

## Google's Chade-Meng Tan Wants You to Search Inside Yourself for Inner (and More) Peace by Knowledge@Wharton

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□Chade-Meng Tan (widely known as Meng) was among the earliest engineers to be hired at Google. He and his team worked on ways to improve the quality of the site's search results and also played a key role in the launch of mobile search. When Google allowed engineers to spend 20% of their time pursuing their passion, Meng decided to spend his time on a cause dear to his heart: Launching a conspiracy to bring about world peace. The conspirators could well be called the compassionati.

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□Meng believes that world peace can be achieved -- but only if people cultivate the conditions for inner peace within themselves. Inner peace, in turn, comes from nurturing emotional intelligence through the practice of mindfulness and meditation. Working with Zen masters, meditation teachers, psychologists and even a CEO, Meng created a seven-week personal growth program named -- what else -- Search Inside Yourself (SIY). Launched in 2007, Google has had more than 1,000 employees go through SIY with startling results. Participants rate the program at 4.7 on a five-point scale. Anecdotal feedback, among other comments, from many participants is that this program "changed my life."

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□Meng then decided to open-source the SIY program by making its principles and components available to companies everywhere. He has written a book titled, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World Peace)*, which is being published this month. Meng spoke with Knowledge@Wharton about the SIY program, why emotional intelligence matters, and other lessons he has learned during the past five years as Google's Jolly Good Fellow (which, seriously, is his job title).

□The first part of the edited transcript of the conversation appears below. To read the rest of the interview, check out part two, *How Emotional Intelligence Can Help Resolve Conflicts and Build Tough, Kind Leaders*, and part three, *How Emotional Intelligence Helps the Bottom Line*.

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□Knowledge@Wharton: What is Search Inside Yourself, and what inspired you to launch the program at Google? What was the spark?

□Meng: Search Inside Yourself (SIY) is a curriculum for emotional intelligence based on mindfulness. We wanted to create a curriculum that works for adults. We had this epiphany that you cannot learn emotional intelligence by just reading a book alone; more work is involved.

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□ Three steps are involved in developing emotional intelligence in the SIY framework. The first is to train attention in a way that allows you to make your mind calm and clear on demand. At any time, whatever is happening to you -- whether you're under stress, you're being shouted at, or anything else -- you have the skill to bring the mind to a place that's calm and clear. If you can do that, it lays the foundation for emotional intelligence. Step two is creating self-mastery. Once your mind is calm and clear, you can create a quality of self-knowledge or self-awareness that improves over time and it evolves into self-mastery. You know about yourself enough that you can master your emotions. The third step is to develop good mental habits. For example, there is the mental habit of kindness, of looking at every human being you encounter and thinking to yourself, "I want this person to be happy." Once that becomes a habit, you don't have to think about it, it just comes naturally.

□ Then everything in your work life changes because people want to associate with you and they like you. It operates on the subconscious level. Those are the skills that SIY is designed to develop.

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□ The spark behind creating SIY was my desire for world peace. I have been a long-time engineer at Google. We can spend 20% of our time working on whatever we want. I figured, I might as well try to solve the toughest problem I know, which is bringing about world peace. I started thinking about the necessary and sufficient conditions for world peace and one thought led to another. I came to the conclusion that a very important condition for world peace is to create conditions for inner peace, inner happiness and compassion on a global scale. The way I want to do that is to make those qualities profitable for businesses and to help people succeed. If we have a program that helps people and companies become successful and the side-effect of that is world peace, then we will have world peace. Eventually, that idea became a curriculum for emotional intelligence because emotional intelligence can help people succeed. It's good for the company's bottom line, and if we teach it the right way, then the side effect is world peace.

□ Knowledge@Wharton: How did you make the connection between mindfulness, compassion and emotional intelligence?

□ Meng: As I said earlier, the foundation of emotional intelligence is attention training, which allows you to be calm and clear on demand. The way to train your mind to do that is called mindfulness, which is defined as paying attention moment to moment non-judgmentally. It creates a quality of mind in which, neurologically, you move from the brain's narrative circuits to the direct experience circuits. The part of the brain that keeps going nah nah nah nah nah just quiets down; you go to another part that relates to experiencing sensations, perceptions, mental formations of thoughts and so on.

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□ The thing about mindfulness is that everybody knows how to do it. We all already experience it. It's simple: From moment to moment you pay non-judgmental attention to what is going on. Then we can make it deeper. With enough practice, we can concentrate our mind at a very high power, with high intensity, on demand. That ability alone is very useful in life. But in addition to its intrinsic usefulness, mindfulness also creates the foundation for emotional intelligence.

