

BY DARRYL WEE

# PHILANTHROPY IS PHILLIP'S SECOND NAME

COMMUNITY CHEST CHAIRMAN SEES GOLF AS A MEANS TO RAISE MONEY FOR CHARITY

I discovered the type of man Phillip was when I told him I was leaving the firm.

By this time, he had already retired from full time work at PwC, and was involved in a number of different personal projects that were important to him at a personal level.

Even so, Phillip Tan was one of the few people who really spent time and energy to explore how he could help me with my transition and we even discussed opportunities with some of the organisations he was involved in.

Today, Phillip Tan is the Chairman of Community Chest, a non-profit organisation established in 1983 to centralise fund-raising activities for various Voluntary Welfare Organisations in Singapore.

Prior to that, he was active with the Yellow Ribbon project and still champions helping former convicts re-integrate into society through providing work-placement opportunities.

In a study last year on the state of golf in Singapore by the Singapore Golf Association and the R&A, it was estimated that over \$63 million was raised for charities in Singapore using golf.

This number was in fact a conservative estimate, according to the study, but it goes to show how important and intrinsically linked, the game is to charity.

As leader of the nation's largest charity fund-raising machinery, we are keen to discover what Tan thinks on how the game is linked to philanthropy.

**Swing: How did you get started in golf?**

**Tan:** I started golf late, around 48-years-old, when I could afford to buy a membership at the Singapore Island Country Club. It was my eldest son who started first and got my wife and I interested. It helps that a

number of my partners at Coopers & Lybrand were golfers so that there were people to guide us on golfing.

**How has golf been useful for business?**

Golf is a good bonding vehicle with clients which enables us to get to know them better and it helps to build up a friendship rather than just a business relationship. I have personally never used the golf game as a means to get business and have never done a deal during a golf game.

Personally, I think you should treat the game as a social event rather than a business event. It is an opportunity to build a relationship that forms the foundation for long term business.

**Can you provide two or three parallels between the game of golf and business?**

First you must have commitment in the business you are in. With no commitment you will not be successful. You need to have patience, especially as a practising public accountant, I must try to understand my client's business and must have the patience to listen to my client's problems and help them to solve it.

Going through a set of statutory accounts needs a lot of patience as you need to read everything, evaluate the accounting and financial information carefully to ensure the financial statements shows a true and fair view.

You cannot simply rush through a set of financial statements and form a view without proper evaluation.

Finally, golf needs practice and that indirectly is required in a professional accountant.

He or she has to continuously keep up to date technically to continue to develop and get better.

**How is golf linked to philanthropy?**

In golf, you will enjoy the game if you have largeness in you. Personally I think I am very forgiving with golf



Phillip Tan drives home the point that golf is all about fun and camaraderie.

and don't stick too much to the rules, which may not be the right thing, in giving my opponents mulligans and "gimmies" in putting.

Some serious golfers would not agree with my approach. In charity you must also have the largeness at heart to give. More importantly, we have been using the game to raise funds for charities.

Having a charity golf event is a very popular approach for fund raising. What other game can give you good exercise that stimulates your mind and body, have the ability to enable fellowship with friends, have good food and do a good deed all at the same time in one afternoon?

**Who was the most interesting business person you have played golf with?**

Mr Lee Kim Yew the former president of Sentosa Golf Club and he was chairman of one of my listed clients.

He demonstrated all the positive things I said about golf. He was patient and forgiving with a bad player like me.

An old school gentleman who treated us like friends

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— PHILLIP TAN

although he was chairman of a large listed company. We often played at Sentosa where he knew the course like the back of his hand and he was generous in giving us guidance to tackle each hole.

It may not have been very useful for a person like me but I still appreciated it.

In fact in that particular game, with his guidance, I end up playing much better than my handicap.

**Which is your favourite destination and why?**

My favourite destination

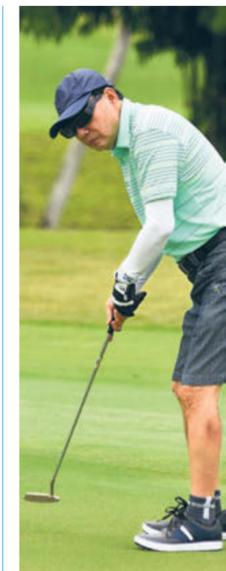
is Japan in spring and autumn.

First, it is the coolness, second the beauty of the course when you can see the Sakura trees on the golf course in full bloom; it really is an object of beauty!

Thirdly, I really like the professionalism of the caddies. It is very common to have one caddie looking after four players efficiently and effectively.

**Which is your favourite golf course?**

In Singapore, it is the Bukit Course in SICC. It is a good



Phillip is focused while putting.

walking course with beautiful scenery.

Watching a rising or setting sun against the backdrop of the reservoir gives me a warm feeling.

Photos: Thiam Sook Wai

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