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Giving Tree International: ESL Training in Vietnam

“Vietnam is where we need to be,” said John Kim, CEO of Giving Tree International (GTI). “The country is flourishing, there’s a clear need for English training, and we can really make a significant impact.”

John and the rest of the GTI board members were in a critical meeting deciding whether or not to send a team to Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) to do some further market research on an investment in Vietnam. After returning from a business trip in HCMC a year ago, John was convinced that there was substantial opportunity and that was where GTI needed to be. After John’s presentation, based on his trip and secondary research, the board voted unanimously to send a team into the country to meet with various parties to do some more digging.

Background

GTI is a registered 501 3(c) organization founded in 2006 by six friends in Los Angeles, California, who had the desire to use their professional expertise to start small-to-medium sized businesses that addressed a social end in emerging economies. “We really believe in the stewardship principle and want to leverage our resources and expertise in business to make an impact in communities overseas,” says Will Suh, COO of GTI. GTI raises funds through charitable donations primarily from private donors. These funds are used to provide seed money for new business ventures in developing countries in efforts to have a sustainable and long lasting impact.

In 2006, John Kim visited HCMC on a business trip and saw the enormous potential for the city. HCMC was considered the economic hub of Vietnam, boasting the highest GDP growth in Vietnam and approximately 20% of the country’s GDP.¹ “The city was bustling. Foreign direct investment was entering into the country, and poverty rates were dramatically falling,” said John. The poverty level had declined to under 20% of the population in 2004 from 58% in 1993.² However, there was still much work to be done in the rural areas and in addressing social problems within the cities, such as lack of education, drug addiction, and prostitution.

One clear need that John noted on his visit was in the area of English training. “A lot of the people were telling me that the country needed better training in the English language. For a country entering the global scene, English was a much-needed skill set not only for business leaders, but also for those looking for employment.” Opening an English language institute in HCMC seemed like a great fit for GTI. A year earlier,



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