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Leadership Profile: Belinda Yeung

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Belinda Yeung, a brilliant leader in the field of hospitality and tourism, graduated in 1982 from the Hilton School of Hotel Management at the University of Houston and joined Regal Hotel International Holdings Limited in 1987. She has assumed various leadership positions in the Century City International Holdings Limited group of companies, which Regal Hotels International (RHI) is a major player (Rotary, 2014). Now holding positions of Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer of Regal Hotel International Holdings Limited, Yeung has well-divide her time between her work duties and household post.

As Chief Operating Officer, she has successfully led Regal through difficult times such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 and the 2008 economic tsunami. Under her watch, Regal has grown from owning and managing seven hotels in 2007 to 24 in Hong Kong and other cities in China, operating and opening over 9,000 guest rooms, 241 banquet venues, and 100 restaurants and bars under its portfolio, staffed by 7,800 employees (Rotary, 2014)

Her career has been formulated on the premise that she gives back to society a fair measure of the benefit she has derived from her vocation. This can be seen from her work for various governmental and non-governmental committees and associations, and her services to the community through Rotary and other charitable organizations. Social responsibility seems to be one of the many strengths in Yeung's leadership style. Apart from her positions in the United States, Yeung has variously served as a member of the Hong Kong Chief Executive Election Committee, first Vice Chairwoman of the Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners, Fellow of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) and chairwoman of their Industry Advisory Committee of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management, and the Corporate

Partner Scheme Committee of the Wofoo Leaders' Network (Regal Hotels International Holdings Limited, 2010).

Yeung devoted her career in the hospitality industry in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and the U.S.A. on both the multi-unit corporate and the single unit hotel property management levels (Regal Hotels International Holdings Limited, 2010). As the Chief Operating Officer, she is in charge of the operations of all Regal Hotels in Hong Kong and Mainland China. In addition to her hotel management responsibilities, Yeung is also responsible for the human resources management of the Century City Group. Consequently, it could be seen that by making rational decisions that leads the company into a success, Yeung is a transformational leader. She has high integrity and the ability to share her vision via well-connected communication, which allows a company to develop a highly productive collaboration. She also set a clear goal for the company and her subordinates in order to retrieve high productivity and engagement in workplace.

The RHI, with its 2003 net cash flow of HK\$203.3 million, was planning to launch its luxury residential project comprising 139 houses in Hong Kong (Kwong, 2005). However, The SARS outbreak in the beginning of the year 2003 directly affected the hospitality business segment in Asia, especially Mainland China and Hong Kong, since it began in the Guangdong province of China, which borders on Hong Kong. Even though China National Tourism Administration expected its country to lose US\$33 billion in tourism revenue from this outbreak, Yeung and the management team decided that the project could still be completed. The Regal Bay project was then prepared to launch in the second half of the year and hoping to raise HK\$5 billion in return (HVS, 2003). With Yeung and her insightful management team, and with the hotel market in Hong Kong recovered from SARS phenomenon in

2014, managed to increase the occupancy level and combined average room rate for the five Regal Hotels in Hong Kong by 40% and 14% respectively (Kwong, 2005). Yeung presented her teamwork capability in being a part of the board even though she has just been appointed in June 2002, and she also led the team with calmness consideration and optimistic viewpoints of the hotel industry in Hong Kong. Under her watch, Yeung led Regal Hotels International Holdings Limited into the Shanghai market. She put her effort in establishing a remarkable brand by tracking records in Greater China as well as internationally.

Moreover, in the year of 2008 the hotel market faced another obstacle, the economic recession in Asia region. Nevertheless, Yeung, who was an executive director, set an example of being calm and optimistic by unveiling the two new brands, Regal Royale and Metro Regal under the Regal Hotel brand. She can be seen as a visionary leader when she set this new goal for the employees in the group who work forward in order to get the best result for the brand. As most of Hong Kong workforce is employed in services, retail, tourism and the logistical and financial sectors, it can be seen why Yeung has confident in her forecast of the market location as she said that despite the slowing growth in room rates and a slight decline in occupancy in Shanghai, the demand still remained strong for the hotel market segment. As Shanghai's hotel would benefit from the country's strong economic growth and the 2010 World Expo (Liu, 2008), Yeung saw the opportunity to expand the hotels.

Furthermore, Regal Group, under Yeung as the Chief Operating Officer, partnered with Sicheng Group in a major hotel project in Suzhou, China in 2013. A strong brand name and extensive hospitality management experience of the Regal Group will help accelerate the development pace and bring satisfactory business

performance for the hotel in the project. Not only a major hotel project that the Group partners with, it also interested in environment and sustainability. Under Yeung's watch, she addressed the commitment of the group to the impacts of economic, social, and environment sustainability. She acknowledged the importance of transparent and credible reporting of environmental and social performance and the need to take a holistic management approach across the company and its properties (EarthCheck, 2012). As an Executive Director and chief Operating Officer, Yeung established the Sustainability Program, "We Love our Planet" with an environmentally responsible management focus to engage the guests, associates and their families through the sustainability process. The intent was to also maintain transparency through the EarthCheck Certification program in order to assist the Company in measuring and reporting its sustainability performance (EarthCheck, 2012). Henceforth, Yeung and her development team developed a set of environmental policies and guidelines for its employees and associates. With all these partnership projects, Yeung was showing that she has a servant leadership style. Not only business-centric, but she also thinks about sustainability and cares to develop the policies and guidelines thriving to prove to society that she, and the Hotel Group, cares for the environment. She values an importance of social services.

Compared to other leader profiles, research results of Belinda Yeung has not focus solely on her leadership styles. In the classic short story in the Sherlock Holmes series, *Silver Blaze* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1894), Holmes found a critical piece of evidence that help catch the antagonist, the dog that does not bark. A guard dog that does not bark during the commission of the crime guided Holmes to notice significant evidence that pointed out a particular person who could have committed the crime. "The midnight visitor was someone the dog knew well,"

Holmes concluded. This story shows the importance of expanding the search for clues beyond the obvious and visible; the dog does not bark does not mean there is nothing going on. Seeing what is being offered might not always provide useful information, rather focusing on the unseen and observing the missing points could give an idea in finding what is missing. People, too, are very good in paying attention to what could be seen and heard but not to the things that could not be seen or heard. Lacking direct information on Belinda Yeung's leadership style could be seen as a clue in identifying her various styles.

Highly successful businessmen and women are often the subject of articles and books that attempt to determine the critical factors that led to their wealth and fame. For each of these business superstars, there were thousands of run of the mill entrepreneurs who achieved either modest success or complete failure (Dan, 2012). The study of Yeung's leadership profile shows that she shared some of the quality characteristics with highly published successful people. Yeung serves well as an example of a leader who shows the followers that she is willing to do the job they are doing and is not just sitting behind her desk and pointing a finger. Her leadership styles could definitely be seen in the absent of the seeable objects, showing that Yeung does not focus on having just one leadership style. Even though the overall business environment in China and Hong Kong is now very challenging and competitive, Yeung is still working hard to contribute her professionalism and leadership to the organization and the tourism industry.

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