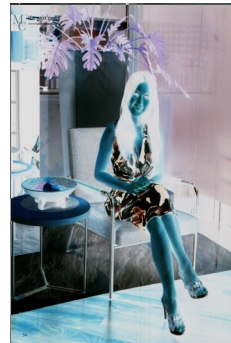


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text by Sarah Sabaratnam

The Girl with a GREEN Heart

In the face of rising concerns about climate change, both globally and locally, one forward-looking company, YTL Corporation, set the right course by going green, way before the term “climate change” became a recognisable phrase. Ruth Yeoh is the company’s advocate for doing things sustainably and rising to the challenge of mitigating global warming.

At only 25, Ruth, the director of investments at YTL Corporation, exudes such certainty and conviction about the need to do business sustainably that one can’t help but be bought over.

She exudes this fervour not just with a well-modulated voice, sparkling eyes and expressive gestures of hand, but with well-researched facts to back her claims. Then, there’s that enchanting smile. It is hard not to be captivated.

“I’ve always been very passionate about the environment,” she says. “I think I get it very much from my father. He has a green heart.”

Her father is business tycoon Tan Sri Dr Francis Yeoh, YTL’s managing director. He has groomed his daughter, not just to be a good businesswoman but a sensible and caring one too. This means doing business with a conscience, and always choosing the right way of doing things.

“He taught me to do business in the right way — which includes taking care of the environment. He believes in protecting God’s creation, which is imperative for our survival. We subscribe very much to the Bible’s teaching that ‘The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it’.”

Ruth believes her awareness for the environment began at a young age, about six, when her father would take their family to their private island resort (before it became the world-renowned Pangkor Laut Resort).

“He would tell us about his dream to build a sustainable, eco-friendly resort with minimum impact on the environment.”

He evoked the interest of his children by always pausing and asking if they knew what species of plant they were looking at, or what animal or bird they had just witnessed.

“We have done things together like plant seeds on our island. It is very much in his soul to do things sustainably, and this has come naturally to me.”

Why go green?

In time, Ruth, through her own initiative delved deeply into why it makes good business sense to go green, conserve energy, use renewable fuels and reduce wastage.

YTL’s own experience has shown her that by reducing the impact of the company’s operations on the environment, they not only save money, but are doing their part to ensure a better future for generations to come.

“I would feel very guilty if I didn’t do something about the death and devastation all around me — especially when I have the capacity to do something,” she says.

Her belief in sustainable business led her to co-edit and author a chapter in the book *Cut Carbon, Grow Profits: Business Strategies for Managing Climate Change and Sustainability*.

The book, launched in 2007, was co-edited with Dr. Kenny Tang, founder/CEO of Oxbridge Climate Capital, who is among the leading UK experts in the fields of carbon reduction and clean technology.

She had met him at a function, and he was surprised at how knowledgeable she was in principal climate change issues. He immediately got her on board the book project. The book essentially addresses what businesses and cities can do to address the crucial issue of climate change and compiles the works of academics from all over the world.

The chapter Ruth wrote (Chapter 6) looks at what companies can do to reduce their environmental footprint, which not only helps reduce carbon and the effects of climate change but can help a business grow its profits as well.

She makes a good argument for investing in renewable energies, which is “the fastest growing energy sector in terms of per cent annual increase”.

Investment in this sector, she says, will also respond to global environmental, economic, safety, social and sustainability goals.

Global investment in the clean energy sector reached a record US\$30billion (RM99billion) in 2004, which represents four per cent of the global capacity.

“It is becoming a big business, attracting some of the world’s largest companies, including Sharp, Siemens, General Electric and Royal Dutch Shell,” she writes. “Market leaders

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championing renewable energy in 2004 included China in solar hot water, Germany in solar electricity, Brazil in biofuels and Spain in wind power.”

Ruth also believes that renewable energy has huge potential for growth in Asia. As a director of a company that has shrewdly ventured out into new territory such as utilities, e-solutions and transportation, and made a success of it, she knows what the business community is likely to stake their money in.

Viable energy sources.

“There is a growing belief among this community that renewable energy is a serious business opportunity.”

It is no surprise then that Ruth is an investment committee member for the Asian Renewable Energy and Environment Fund (AREEF) to which YTL is a regular contributor.

“I am very ethical about what goes into it. As a committee member I have a say as to what renewable energies we invest in and I will not agree to invest in uranium energy and nuclear energy.”

There are (should it be not yet?) yet proper measures in place, she says, to properly dispose off and manage the waste produced in the exploitation of these energy sources.

