. Some may be less interested and are more dependent on others. That's why they may not have the chance to use their inner strength and develop it.
- Be independent.
- Dare to do what others can do.
- Learn to manage people. The more you manage people, the more responsible you are and the more cautious you are. Then your leadership will improve too.
- Don't be afraid of making mistakes.
- Dare to make decisions. But before you make them, you have to analyze things from every corner.
- Before blaming others, learn how to ask first.
- Lead yourself first, before you lead others. **WIK**

Mrs. Pong Limsan

Founder and CEO

First Womentech Asia



CAMBODIA'S WOMEN
LEADERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status) and how your experience has been as a leader and what achievements you are most proud of.

I am Ms. Limsan Pong, an MIS and Software Solutions Expert. I was born in 1980 in a rural village of Kandal province, Cambodia. I married Mr. Socheat Bin in 2006 and I have one daughter and son. After more than ten years of deep involvement in providing MIS's IT solutions consultancy services to government agencies, the World Bank, ADB, NGOs and private companies, I have learned that Cambodia and its region is in need of more young females to engage and be involved in the field of software and technology to fulfill community needs and to make a greater impact. Then I started discussing the need with my husband and kids about my dream to drive this mission for Cambodia and its regional community. Finally, my dream was agreed to and strongly supported. I first founded the First Womentech Asia Co., LTD. (FWTA) as a female-oriented IT firm in May 2013. It was a freelance team with five team members, including me, and since its founding, FWTA has gradually grown and is now legally registered with the government's Ministry of Commerce. My dream of founding FWTA was based on the aim to get more Cambodian youth and professional female IT engineers on board so that it would enable us to deliver the best possible IT Solutions and Innovation tools to all of our clients, especially to female and young entrepreneurs in the healthcare and medical fields to help them grow and succeed in their businesses.

As founder and Chief Executive Officer of FWTA, I play a central role by overseeing the day-to-day operations of the company, including: networking for business growth, to support the product design and the technical product development of the company to meet highest international standards of quality and safety. At the same time, I have made myself available to provide outsourced consulting services for a number of

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Engineer your own working culture, and you'll achieve your ultimate goal

government projects funded by the World Bank, ADB, international donor agencies / communities, and NGOs through the joint sharing of expertise with local and international consulting firms since 2010. From 2006 to 2010, I was the MIS Specialist and IT Manager for the US based firm, Agrifood Consulting International, Inc. (ACI) and the Australian based company, Agricultural Development International (ADI). With both companies, I was hired to take on the main role and duties for MIS design and development, database management and IT solutions management. Since I am a committed and hardworking person, the founders and managing directors of the companies fully trusted me and believed in my capacity. Each company gave me a great chance to build my additional soft and hard skills in financial management, cash flow, human resource management and office administration management. In response to their trust in me, I performed my assigned tasks to the best of my ability, thereby allow-

ing me to join hands with the company as one team to successfully handle and deliver all projects to Cambodia's government and other Asian governments' projects funded by the World Bank, ADB as well as international donor communities / agencies and NGOs.

I started my career as a Database Manager and Secretary Accountant with a Denmark-funded project for Cambodia's Forestry Administration after I obtained my Bachelor's Degree. My main role was to design, develop and administrate the database of the project.

I graduated with my Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science and Engineering in 2003 from the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) and earned my Master's Degree from the same university with the same major in 2006. I completed a one-year diploma in Business Administration from the Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE).

Being a female leader of a tech company, FWTA, in a country where there is limited acceptance of professional women, is a tough job. However, I have overcome these challenges and particular environments to move forward toward pursuing my dream. I began by gathering people around me: colleagues, workmates and business partners to believe in my visionary thought, capacity and knowledge. I saw all of us, including me, as good workmates, friends and supporters rather than me as their leader. I realized that our success could not be demonstrated with talk, but by real actions that demonstrated and ensured that I could succeed and we, women, can succeed in tech leadership jobs where many people culturally and traditionally have viewed and valued many leadership roles as a man's job.

With family, I need to balance and manage my time for work and family but luckily enough, our family culture is very different from most traditional Cambodians! We go to work in the morning and kids go to school from morning until afternoon. We have lunch outside and return home in the evening. My husband has a sense of gender equality and is willing to promote women so I have less barriers to my work and business to meet my dream.



In my professional career, I am proud of being a role model for females in tech development and for young Cambodian ladies who wish to start a business, especially in tech. Also, a part of my business is supporting and solving business problems and assisting the growth of businesses, particularly for female and young entrepreneurs with businesses in healthcare in Cambodia. That is in line with my dream.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I started my career as a database officer while doing other administrative duties in July 2003 with a government project funded by the Danish government based in the coastal province, Kampong Som of Cambodia. I had to relocate to work and live far from my family. This was my first challenge to convince my family, especially my mother, that I could do it. My mother did not want me to go and work there as she worried for me. I had to work under the project for nearly three years before I could move back to Phnom Penh. While there I learned a lot during my first experience in the professional world. I worked very hard and did a lot travelling from the province to Phnom Penh because I did my Master's Degree on weekends and needed to come to work in Phnom Penh often. Finally, I successfully overcame my challenges and completed my professional mission with the project and I successfully earned my Master's Degree in Computer Science and Engineering.

