

## **Opportunities and Talent**

The City of Perth is the most isolated city in the world. Perth, on the west coast of Australia, is the capital of the State of Western Australia, the largest State on the continent. Perth, with a population of nearly 2 million people, is the city I lived in before moving to Hong Kong. The size of the State of Western Australia is enormous by any standard. It takes nearly three days to drive by car from Perth to the northern parts of the State and five days if you wish to drive across the continent to Sydney on the east coastline.

You can actually 'feel' the isolation when you live in Perth. To the west is the Indian Ocean with no land between Perth and the South Africa. To the south is the Southern Ocean with Antarctica the next landfall. To the north and to the east are vast areas of desert. Indeed, the nearest cities to Perth are Denpasar on the Indonesian island of Bali and Adelaide, two thousand kilometers away in South Australia. The only people living between Perth and those two cities are living in small towns in remote mining, agricultural and fishing areas.

In comparison, we live in a city that is certainly not isolated. If we take a two hour plane journey to the west, to the north, or to the east of Hong Kong we will travel over areas of mainland China that are home to over 300 million people. Also close by are Japan, Vietnam, Chinese Taipei and South Korea. The contrast to Perth could not be greater.

Perth and Hong Kong are also different in another way. As the capital city of Western Australia, Perth is the centre of the State's enormous deposits of raw materials. Western Australia has some of the world's largest supplies of iron ore, natural gas, bauxite, nickel, gold and diamonds. It is also a leading world producer of sheep and wheat. By contrast, in Hong Kong we have a very small area of land with no natural resources.

The question is; what do the people of Perth do to make use of its natural resources in spite of its isolation, and what do the people of Hong Kong do to make use of its location on the east coast of the Asian continent in spite of its total lack of raw materials? The answer is that Perth and Hong Kong have learnt to 'think smart', to make good use of talented people and to maximise their opportunities. Recently, both cities have looked to mainland China to drive their economies. Perth is experiencing an economic boom as it tries to keep up with the demands of China's industries for iron, aluminium and gas. Hong Kong is also looking at ways to maximise the opportunities that can be derived from being so close to a quarter of the world's population and an economy that is rapidly catching up with the United States and Japan.

Last week I went to a meeting at the University of Hong Kong. The meeting brought together leading business people in Hong Kong, all the faculty deans and some students attending HKU. The aim of the meeting was to discuss ways that the University might work with the business community to train students for the future needs of Hong Kong.

At the meeting were some of the leaders of the biggest companies in Hong Kong. Some of the companies were local businesses, other were multi-nationals. These business leaders all said the same thing, that is, that Hong Kong companies need to be creative and innovative in order to stay ahead of the changes taking place in our rapidly changing world.

The business leaders said that the new graduates they were employing from universities in Hong Kong were very intelligent and obviously had received an excellent education both at school and at university. However, they did say that intelligence itself was not enough in this day and age. The business leaders indicated that when they are interviewing applicants for positions in their companies in 2006 they are looking for more than just academic results. What they are looking for is 'talent', that is, a young person who has the ability to think creatively, to take the initiative, to be a leader.

The business leaders said that in their companies, the best employees were those who had an international outlook and who were prepared to work anywhere in the world but particularly in China. Their major concern, however, was that they were finding it increasingly difficult to employ people with talent. Most of the graduates they interview are intelligent but very few have that spark, that special quality that makes them different.

So what are we doing here at St. Paul's College to prepare our students for the opportunities of the future? If we look carefully, we see that we use English as the means of instruction in most of our subjects; we place great importance on the learning of the Chinese Language; we offer a Global Classroom programme of world tours; and we consider student leadership an important part of building confidence and character. In other words, we aim to provide a well-balanced education that hopefully brings out the talent that is in each of you. These are the qualities that the business leaders said we need in the Hong Kong of the future.

As the business leaders at the meeting continued with their presentations, I started thinking about one or two other issues. While they were talking about talent, I was reminded of an assembly earlier this year when I spoke about the problems being experienced at Real Madrid, the Spanish football club. You will remember that while Real Madrid had playing for them arguably the most talented footballers in Europe, they were not performing as a team. The same can be said of many companies; they might have talented employees but they need to be able to work together as a team. Surprisingly, the business leaders at the meeting did not mention team work.

I was also increasingly concerned that they talked only about preparing young people for a Hong Kong of big business and multi-national companies. But the world of work is not only about businesses and corporations. Many talented people will become medical doctors, teachers, lawyers, architects and journalists. Others will become politicians and civil servants. Some will be charity workers, social workers or join the Church. Others will see the future in their small family business.

Indeed, if we take a close look at the list of the most famous St. Paul's College alumni we will see that it is dominated not by people in big business but by those who moved into the professions. For example, past students of this school include the architect who designed the newer Bank of China building in Central; bishops of Hong Kong and of Toronto in Canada, members of the Legislative Council, opera singers, university professors and so forth. The list is really very impressive. All of these past St. Paul's College students used their talents to the full, took the opportunities as they arose and pursued successful careers.

A number of these past students, along with very many parents and visitors, will join us during the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities planned over the next three months. The first activity will be the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary Exhibition on Saturday, 28 October. I understand that many of you, along with your teachers, are working hard to bring the Exhibition to life. I hope that the displays and demonstrations planned for Exhibition Day really do showcase the wonderful talent that we have here at St. Paul's College.

I urge each of you to use the talents that you possess, be prepared to work in team, and grasp opportunities as they arise. There are exciting times ahead for Hong Kong. It is time that you all started to think about what part you wish to play in that future.

jrk