“A lot more work needs to be done in this area. Until then there are other much more viable energy sources we can invest in.”

YTL continues to look for ways it can invest in renewable energy in its own operations too. In Wessex Water, YTL is looking at using a windpower mill in one of its plants. At the Wessex Water’s headquarters, rainwater is harvested to flush toilets.

YTL’s Express Rail Link (ERL) project and the proposed Malaysia-Singapore fast train project are designed to reduce carbon emissions through efficient usage and by taking millions of cars off the roads each year.

As the first Independent Power Producer in the country, YTL Power was instrumental in changing the Government’s policy to the use of clean fuels like natural gas.

In its power plants, YTL uses gas to fuel its operations and strives to reduce emissions to the bare minimum, adhering always to international standards.

“YTL was the first IPP to start using natural gas. It comes from a vision to do the right thing. Fossil fuels are dirty and using coal isn’t the best option. A lot of companies followed suit after that.”

The company has an ongoing a recycling campaign, with recycling bins on every floor. The money that is generated from

the project goes into the company’s relief and aid funds.

In a bid to grow awareness that energy-efficient buildings are the future of architecture and design, YTL Land and Development Berhad commissioned the Bird Island Green Homes Competition in 2007.

It is the first “green” architectural contest of its kind and has called on the talents of eight architects and designers from all over the world. They were to submit designs for six eco-friendly homes on Bird Island, a green haven located in the 35-acre Sentul Park.

“I’ve had a look,” says Ruth, “and the designs are really impressive. They are very much sustainable to the core.”

What she liked most about this project is that contestants were not limited to architects. Even environmental engineers were invited to participate.

Ruth first joined YTL Corporation in 2005, at the age of 22, after she graduated from the British University of Nottingham and earned an MSc in Management from the BASS Business School in London.

It didn’t take her long to incorporate the values she believed in into the company. As she toured the company’s operations she learned from senior engineers that YTL has always been very environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Setting targets.

“Our engineers showed me that this is what we have already been doing to reduce energy consumption and to be sustainable. But no one was keeping a record of what was being done.”

This led Ruth to document everything – she wrote reports, threw in some graphs and tables to show the performance, and gave it all a formal structure. She set realistic targets for the company to reduce emissions and published everything in the company’s first sustainability report, which came out in 2006.

It wasn’t long before it was recognised as the Best Social Reporting in an Annual Report at the ACCA Malaysia Environmental and Social Reporting Awards 2006.

She has gone on to write the company’s sustainability report for 2007 and the 2008 report.

Ruth is board member of Rare Conservation, an international conservation organisation. She is their youngest committee member but does not let that deter her from using the huge opportunity it affords her to influence the people of Southeast Asia.

“I believe my role is to help Rare expand its projects in Southeast Asia.”

On a personal level, Ruth hopes to contribute to the

regeneration and preservation of coral life near the fishing communities of Pangkor Island.

“Corals take years to regenerate, so it is important to protect the existing corals while bringing life back to ruined ones. This will bring the fish back and the communities benefit from it.”

Ruth was also the person behind the highly successful Climate Change Week that was organised in March 2007 and which received overwhelming response.

It included public screenings of the award-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* and a Cut Carbon, Grow Profits business conference for forward-thinking global CEOs and senior managers on how to operate in a low-carbon economy, while focusing on bottom lines and long-term solutions.

All this was done, she says, to get people to look at their own capacity to take better care of the environment, and to look at how businesses can adapt to mitigate the risks of climate change.

“I always wonder are my children going to see trees? Will they disappear in their lifetime? I have this vision to do my best for myself and for the future generations. I want them to see everything I have ever known in this earth.”

Due to its commitment to the environment, YTL Corporation was also invited in 2007 to be a participant at both the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference in Sydney and Forbes Global CEO Conference 2007. Here, climate change and energy security were on top of the agendas.

It also participated in conferences to raise further climate change awareness locally; supported the British High Commission (Malaysia) in its Cutting Carbon to Increase Profits Conference, and The Star newspaper's Green Every Day Festival held at the Forest Research Institute.

YTL's commitment to sustainable development is an example to all Malaysians, more so, businesses; it is a showcase of how simple measures by individuals and companies can lead to more efficiency, increased profits and a better world for us all.

It all boils down to choices.

“What I think we need in Malaysia is a more civil attitude. We don't have a civil society. Look at Singapore. Why is it so clean? So progressive? I believe there are a lot of caring Malaysians but it is frustrating because we don't have that civil mindedness.”

As for herself, Ruth intends to continue doing the best she can, making the right choices, and she intends to do it now, while she is still young.

