

CENDOL FOR THE SOUL



Musings on life, rules to live by

Once in a long time we chance across a person worth emulating, admiring. These people are usually great personalities or speakers. Sometimes they are both. HT recently had the chance to speak to Raymond Lew, CEO and President/Country Head, Sun Life Malaysia, a life insurance and family takaful provider.

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Lew, who is in his 50s, looks like someone in his late 30s, casually brushes off comments about his apparent youthfulness. As CEO of a young, emerging company of over 600 employees, he lives an undoubtedly busy life but still manages to take excellent care of himself.

We ask about his philosophy in life, to which he says: "I believe that there are three things we have to feed - the body, the mind, and the soul. Only when those are adequately fed, can we achieve a secure, meaningful and healthier life. Intrigued, we ask Lew to elaborate. He gladly explains the meaning of the seemingly simple quote.

FEED THE BODY

This is not just eating sufficiently to avoid malnutrition, Lew says. It involves watching what one puts into one's body - the importance of eating home-cooked meals and selecting a balanced variety of foods. He says: "In order for me to be at my peak daily, it is important to understand what I put into my body as it translates to how I feel and look on the outside. You don't have to eat expensive healthy or organic food all the times; just eating less processed foods is [sometimes] good enough. I look at getting the right nutrients, such as from vegetables, into the body to boost my energy levels and stay alert throughout the day."

In spite of his busy schedule, Lew is an ardent cook. "You'll see me at the wet market weekend mornings as I shop for ingredients for the day's meals," quips Lew. "I cook for my parents, who are in their 80s now, my children when they are home, and my extended family." Eating together is a great way for the family to bond, says Lew, noting that his parents are already at an advanced age and his children will be leaving the nest soon. He's on a quest to spend as much quality time together as possible and what better way than eating a healthy meal together.

Apart from food, feeding the body involves exercise, too, as Lew considers exercise as a 'nutrient' to keep the body healthy. Lew recommends walking every day after work as the simplest form of exercise one can do. Besides it is a great way to destress. A health scare years ago was a wake-up call for him to stay active and now he incorporates exercise such as working out at the gym into his daily regime and on weekends or when time allows, he brings his family hiking.

Last, but not least, Lew shares that getting sufficient sleep is also crucial to feeding the body. "Sleep is probably most neglected by people and the lack of it will significantly impact our productivity," he adds. He explains: "I make sure to get enough sleep daily in order to perform at my best physically and mentally as well as to also combat illnesses."

FEED THE MIND

The mind is an abstract concept and encompasses one's thoughts and consciousness. For Lew, one of the ways to feed one's mind is to look for mentors. His idea of mentorship is not the usual one we are all used to - where we get paired up with someone with more experience in an effort to better ourselves. Instead, Lew says one should find mentors in each area where one is trying to improve oneself. Everybody has different gifts and can teach you something different. "For instance, if I see my friend treating his children in a way I believe is better, then I will make a point to pay closer attention to how he or she interacts with their children."

A mentor should always be easily accessible, preferably someone that you can meet at least once a week. The main thing is to have several mentors to model, learn and rely upon for knowledge and wisdom that you can gather and use when dealing with challenging situations.

In the course of our life, mentors can also be changed to suit the different stages and needs, noted Lew. As one grows, the people and situation around the person changes, thus the needs evolve as well. Therefore, it is important to keep an open mind and to know when to seek out other mentors.



Feeding the mind also comes in the form of constantly learning. He says, "Learning is a lifelong journey that can open our minds to new possibilities and interests. You can learn by reading, listening to podcasts or taking online courses." On top of learning through reading which can widen knowledge and improve one's world view, Lew recommends picking a hobby (or hobbies). A hobby should be an activity that one loves to do and brings joy and gratification when done.

"Travelling should not be considered a hobby," says Lew. "Why do I say so? Well, you can only go travelling once or twice a year depending on your affordability. Does this mean you only need to feed your mind once or twice a year? If not, how are you going to keep your mind simulated and satiated the rest of the time?" His advice is to pick up something simple and can be done

regularly, if not daily for example, listening to music, playing an instrument, cooking or gardening.

Perhaps the most important aspect of feeding one's mind is to surround oneself with positive people, says Lew. "This is very important. There is a saying which goes *jìn zhū zhě chì, jìn mò zhě hēi*. It means we tend to turn out like the people we hang around with." He adds a piece of advice for parents: "You don't have to look too close at your own child. Just pay attention to the friends they hang around with. If they are good, your children will turn out fine. Otherwise, it is time to intervene."

On the same note, he adds, "We need to observe our surroundings better to feed the mind. It improves focus, memory, and analytical skills when we pay more attention to what is happening around us."

Ed: We did some digging and found out the Chinese phrase is literally translated into 'close to the cinnabar, it's easy to get red; close to the ink, easy to get black' which means the environment affects a strong influence on a person.

FEED THE SOUL

Of course, it makes sense that the soul shouldn't be left out and it does not necessarily have to be about religion in this case. Instead, Lew says the soul needs a deep sense of purpose. "Ask yourself 'why are you here', 'who am I?'" The answers to these questions are dynamic and powerful enough to drive us to make a difference in the world. For those who are religious, and believe God is with them and guides their path, then by extension everything they do should be for good [and with good intentions]."

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Lew also recommends making time to reflect daily. He explains, "It's easy to lose touch with ourselves in our current "always-on" environment. There are benefits to reflecting on what went well, what did not, the conversations and accomplishments each day. The learning from each experience helps us to improve and ensure we get better at what we do."

"Set aside personal time for the things that bring joy to you. Remember to fuel your passion and set time for what makes your soul happy," says Lew. We must fulfill our own needs and recharge ourselves before tending to others. This allows us to give our best to the responsibilities and tasks at hand.

LIVE IN THE NOW

In addition to feeding oneself well holistically, Lew stresses on the belief that one should live in the present. He explains: “Living in the future is when you constantly worry about the what-ifs and maybes whereas living in the past is when you constantly look back with regret, hatred or guilt. Choosing to live in either (past or future) is not healthy and robs you of the enjoyment you should be having now.”

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“By living in the present, you focus your attention and thoughts onto the task at hand, without preconceived notions about failure or rejection. It will allow you to achieve your best work with the right mindset,” says Lew.

Lew not only believes, live and breathe in his philosophy – he makes it a point to share and shape the lives of the people around him. His employees also benefit from his viewpoint as Lew constantly impresses upon them the value of living a balanced, happier and healthier life.

To strike a perfect balance between running a high-growth business and sustaining a healthy lifestyle is no easy feat but it’s certainly attainable with his formula of having the right mentality as Lew has shown us. We found his thoughts and tips inspiring and we hope they’ll benefit you as well.

HT