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□ Compassion is at the other end of this pipeline. It is a component, but it's also a result of emotional intelligence. If you tease out the components of emotional intelligence, you'll find that there are five domains as defined by Daniel Goleman [author of the 1995 book, Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ], which I found very useful. The first three domains are intrapersonal intelligence, which is intelligence about

yourself. These are self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation. The other two domains involve inter-personal intelligence, or intelligence about other people. These are empathy and social skills. Compassion is integral to the last two domains. In a way, compassion involves training your mind to develop empathy, but at the same time, is also the output, it's the beneficiary of training social skills. That's the relationship between compassion and emotional intelligence.

□ Knowledge@Wharton: Why does emotional intelligence matter?

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□ Meng: It's important for at least three reasons or aspects. The first is work effectiveness. People with high emotional intelligence are far more effective at work. Some of this is obvious. For example, take people who deal with customers. In their case, the more emotional intelligence they have, the better they can work with customers and the more they can sell.

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□ But there are also aspects that are less obvious. For example, emotional intelligence affects the work effectiveness even of engineers. Among the top six characteristics that distinguish top engineers from average engineers, only two are cognitive; four have to do with emotional competencies. The six characteristics are: a strong achievement drive; the ability to influence others; conceptual thinking; analytical ability; initiative and self-confidence. Of these, only conceptual thinking and analytical ability are cognitive. The rest are emotional abilities. So, emotional intelligence is very important even for engineers.

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□ Interestingly, emotional intelligence is important for innovation. For example, there is a recent study that shows if you're happy today, you're more creative today and tomorrow, regardless of how you feel tomorrow. So happiness has a two-day effect...and there are neurological explanations for this. An emotional skill like happiness has an effect on work, on creativity. All this is the first aspect involving work effectiveness.

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□ The second aspect is leadership. Everybody knows that emotionally intelligent people make better leaders. We know that from our day-to-day experience dealing with managers. What I found surprising is that this is true even in the Navy. A paper came out in the late 1980s that dealt with what makes naval units effective. It had very objective, quantitative measures for effectiveness. The research showed that the best naval commanders are people who are nice and warm. I have a quote here about naval commanders that the study found were most effective. They were "more positive and outgoing, emotionally expressive and dramatic, warmer and more sociable (including smiling more), friendlier and more democratic, more cooperative, more likeable and fun to be with, more appreciative and trustful, and even gentler than those who were merely average." In other words, the best naval commanders are nice guys -- people we want to hang out with. Oh, by the way, the title of the paper is "Nice Guys Finish First."

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□ The third aspect is happiness. Emotional intelligence creates the conditions for happiness. To me, that is the most important part because I want to create happiness worldwide.

□ Knowledge@Wharton: How did you structure the curriculum to nurture emotional intelligence among your colleagues?

□ Meng: When we started working on this, emotional intelligence was an unsolved problem. How do we train people to develop emotional intelligence? I didn't know, nobody knew. I'm an engineer...what do I know? So the fallback was to do what Google always does to solve big problems that we don't know how to solve. We get the

smartest, the best people in the world in that domain, we put them in a room and we figure it out. Then we launch it on an unsuspecting audience, and assess what went wrong and then re-iterate. It's a process we call launch and re-iterate. That is what we did with the SIY program.

□ I have a friend, Mirabai Bush, who was the person who brought mindfulness into companies like Monsanto. Another friend, Norman Fischer, is America's top Zen master. Yet another friend, Daniel Goleman, who literally wrote the book on emotional intelligence, also helped. I got these people into a room with a few other people I know, including Marc Lesser, CEO of ZBA Associates, a management consulting and coaching firm. It almost sounds like a joke: "A CEO and a Zen master walked into a room..." We got everyone together and we figured it out.

□ Knowledge@Wharton: What tools and techniques did you use to teach emotional intelligence in your curriculum? Which ones worked best and why?

□ Meng: If you want a strong curriculum for emotional intelligence, it is important to base it on neuroscience and data. It's important not to be fluffy; if you're fluffy, you lose people. For example, if everybody sits around in a circle, talking about emotions and bringing awareness to their breathing, half the people will leave, especially the engineers. They'll say, "Screw it." So you have to show the science behind emotional intelligence. Fortunately, good science does exist on this issue.

□ Through brain scans, for example, we know that if you focus attention on breathing for a certain amount of time, your prefrontal cortex becomes stronger. That is the part of the brain that has to do with attention and executive thinking and decision making. Your prefrontal cortex also regulates the amygdala. The stronger you are in this part of your brain, the more you can regulate anger and feelings of powerlessness. Meditation and mindfulness develop this part of the brain.

□ There's a practice called body scan, where you focus your attention on parts of your body. Again, there's science behind it. If you do that a lot, you find that the part of the brain called the insula becomes more active. If that part of the brain becomes active, the person becomes emotionally self-aware. There's brain science behind all of this.

