ON GIVING AND GRATITUDE

Having benefited from financial assistance schemes in the past, alumnus Mr Victor Leow found a way to pay it forward through his alma mater.

I t was quite a wake-up call. Here I was, wanting to give back, and yet I couldn’t.”

So he went back and did some soul-searching, rethinking his strategy of making ad-hoc donations. Speaking to close friends and family members about his intentions, he eventually learnt of NTU’s endowment fund, a part of which is dedicated towards supporting needy students through bursaries. In it, Mr Leow saw an opportunity for philanthropy through his alma mater, allowing him to give in a more sustainable manner.

The Leow Joo Teng & Chang Choon Har bursary was thus established at NTU. “My family was supportive of this move,” said Mr Leow, adding that his wife, Madam Julie Chang, who owns and manages the preschool group ‘Learning Kidz’, also champions education.

Initially, the couple had some qualms about having the bursary awarded in their names—they had always been private people. “But at the end of the day, the important thing was to focus on helping financially needy students across all disciplines,” Mr Leow noted.

IGNITING FEARLESS AMBITION

In Mr Leow’s opinion, an ideal society is one where hardworking, intelligent and sincere students should never have to worry about money. “It is also one where those who have done well for themselves on the back of financial assistance choose to pay it forward.”

“A bout ten years ago, I went down to Ngee Ann Kongsi ready to make a contribution. There, I was told that they are a private charitable organisation, and they don’t take public donations. It was quite a wake-up call. Here I was, wanting to give back, and yet I couldn’t.”

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“I think most people want to give back in varying degrees, but they don’t know how to,” he mused, recalling his own experience. “I think that there should be more awareness on the channels by which one can support worthwhile causes.”

At the same time, he thinks that students who may be struggling financially should be confident in their own abilities and forge on without fretting too much about their situation.

“They should just focus on what is their core role at that point in time and rest assured that everything else will fall into place,” he said, suggesting that a good student is unlikely to encounter problems with securing scholarships. “We should have enough layers of support for people to turn to. But of course, people should not take things for granted.”

At the end of the day, Mr Leow hopes to see more deserving people—especially those without connections and affluent backgrounds—succeed. He emphasised that upon entering the working world, young people need to remain strong in moral character and resist the temptation to play up their connections.

“As they progress in their career, they should also feel the need to return something to society. This way, I think we can create a society with more empathy,” he said.

While many students stand to benefit from the Leow Joo Teng & Chang Choon Har bursary, Mr Leow feels that his family is the greatest beneficiary. “We’re showing our children that life is not just about working hard, being honest, growing in intelligence, and building a career, but also about being mindful and grateful for how you have benefitted from the kindness of others.”

SUPPORT FOR THE NEEDY

And progress he did. Mr Leow went to a neighbourhood school, receiving support from the Ngee Ann Kongsi bursary. A prodigious and hardworking student, his academic results qualified him to study at Hwa Chong Junior College, then at NTU. Both times, he earned himself Ngee Ann Kongsi scholarships to relieve his parents’ burden of financing his education.

Feeling a tremendous sense of gratitude to the private philanthropic organisation that had sponsored him during his formative years, he decided to return the favour once he was relatively stable in his career.

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