

Doing Good Well:

What Does (and Does Not) Make Sense in the Nonprofit World

BOOK REVIEW BY
Suzanne Lim

In his new book, Willie Cheng offers a fresh, engaging perspective on the non-profit world. Suzanne Lim flips the pages of this weighty tome.

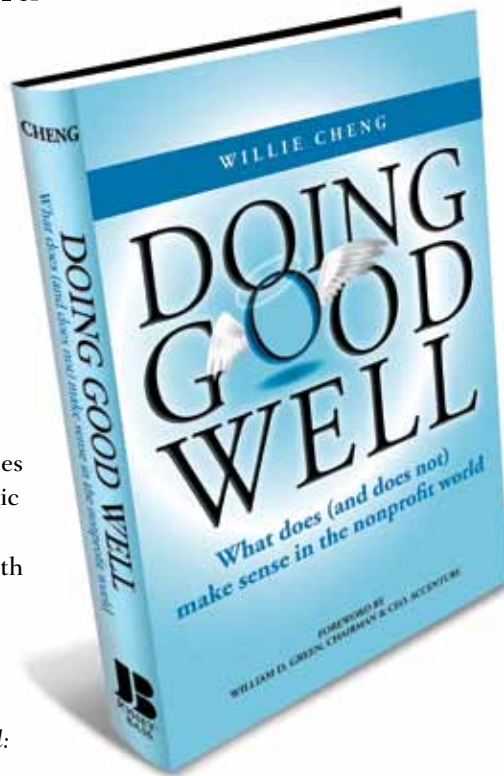
Many in the local non-profit scene have lamented about the lack of published resources dealing with the conceptual and strategic issues that plague the non-profit world. Certainly, none has dealt specifically with the non-profit scene here in Singapore –until now.

Those who know Willie Cheng, the former NVPC chairman, will be thrilled to find that *Doing Good Well: What Does (and Does Not) Make Sense in the Nonprofit World* is 20 chapters of characteristically provocative insights on the non-profit world, warts and all, peppered with personal anecdotes and Cheng's trademark quirky sense of humour.

Well-versed in the ways of the corporate world thanks to his 26 years at Andersen Consulting and then Accenture, Cheng makes the trenchant point that applying pure corporate principles to the non-profit world is a recipe for certain (if not ultimate) disaster.

The first half of the book discusses and analyses this position in detail, with Cheng often offering radical views. In chapter 5, *Endgame: Extinction*, for instance, he argues that contrary to the conventional definition of success (which is growth and more growth), the real definition of success for a non-profit should be its demise.

Throughout, Cheng prods and forces uncomfortable questions. How charitable are we really? And for those of us who fall



into the category of society's elite, are we really pulling our weight on the charity front? Corporations are not spared either as he questions the rationale behind businesses engaging in corporate social responsibility, offering his own insight as to what the positioning of good corporate social responsibility really ought to be.

For many in the sector, chapter 19, *NKF: The Saga and Its Paradigms*, is the first time Cheng has examined the scandal and its fallout in any great depth. Throughout the chapter, Cheng thoughtfully applies the various paradigms covered in the earlier chapters to NKF, making this case study a riveting read.

That the book manages to fill a much needed gap in the non-profit literary scene while being, at the same time, an intelligent, analytical and thoroughly engrossing read makes it a worthy addition to the library of anyone interested in the non-profit world. ☆



By learning some basic principles, you can ensure your cause will always attract support. Even when times are tough.

Disasters, or one-off local events, still prompt great generosity from the public. But it's becoming harder to get support for less high profile causes, especially in times of economic downturn.

The question is, how do we whip up support for our causes when potential donors are more concerned about their own financial problems?

There are a number of key donor questions that NPOs need to address effectively:

Trust: Who are these people who are asking for my money?

Transparency: Where is my money going?

Clutter: There are so many seemingly worthwhile causes. How do I choose which to support?

Solutions: Will my money achieve something, or am I pouring money down a black hole?

Research also shows that successful charities are characterised by:

Staying in touch: Successful NPOs work hard to maintain links with the people they have helped, their families and friends, and other people who have an emotional attachment to the cause.

Encourage sharing in your success: Successful causes talk about their successes – the people they have helped, the progress made, the difference being made to people's lives.

Focus on small steps: People know that complex problems take time, wisdom and patience to solve. Sometimes, they doubt whether their small contribution can make a difference. So, request support for achievable, easily imaginable steps – eg we want to buy 1,000 wheelchairs.

Try not to panic people: You may need \$250,000 urgently, but saying so can make the problem seem large and intractable and make potential donors question whether their small contribution will make any difference.

Make your message and call to action stand out as much as possible: People have limited time and attention spans. They're exposed to thousands of marketing messages every day. Successful campaigns quickly and succinctly state their objectives. ☆

Guy Hearn is Director of Client Service & Insight at TNS Singapore and Hong Kong.