

An Interview with Vic Yau: Tips from the Top

'I'll get the job done.' This slogan from the Chief Executive, despite being a tall order at times, should be the work ethic of all of us, and our alumnus, Mr. Vic Yau, is an enthusiastic advocate of this philosophy. Vic is currently serving as the Assistant Director (Media) in the Office of the Chief Executive. In May 2009, Vic talked with Connection, the English school magazine, in a small coffee shop where he shared with us his notions of life and work and reminisced about his school days.

Q: Would you briefly tell us about your duties?

A: I mainly help the Chief Executive deal with media matters, handle interviews and all kinds of activities that are related to public relations.

Q: Are you responsible for writing the speeches for the Chief Executive?

A: I am not a professional speech writer though colleagues and I prepare the speeches for him. Since the speeches can encompass a very wide range of subjects, if part of the speech is not relevant to the topic, our job is to do a bit of refinement to improve it and to give it a more lively delivery.

Q: Have you had any interesting events working with Mr. Donald Tsang?

A: I have a lot of meetings, meet a lot of new friends, I've learned about the media work and I'm able to witness some major decision-making processes of the government. They are all very interesting, exciting and rewarding experiences for me. Every day is exciting and something always awaits me.

Q: Why did you choose the civil service?

A: I didn't choose to be a civil servant. I was very much influenced by events. 12 years ago, I graduated from the University of Hong Kong, thinking about further studies. So I applied for a scholarship. Unfortunately, I failed to win the scholarship and though I was admitted to the university that I applied for, it eventually turned out that it was beyond my means.

At the same time, I applied for the position of administrative officer, so I did the interview and the written exams. In the end, I was selected. I didn't have any serious thoughts about being a civil servant in my school days – it just happened.

To date, I have been with a number of departments, like the Transport Bureau. I was even sent to Belgium a couple of years ago. In short, I have had a lot of interesting experiences and I don't regret being chosen to be a civil servant.

Q: It's said that civil servants in Hong Kong are smart but stereotypical. Do you agree?

A: Many of them are smart, yes. But considering creativity, a modern government has to be creative, so do the civil servants. As a matter of fact, human beings are born to create.

Still, we are living in a community, with social norms and guidelines. Working in the government is

just like working in any big firm or school. You have rules to follow so that members can work together but those rules may not always be compatible with creativity. Occasionally you need to forgo the latter so the processes can comply with the norms.

That's not necessarily bad because to run a big organization, you must have rules to follow. The stakeholders expect the government to follow the rules, not just do what civil servants want. Equilibrium must be attained.

Undoubtedly however, we need to be innovative these days, particularly in the PR firm in which I am working. We need to be creative and exercise more of our creative minds to discern what more can be done.

Q: Should students in Hong Kong learn about politics?

A: Everyone should. In fact, politics is part of life, just like economics, it affects you in some way. Our society is formed by people who are different but who live together. We have a political system in which we can elect our own representative to debate and resolve conflicts, so it is all politics. I'm not encouraging you to become political science students. Studying political science is something more complicated. You don't need to be political science students to learn politics, reading newspapers and paying more attention to current affairs are ways of understanding politics too.

Q: Do you lead a busy life?

A: Absolutely. I'm just too busy.

Q: How can you strike a work-life balance?

A: I don't think I've struck a work-life balance. But as a Christian, I believe my job is given to me by God. If that's so, I have to do it. I'm not bound to do every bit of it well, but I try my best. That might result in a busy life, but it's a 'calling' at that particular time. I just need to live it and life must go on. But it's still important for me to strike a balance, as it is for pupils like you. I have a feeling that students in Hong Kong are far too busy, and maybe Hong Kong is too competitive. There's a passage in the Bible that has inspired me recently. 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Sometimes you have to rest to learn that life in this world is a lot bigger than you and me. Only when you sit down silently and do some soul searching can you appreciate what life is about.

Q: Is it the only way that you deal with stress? Do you have other interest?

A: I like running because it's a very good way to reduce stress. When I'm running, basically, I forgot everything.

Q: Which is more important to you now, your family, your job or your health?

A: Family, without a doubt. But there is an irony. The job obviously always comes last, but it's where you spend most of your time. Sometimes we don't like our lives because we know that we

have more important things to do, but we just don't have the time. It's a hard part of life and that's a big challenge for everyone – to prioritize things so that when you come to the end of your life, you won't have regrets.

However, I truly want to spend more time with my friends, my family and God.

Q: Do you have any other aspirations for your life?

A: I just want to lead a fruitful life. Not necessarily a successful life, but one that I will not regret at the end. Life is not measured by achievements. Achievement is attained when God gives you a job and you do it in spite of the constraints. In the end, no matter whether you succeed or not, you have paid your dues, done your part and given your best. So I spend very little time planning how my career should go. I spend more time focusing on how to do my job well now.

Q: Would you start a second career?

A: I don't know yet. I think it is good not just for me, but for everybody to have more than one job in life. I would not turn down the opportunity to have a second or third career some time in the future.

Q: Instead of seeking another job, would you like to continue with your academic pursuits?

A: It was the dream of my earlier life. I am not sure if at some point I will resume it again, but it would be interesting if someday I were mentally and financially prepared to go back to school.

Q: What would be your ideal discipline?

A: From my very early school days I have always been in love with history. I was very much influenced and inspired by my secondary school teacher and that was the subject I studied in college.

I remain a lover of history now. It just gives me a lot fun to read them, to learn more about what happened in the past, not just in Hong Kong, but around the world.

Q: What inspiration can history bring you?

A: It helps me understand the world and its people. Historical events are usually the result of human activities.

Human beings are very difficult to understand completely and by studying historical events I learn more about them. It also helps me to understand the present world better and to interact with people more successfully.

Basically history teaches us how to understand others and to develop empathy so we no longer see things only from our own perspective. Many of my peers see history merely as a subject requiring

the memorization of facts.

That's a misconception. It's much more fascinating than that. As we learn more history, the less memorization we have to do. The key task is to analyze, to understand, to summarize – and it calls for a good brain.

Q: And how about critical thinking skills? Aren't they as important?

A: I am not sure how similar history is to liberal studies. But critical thinking isn't just about being critical. History teaches us to be critical, but also to be tolerant. They seem to be unusual bedfellows but you need to accept people who are different from you. That's the most challenging part, not only for students, but for people in the government, for politicians and for everyone else.

Q: How do you feel towards HCY?

A: The teachers are caring and the students are courteous and committed. When I met my old primary schoolmates in later times, I discovered that other schools are very tied up in internal politics and students there are rather too worldly and unfocussed. HCY appears to focus on the academic, but it doesn't only advocate rote-learning. The personal touch is something intrinsic to the school.

Q: Did you have any leadership experience at school?

A: I was a house committee member.

Q: Can you share a memorable experience?

A: There were lots of exciting events. It was fascinating to work closely with schoolmates who were from different forms. It was the range in age that was the significant factor, and as a Form 6 student, I felt that I was the elder brother and could lead the younger students. It was an interesting experience.

Q: Thank you.