□ Knowledge@Wharton: How has the SIY program evolved? What were some of your challenges and how did you deal with them? What lessons did that experience teach you?

□ Meng: SIY started as a meditation program. The reason was it was started, basically, by Norman Fischer and Mirabai Bush and they are deep meditators. In the beginning, it was mostly meditation and wisdom from Norman and Mirabai. But it didn't scale beyond Norman and Mirabai because it depended on them being there. Over time, we had to do a few things. First, we had to formalize the content. Also, just meditation and wisdom is not enough. We had to add a lot of the science we just talked about. We invited Phillippe Goldin, a neuroscientist from Stanford University, to join the program.

□ Then I started learning the business applications. How does this apply to business and our day-to-day work lives? Mirabai already had a lot of business experience because she was an entrepreneur in the old days. We added a lot of business content. That's how it evolved. It evolved from a meditation program into a program on emotional intelligence full of science and business apps.

□ The biggest challenge, as I said earlier, was expanding the circle to include the most

skeptical people. If you advertise a class on mindfulness-based emotional intelligence, the people you are going to attract are the most obvious. These are the people who do yoga classes, who sit at a local Zen center, but you don't want to reach just these people...you want to go beyond that. Then there are people who are open to anything or the people who have read about Zen when they were in their 20s, so they're open to trying it. But I wanted to go beyond even that. The people I wanted to reach were those who might look at the course description and say, "This is all hippie bullshit." I wanted those people. That was my biggest challenge.

□ How could I reach those people? I had a couple of things in my favor. I have credibility in the Google world because I have been a successful engineer for many years. So, even for those people who call this hippie bullshit, they say, "Well, there's Meng and there's this hippie bullshit crap." At least they are curious enough to ask, why is Meng teaching this crap? Once I get their attention, I can show them the science, the practices and the data. My biggest challenge was reaching those people and I think I have been very successful. Some 1,000 people have gone through the SIY program and a fairly large percentage of them started very skeptical, which is good, because that was the audience I wanted.

□ I have learned some important lessons. The science is important and the language is important if you don't want to lose people. In addition, I discovered that you have to tell people why they are doing the practice. It's not good enough to say, "Let's create a loving, kind perspective." They will call that hippie bullshit. You have to explain why you do that: Because if you do that, then you're creating the mental habit for kindness. And if you do that a lot, then it becomes an instinctive habit. When you look at any human being, you say, "I want this person to be happy" and that changes behavior. Once you explain that in terms of creating mental habits then they get it, then they will do the practice and then they'll benefit. So, explaining the outcome is very important.

□ Knowledge@Wharton: What anecdotal evidence have you found to show whether the SIY program is working? And as an engineer, how did you quantify the program's effectiveness?

□ Meng: We obtain anonymous feedback every time we run a class. A lot of it is qualitative. But when we ask people what the class has meant to them, the feedback we get -- and some people have used these exact words -- is that "This course has changed my life." To me this is mind-blowing. I mean, imagine coming to work on a Monday morning and you take a class and it changes your life! This happens a lot. I have a lot of students whose lives have been changed. Sometimes they use different words. "I see myself and the world entirely differently." "Now I see myself in kindness." "I feel a new me. I'm a different person." A few have told me in person that they got promotions after SIY and that they would have never gotten promoted if not for what they learned at SIY. There are also a few who said they wanted to leave Google and then they took SIY and it changed their minds. So, there's been a retention benefit, in addition to promotions. That's the kind of qualitative feedback I get -- that's basically the anecdotal evidence.

□ Quantitatively, I'm an engineer, so the feedback doesn't work unless it's quantitative. We have two main sets of data. One is satisfaction surveys. On a scale of one to five, we ask participants to rate the usefulness of and satisfaction with what they have learned. For satisfaction surveys, the score has been very high. It has been 4.7 or 5 out of 5, which is not bad. I can imagine worse, especially for a seven-week class, where people come in thinking it's hippie bullshit and when they leave the class they rank

it 4.7 out of 5 -- it's not bad.

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□ We also have psychometric measures. For example, we have first-person survey measures of things like empathy, self-rumination -- which means how often they keep thinking the same thought over and over. We also look at self-perceived stress, self-criticism and things like that -- it's standard stuff. For the psychometric measures, again, the feedback is anonymous, but when we aggregate the results, we have found statistically, significantly, they're improving in every dimension, every measure.

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□ We don't yet measure, unfortunately -- some things we really would like to measure. I want to create a scientific study with controlled conditions on how this course has affected qualities that are directly meaningful to work. For example, we could create an experiment where you get half the people to take SIY and half to go to the gym and then five or six months later, see how many of them meet their sales quotas. That can only be done in a controlled environment with random assignment and so on. We haven't done that yet.

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