

Willie Cheng (2003) publishes book, *Doing Good Well*



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Many retired partners/senior executives have something they really want to do when they retire. For Willie Cheng (2003), that something was to write a book. And just five years into his retirement, he's done it. *Doing Good Well: What Does (and Does Not) Make Sense in the Nonprofit World* offers readers a new perspective on the nonprofit sector and is being distributed through bookstores in countries around the world. It is also available through Amazon.com. Since its launch in October 2008, the book has received several favorable reviews, including in Singapore's national daily, *The Straits Times*.

A "thinking man's guide to the nonprofit world" wasn't exactly the story that Willie had planned to tell. "I really wanted to write a science fiction novel. I am a big Isaac Asimov fan," he shared. However, Willie has a long history of charitable work, starting in his early years at Andersen Consulting when he was encouraged to get involved in the community and with fundraising. Then about a year before his retirement, he was asked to chair the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre in Singapore which gave him "a different and macro perspective of the nonprofit world."

At that time, the SARS crisis had galvanized the nation, and the "Courage Fund" was established for donations to the cause.



Willie Cheng

But as Willie explained, "There was too much money going to the fund, and it occurred to me that how the money comes in and how it's used weren't necessarily well connected." This became the topic of the first article he published in 2004 for *SALT*, the Centre's nonprofit magazine. Entitled, "The Missing Hand of Adam Smith," he made a comparison of fundraising operations at two national charities that provided kidney dialysis. That article eventually led to a management scandal at the National Kidney Foundation and triggered major charity reforms in Singapore. After a few more articles in *SALT* and other publications, one of Willie's colleagues suggested that he put them into a book. Soon he was approached by several publishers. He signed up with John Wiley & Sons and set

out to rewrite his published work from an international point of view and bolster his material with extensive research and anecdotes from his experiences both in consulting and with nonprofits.

Changing the nonprofit paradigm

Willie's perspectives are both unique and provocative. In many cases, he deconstructs and reconstructs nonprofit paradigms. One of these ideas, which may sound counterintuitive, is that charities should seek extinction rather than growth. "For example, several charities that help migrant workers do so by setting up shelters for abuse victims. Well, their ultimate measure of success should not be how many more shelters they have or how many more victims they take care of. Rather, it should be that eventually, there are no abuse cases and there is no need for the shelters," he explained. "Most people, especially those of us from the commercial world, think that growth is good. But a charity is set up to solve a particular societal problem and its mission is accomplished when that problem is solved."

Similarly, he frowns upon the idea of a charity excessively saving surplus money for a rainy day. "Without a large surplus to fall back on, charities are more likely to stay relevant to the community. As donors continually give money, they are able to require ongoing accountability of the charities. Excessive reserves also deprive other deserving charities of their funds."

During the 20 chapters in the book, Willie evaluates the spectrum of issues in the nonprofit sector, taking a close look at all those who have a stake in the process: the donors, beneficiaries, regulators, volunteers, management and the community. He concludes that the different players in the charity world must coalesce on the issues for an effective

and self-sustaining "charity ecosystem" that is currently evolving from "just doing good" to "doing good well."

His ideas have resonated with former Accenture colleagues as well. The book features a foreword by Chairman & CEO Bill Green, who sees value in this book for business leaders as well as individuals just seeking to understand the charity landscape. "At the end of the day, this is about developing a more holistic and integrated approach to change in the nonprofit sector," he wrote. "(This) book is a powerful reminder that at the individual level we can make a lasting contribution to society...and do good well."

Leveraging his talents

Willie credits his 26 years of training and experience at Accenture for "the critical thinking and the framing of problems and solutions" which has helped him in his nonprofit work. It has also helped him understand the vast differences between the corporate world and the nonprofit world. "When I first suggested changes, I usually met with resistance," he said. "Over time, I realized that not everything in business applied to nonprofits, and not all the ways that nonprofits were run worked that well, either."

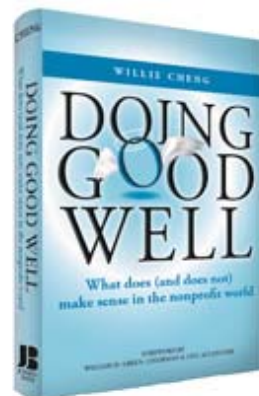
These days, he is often approached by those who are retiring or are about to retire with an interest in charitable work. His advice: "Do what interests you or you have a passion for, but give from your strengths, and leverage your talents."

Willie also stresses the importance of spending time with the people you are helping in order to keep yourself relevant and to be better able to empathize with them. "I think generally we all want to make a difference and everyone wants meaning in their lives," he said. "But there are a million ways to do that.

Choose the ones you have a real passion and interest for. The most meaning comes from those you can relate to."

Now that his book has been published, Willie has time to reflect on the experience. "I never realized what was involved in writing a book. It's a lot more effort than you may have bargained for." He is currently promoting his book through endorsements and book reviews, but has chosen not to go on the speaking circuit. Instead, he will continue serving on the boards and volunteering with local nonprofits including the Lien Centre for Social Innovation and Caritas Singapore which he chairs. He is donating all royalties from sales of his book to a local charity. He also intends to stick to his original plan of writing a science fiction novel. "I had told my staff and partners when I retired that I would do one. So, I will definitely start on this in the new year."

For more information about *Doing Good Well*, and for details on where to purchase the book, please visit <http://doinggoodwell.net/>. Willie can be contacted at willie@doinggoodwell.net.



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