From that big kick-start experience, I have developed myself to a higher level as an IT professional. When I returned to Phnom Penh, I joined private consulting firms for nearly four years as an MIS expert providing consulting services to government projects funded by the World Bank, ADB, International donor agencies / communities and NGOs. Prior to the founding of FWTa in 2013 and after that time, I was an MIS Consultant for various government agencies through joint collaboration and outsourcing with local and international consulting firms.

In my professional career as leader of a tech company and MIS professional, I faced challenges:

- Building a belief in people that I as a woman could also succeed in jobs considered men's jobs.
- Convincing team members to believe in the value of the vision and ideas for company development and to join and contribute to make greater impacts on their community and their daily working life.
- Building trust with all business partners that women are able to lead a tech company and develop quality tech products to solve their business problems.
- Other challenges include differentiating between family and work, and childcare. As women, we have more work to do at home than men, even though we may have husbands who are aware of and sensitive to gender roles and gender inequality and who support more women taking roles in society.
- Cash flow management gave me a good learning experience on how to manage and ensure the survival of FWTa as we started and established the company with only US\$5000.00 and a small loan from



my sister. We did not have a big reserve fund to cover losses. I had a master plan for the business product and was able to provide input for product design and development, and I oversaw all product development. At the same time, I needed to go out to do some sales work and to do consultancy jobs to get money for the development of the company.

- Accessing sources of funding in order for companies to survive in their early stages as well as to support scaling of a company at the growth stage is a struggle for many businesses in Cambodia, including my company.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned as a leader?

In my role as Chief Executive Officer of FWTa, I have learned great lessons from my daily job. As leaders, we need to have clear visions of the goals and mission of the business as the core strategies to lead the team to move forward together with us.

In the early stage of founding the firm, we have to be engineers and architects to design and to create a working culture, teambuilding and a working system rather than assigning someone else to do this work for us. But this has to be delegated to responsible people later on after the working culture has been well cultivated and grown thus allowing the system of work to strengthen and run smoothly without our guardianship.

Setting up a leadership team with the right mindset and faith in the mission and vision of the company is the core strategy to put the company on the path to growth. Accountability and the integrity of the leadership team are very critical areas where I need to pay attention as they are the core values for the success of FWTa.

An experienced leadership team with good soft and hard skills is very important for a company to grow. Any company without a well-established leadership team will find it hard to meet both a company's vision and mission because leadership-oriented members are the inspiration of all staff to achieve the goals of the company.

A leader has to build a network as the network is the way to bring our mission, vision and products or services to clients and consumers, building trust with potential and present clients.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

The core values of FWTa are professionalism, quality and growth together. As leaders of the firm, we often discuss our mission, vision and core values with our employees to remind them of how to adhere to principles in their daily work as service providers to clients and in their private lives as well. As a tech company, we are very serious and

strict about data security, data safety and the privacy of clients and clients of our clients. If they do not have good professionalism in their daily work, they will not care for product quality or the services they handle daily. Unprofessionalism will lead to negative impacts and destroy the reputation of the company and its clients.

To ensure that our team is aligned with our values, we need to be role models first and then make sure that our leadership teams are well aware of our core values and ensure that their team members under their leadership and supervision recognize and accept the core values as their own values, with pride in the office and in private life.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

It may be easy to say we are good leaders, but actually being a good leader in the real working world is easier said than done. I cannot lead FWTa to grow unless I have a good team behind me. From my personal experience as a tech firm leader, my biggest challenges are to work with people who are not accountable to jobs to which they are assigned and people with poor commitment and poor integrity at the workplace.

I have worked with many people in my professional life and I experienced working with different types of people from different offices. I have experienced working with irresponsible people and this makes my leadership weak and makes me feel exhausted because the assigned tasks cannot be completed by set deadlines, the quality of the work is very poor and the numerous problems cannot be solved on time.

In view of this experience, I often lead the organization with delegation. With delegating leadership, I need to groom leadership team members with a winning mindset, and hold them accountable to the assigned job, while maintaining the integrity to the mission, vision and core values of FWTa. This creates many challenges well before I can apply delegation successfully. I need to learn to spend time creating and setting in place a winning leadership team.

The environment can create a negative impact on our leadership, too. I myself tried my best to rise out from the social environment where women were not believed to be capable of leading modern tech firms. Many people believe that tech firms and programming leadership roles should only be for men.

In my leadership, the flow of information is very important. A good flow of information can help to enable the smooth running of the firm.

Working culture and environment often influence my leadership as well. If the working environment has no clear procedure and leadership, it will result in negative impacts on our job so I am very serious about the working culture, and systems to support the functioning of the job. These require having certain policies and guidelines to direct good leadership and management of the organization. These are often centrally applied at FWTa under my leadership.

What are you doing to continue to excel as a leader (leadership tips in doing business and promoting women's economic empowerment or gender equality)?

