

THE PURPOSE OF DIVERSITY AND WHY IT ACTUALLY MATTERS

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A visit with Dr. Ming Wang provides some practical perspectives for progress and prosperity

DO YOUR CUSTOMERS really understand the value proposition of your company? I recently conducted an eye opening interview with world renowned lasik surgeon, Dr. Ming Wang. He compared purposeful businesses to the human eye. The human eye has a physical element that enables us to see, but seeing without understanding what we are viewing is not always useful. There is an emotional component to sight that helps us interpret what we see and make sense of the images, shapes, and figures in our line of sight. Similarly, businesses may have a physical presence but sometimes lack an added dimension that helps others understand their value and make sense of the business' purpose.

To remedy this challenge, Dr. Wang has a surprising recommendation for enhancing your company. He believes the answer is increasing diversity, not just ethnic or gender diversity, but also diversity of thought. Are you open to hearing what people don't like about your business? Perhaps listening to people who have different perspectives can help you strengthen your company's weaknesses or focus more on its strengths.

As humans, we often identify physical or mental differences as divisive reasons to separate from one another, rather than appreciating those unlike characteristics and collaborating to determine how we can unite to grow and become stronger. We sometimes compete and fight against each other, when a shift in our thought process could drive us to seek out synergies that could allow our businesses to complement one another in a way that helps both advance.

Dr. Wang noted that the science and faith communities sometimes experience this dynamic as well. As someone who is passionate about both faith and science, Dr. Wang has invested a considerable amount of time exploring how to build a bridge between these two communities.

There are some who believe that praying eliminates the need for doctors and medicine. Others believe that doctors and medicine eliminate the need for prayer. For some, these two treatment options are polar opposites and cannot be used together.

Dr. Wang believes faith and science can work together. Perhaps praying is the first step that will help guide your doctor toward prescribing the appropriate treatment that will relieve your symptoms. These two communities do not have to compete. It is okay to believe that using both science and faith together is beneficial.

To reiterate how two opposites can come together for a common good, Dr. Wang noted how combining two unlike people can sometimes create a baby that is stronger than the offspring that is created by two people of the same ethnic group.

According to Dr. Wang, diseases like cystic fibrosis and sickle cell anemia can only occur when a child receives two recessive genes that cause that disease (one from each parent). Since recessive genes for cystic fibrosis are more common in Caucasians, and recessive genes for sickle cell anemia are more common in African-Americans, babies who are born of parents from two different ethnic groups are less likely to be born with either of these diseases. It is rare that both parents would contribute the recessive genes that are required for the disease to be present in the child.

This same concept can be applied to business. While it is easier and more comfortable to stay within your own culture, Dr. Wang notes that the

opportunities exist when different sectors and communities mix. We are stronger and have a greater ability to overcome challenges, when we build diverse teams of people from various ethnic, gender, religious, political and mental backgrounds. We should not aim to have diverse teams for the sake of promoting that fact on our website or to be compliant with laws and regulations. We should aim to build diverse teams because we actually believe diverse teams are stronger than homogenous teams.

In the short term, it is tempting to operate businesses that are filled with employees who are all alike because these types of teams tend to have more harmony, consensus, and agreement. However, it is important to know that harmony and agreement working together is not always a good thing. It can lead to group think and cause business leaders to be blind to the issues that are derailing their companies' success. Conflict, on the other hand, can often shine a spotlight on important issues and serve as the catalyst that helps your business overcome these challenges.

Dr. Wang also believes that it is important for entrepreneurs to remember that "doing the right thing" should drive their business decisions. His ethical compass drives his business decisions. When determining whether or not to operate on certain patients, he must first determine whether he believes operating will actually benefit them. Although performing surgery on every patient who wants it would generate short-term profits, poor outcomes would ultimately lead to declines in his business. His patient success rate for lasik surgery is high because he turns down patients who are not good candidates for surgery, and he only operates when he believes it is in the best long-term interest of the patient.

After speaking with Dr. Wang, it was apparent that he has a heart for helping others. In the American economy, the law of supply and demand suggests that products and services that are in higher demand can command higher prices. However, Dr. Wang has also established the Wang Foundation for Sight Restoration which provides free surgeries for blind or near-blind patients who need some of the most complicated surgical procedures. I asked Dr. Wang why it was so important for him to conduct these complex surgeries for free when he could make more money by charging these patients? He shared stories about the people who helped him when he was growing up in China and when he arrived in America. He wants to help others as a way of repaying all of the people who helped him throughout his life.



I believe Dr. Wang's engagement in these types of endeavors is what helps him make sense of his business. Being in position to help others drives him to be successful in his medical practice. As any entrepreneur knows, we all have to make money to survive, but we should all aim to fulfill a need first. When others see that we are operating a purposeful business that adds value to our community, the money will come, and it will support long-term sustainable business growth that lasts throughout your career.



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