

DAVID TAN, PERTH, AUSTRALIA TAKING 100-PERCENT RESPONSIBILITY

Through his Buddhist practice and SGI activities, David Tan has learned to never give up.

David Tan's family emigrated to Australia from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1985 when he was 10 years old. The family moved because David's father, a chef with a major hotel chain, had been transferred to the hotel's newly opened branch in Perth. Life in a new country was exciting for young David, and even the difficulty he had communicating in English did not detract from his happiness in his new home. His two sisters and his parents were also content, and his life was relatively carefree until 1990 when, in his last year of secondary school, he was forced to think about the future. His fellow students were choosing subjects for the university entrance exams. However, due to his poor academic performance in secondary school, David was ineligible to take exams in many of the subjects he wished to pursue.

Faced with this situation, he became very depressed. He lacked direction and had very little confidence. It was at this low point in his life that David joined the Soka Gakkai International Australia (SGIA).

After three years of grueling study and a lot of chanting, he was able to graduate in 1997 with a major in accounting and finance. However, he was disappointed because he had not received any employment offers during his last year at university when companies were recruiting accounting students. Reflecting on this situation, he saw that he felt weak and powerless. He set about challenging himself to change this attitude because he saw that it not only affected his ability to find a job but also undermined his attitude toward life in general. He recalls: "It was a very difficult time for me, especially because I received so many rejection letters from employers. My Buddhist practice definitely helped me get through this period. I was frequently encouraged by the experiences of other members and by the guidance of SGI President Ikeda, and I became determined to change my pessimistic attitude and overcome my tendency to give up when faced with a challenge. Because I was unemployed at the time, I was able to devote much of my time to preparing for the SGIA Friendship Festival—the first nationwide SGIA event to be held in the city of Perth. The preparation activities were challenging, and I was so busy preparing for this event that I had no time to worry about not having a job; I simply kept applying for jobs and was determined to find one before the start of the festival."

About one month prior to the event, David succeeded in finding an accounting position. He feels that his fundamental change in attitude was also reflected in other areas of his life: "I saw that no one else but me could change my life and that I was really the only one who could make things happen in my life, including finding a job. As a result of working closely with youth and other members of SGIA in preparation for the Friendship Festival, I came to see what a selfish attitude I had previously. Taking part in this event really helped me broaden my perspective on many things."

David is currently the Western Australia headquarters young men's leader of the SGIA. He feels that he has become a more confident, optimistic and capable person as a result of participating in SGIA activities. He has been inspired by President Ikeda's advice that

“Rather than try to move others, you must set yourself in motion, like an engine. Herein lies the driving force of victory.” David says: “I used to have the tendency to expect others to make things happen. My attitude was: ‘Why don’t you do this, or why don’t they do that?’ I became frustrated when people wouldn’t take action to produce the results I expected. Now I see that I was actually frustrated about not being able to make things happen or take action myself. Through my practice of Buddhism, I have been able to see my shortcomings and see that it is not others but myself who must make things happen, and I can do this by making changes in myself.”

David is now studying to become a CPA (certified public accountant)—not only to advance in his career, but also to show actual proof of the practice of Buddhism in his daily life.

In 1999, Sydney hosted the “World Boys and Girls Art Exhibition.” This SGI-sponsored event featured the drawings and paintings of children from around the world based on the theme of global citizenship. In commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the establishment of SGIA, the members in Perth created a short multimedia CD-ROM based on the exhibition. This CD-ROM, intended to foster awareness of global citizenship, was shown to 400 guests who attended the anniversary celebrations. Among those present was Mike Board, minister for citizenship and multicultural affairs.

David says the CD-ROM was so well received that, with the encouragement of Mr. Board, SGIA has decided to redesign it for use in schools. He says: “We are hoping to finish this project in early 2000. The CD can be used by individuals at home as well as by teachers in the classroom. The diversity of artistic expression on the CD can be used to spark discussion around questions such as: ‘What country do you think this painting comes from?’ ‘Why do countries have wars?’ and ‘What would you do to heal the world?’”

At work and in his Buddhist activities, David now takes 100-percent responsibility to work for people’s happiness without relying on others. He says: “I think that youth, especially, must follow this spirit. We must never forget our goals and never be afraid to muster the fighting spirit to overcome the negative forces inherent in our lives. We must never give up.”

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