As the leader of the company, we cannot do business for money only because we are part of society. Doing business is for making a profit, but business practices must have ethics and we should never forget to address the social issues of the community where we live and do business.

I am dedicated to my dream, and the mission and goals of FWTA so that I can inspire my workmates and colleagues to believe in my vision and mission as well as to contribute their efforts as a joint force to actualize our dream.

We need to do what we love and care most about. If we don't, our dream will soon vanish, demonstrating that we were not truly passionate from the beginning.

We have to be unique and creative in the business we do and it has to be innovative in the blue area.

Successful businesses not only care about their products and leadership, but must also focus on cash flow management since networking is an important part in making your services and products reach your target audience.

No one is perfect and all challenges and failures should be seen as valuable lessons and opportunities to learn.

While doing business, keep learning and set long term visions because they are an inspiration for yourself, your team and your business strategies.

What are some of the biggest risks you've taken in your career and how did they turn out?

I am not alone. Many entrepreneurs take risks similar to those I have taken so far. I started doing business while yet in debt and I acquired a loan from my sister to start my business. I also took a loan from the bank to buy a home at the same time. My husband and I worked hard to make enough money to pay our bills, interest on the money we borrowed, and family expenses. Sometimes we faced financial hardships when our sales declined and failed to meet our targets. Those were tough times for us as we struggled to keep our company alive and growing.

“ Courage means bravery despite intimidation in order to do something for the people

However, this period of challenges is nearly over and we are surviving at the moment because our loan obligations are almost satisfied. Fortunately, we have good products to deliver to our clients in the market. Now, we need to enrich our product features and enhance them to be unique and as comprehensive as possible to take advantage of the competitive market.

FWTA has survived for nearly six years and now we have four primary products in healthcare and hospital operating management. We expanded FWTA from a team of five people, including me, to a team of nearly 30 with the support of more than 200 clients from previous and current projects.

Another learning experience we underwent resulted from the fact that my husband and I decided to give up our secure, paid jobs to start our non-paying jobs at our own business. Sometimes this resulted in fights because of the financial hardship. At the same time we found solutions to many of the issues and problems we faced.

Due to love, commitment and passion to our dream, we confronted our challenges and continued learning from all the issues in our business. These are some of the lessons I learned and how we turned those lessons into opportunities.

What makes Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodia can thrive in this age of entrepreneurship & dynamic leadership?

Cambodia is ranked as poor nation in the region but it is unique in many ways. Cambodia's population is more than 16 million, and it is a beautiful county with nature and historic temples. Today, Cambodia can truly be considered a young country because it has a large young population. And these young people can be a driving force in Cambodia and help it develop onward. The world is becoming more global and technology is now driving today's economy locally, regionally and worldwide. Therefore, Cambodia needs to prepare her young population and provide it with skills to meet the market's demands in this global, digital era.

Cambodia should consider focusing more on developing a well-functioning entrepreneurship support system to assist the creative and innovative business start-ups of the younger generation, especially young female entrepreneurs so that they can leverage their concepts and businesses to make significant impacts on their community. Much of the younger population in the kingdom at moment is eager to apply concepts and ideas to bring about positive impacts but faces challenges in getting intellectual and financial support from private and government funding to test ideas and concepts.

While Cambodia is known as an agrarian nation, it has to invent new ways of doing business through tech integration in order to develop and meet the demands of global technology.

To adapt to this digital economy as outlined in the strategic plan of the government, Cambodia needs to focus and invest in its human resources through education and health because education and health are the fundamental needs to glorify and to transform itself from the least developed nation to an industrialized nation in the short and long term. For example, South Korea, India, and Singapore have lifted their people from poverty today by investing in their people over the last 50 years.

What advice do you have for young Cambodian female entrepreneurs?

From my personal experience as a female entrepreneur, I would like to share some advice as follows :

1. Doing business is not about the money only. While it must include making a profit, business must also address the social issues / causes of your community and the world.
2. All young females should have big dreams for their future. They should dare to make important decisions and know and manage their own destiny rather than giving in to someone else - be it mother, father or husband. While it is important to consult with them young females should make their own decisions. You have to be yourself with your own dream.
3. From my failures and successes I learned that it is very important to become deeply involved, and important to create a working culture and system to ensure that you can let your firm run to meet your ultimate dream. If you are not the first engineer of your destiny and you let someone else engineer your working culture, you will fail to meet your ultimate goal.
4. Setting up a winning team for your business has to be done in advance before your business begins and you have to get involved in all of the processes to ensure that they are in line with the mission, goals and core values of the company.
5. You have to do cash flow analysis and be able to manage your finances. If you are not able to manage them, you need to find someone who is capable of helping you manage them for you.
6. All successful operations of any organization are not about one person – you must create a team. As in a good play, one actor cannot play all characters; there must be different actors for the different character roles but one actor can fit maybe two characters if you wish to save expenses.

What I have shared here are lessons learned only. At present, I cannot consider myself a successful entrepreneur yet because I have a long way to go to meet my ultimate goal. [WIK](#)

