

A Vietnamese in a previous incarnation

Karl Derek John, Chairman of TCK Group - an investment consulting company, who has already spent nearly 10 years living and working in Vietnam. It is not exaggerate to say that this man does understand Vietnamese people even more than many local people do.

Coming to Vietnam the first time in 1994 to attend a round-table economic conference, but Karl said that his connection to Vietnam had started since he was a 14-year old boy. Karl was down the street in Grosvenor square of England to demonstrate against the war in Vietnam. Whether it is one of the reason Karl wants his business operation in Vietnam?

During the period from 1994 to 1996, Karl stayed in Vietnam just to develop his connections and investigate business opportunities. However, Karl had decided to leave this country after three years. Why? Vietnamese people kept unfriendly views upon foreigners, Karl explained.

Then a phone call from a Vietnamese friend in 2000 had brought him back to Vietnam. In 2002, representative office of Contacts International Consultants Limited was set up. The first two years of operation was a very hard period for Karl despite his very cautious preparation. Karl got to learn to understand Vietnam and its people; to develop connection network whilst only operation expenses were accrued but not any revenues. Yet, it was unlucky for Karl when he placed trust in wrong persons, thus, he did not receive reliable sources of information which are one of the key factors for his business. Nevertheless, hard periods brought about precious lessons. “In Vietnam, you should have patience, wills and self-motivation. To know Vietnam, you must understand Vietnam. And to understand Vietnam, you must know Vietnam” Karl said.

All the lessons that Karl has learnt were totally right. Since if they were not, there would be no existing Karl in Vietnam. Apart from holding the Chairman position of TCK Group (established in 2005), he is also the CEO Contacts International Consultants Limited. Currently, TCK is acting as foundation shareholder of a project management company, and Karl involves in as its CEO. TCK Group has also been a key partner with TigerInvest, an M&A specialized company.

Karl has been interviewed and his opinions were extracted by many domestic and international magazines regarding issues on investment in Vietnam.

However, the fact that makes this man become special as well as be loved by lots of Vietnamese people is Karl's deep love with this country. Karl pronounces the phrase "I love Vietnam" in Vietnamese quite well. That love was proved through his wholeheartedness to Vietnam which was truly felt by the write of this article during the talk with Karl.

He proposed that to make investors continue their interests in Vietnam, the country should understand what the investors want; develop partnership with investors; improve infrastructure; control corruption; simplify regulations to facilitate investment process; improve state-owned enterprises so that they could focus on their main business fields; and lastly, "overhaul" the education system of Vietnam. The leaders need to have long-term and strategic vision, and need transparent mechanism to implement the vision. Vietnam needs to develop its own brand so that investors feel the value whenever they think of Vietnam. His wholeheartedness for this country was also proved through his articles about Vietnam as well as investment in Vietnam which were published by domestic and international newspapers such as Asia Times Online. He has done all these works because of his passion and received no fee from that. "I have a long-term commitment in Vietnam since my fortune teller said that I used to be a Vietnamese person in my previous life" Karl joked.

Although very busy, he is very keen on writing. He is going to publish a novel called Bamboo King and plans to write three other books on management, life and religious issues. It has been six years that Karl has not enjoyed an actual vacation for himself, yet, it is not a big problem for a person who always thinks that happiness is when we could do what we like and be surrounded by people we love to be with.