



“Small gestures can result in great merits” – Vietnamese Abbot, Buddhist Temple, Australia

Dear

Viet Nam’s global business image is at a crossroads. In speaking to my Vietnamese contacts, colleagues and friends, in both Viet Nam and around the world, I know they are rightly proud of Viet Nam’s history as the ‘Jade of SE Asia’. After a period playing a relatively insubstantial role in world development, the last decade has seen Viet Nam receive increased economic and political attention. This opportunity will no doubt be strengthened given the 12 nations Trans-Pacific Partnership.

With opportunity comes responsibility. Sadly, Viet Nam’s increased prosperity has had a detrimental impact on both its own and the world’s wildlife; the rhino being an emblem of this devastation. A percentage of Vietnamese elite desire rare, wildlife ‘products’, for want of a better word, and this must be challenged. Unfortunately, one of the world’s current views of Viet Nam’s elite is that they will disregard strengthening standards of wildlife protection to fulfil their own desire to consume.

As someone who has spent the last 20 years coaching and developing senior business leaders, I have seen the respect bestowed upon a select few that have chosen to evolve in line with global values and expectations. These are people who have gained the inner self-confidence and virtue to reject the aspirational consumption of their peers, even if such consumption is accepted within societal norms today. They recognise this self-serving behaviour creates business people who are followers, pale imitations of the true leader. The self-serving use of rhino horn is a perfect example of this follower mentality; it is used by weak, needy people desperate to be seen as part of the elite group.

As someone who is leading Viet Nam on to the world business stage, you will have not doubt seen the recent ‘Panama Papers’ and ‘Unaoil’ leaks. Undoubtedly, there is an increasing lack of tolerance for self-serving behaviour in global elites and a greater willingness for internal whistle-blowers to leak privileged information. In the not too distant future this may also include the dealings of Vietnamese elites and may target the money flows associated with the illegal wildlife trade.

Over the last year I asked volunteers in Viet Nam to monitor the business press and create a database of the most influential leaders, who have the respect of their peer group, and who could help stop the demand for rhino horn. You are on this database as someone of who stands out as a result of your status and influence and who has the potential of taking a greater global business leadership role.

Over this time period I have also had the great privilege of discussing the rhino horn demand problem with a Vietnamese Abbot of a Buddhist Temple in Australia. On many occasions he has shook his head and said “How can Buddhists get enjoyment from the suffering of these sentient beings?”. But he also expressed that “No one is stuck in this behaviour, everyone can evolve.” To bring about this change, we need the help of local influencers. As the Abbot told me “Small but meaningful actions result in great merits for both the doer and their family”.

So my request to you is to help do something meaningful in bringing about a change in behaviour of the Vietnamese elites who today consume rhino horn and use it as a gift or display of privilege. I would be more than happy to engage in a dialogue with you on how this may be achieved.

I would like to very much thank you for your consideration of this issue and request. It will be a testament to the growing influence of Vietnamese business leaders on the world stage to have a pioneering group of influential leaders taking up this cause; helping Viet Nam achieve global status and pride, not condemnation for practices seen as inappropriate by their global peers.

I have attached examples of the advertising campaigns we have been running in the Vietnamese business and lifestyle press for the last 18 months. We are happy to purchase further advertising space to convey messages designed by you and your peers who wish to become involved and lead the change in Viet Nam.

Many thanks and best wishes

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Victims of useless potions and empty gestures

By Dr. Lynn Johnson,
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An unborn rhino foetus removed from its dead and de-horned mother. This particular poaching incident also cost a wildlife ranger his life. It is not enough for certain businessmen in Vietnam to try to disassociate themselves from this killing spree by saying, "We don't do the poaching, we only buy the horn". This destruction is carried out to fulfil their personal desire for status, bestowed through obtaining a rare, expensive product—genuine rhino horn.

It is common for the wealthy to measure their own wealth and that of others by the luxury goods they own, but there is a stark difference between buying a Bentley or Rolex and obtaining illegal wildlife products. The drive to demonstrate status goes too far when it results in wiping out an iconic species, and in less than one generation to boot. Just how anxious can users of rhino horn be for their peers' acceptance to remain blind to the devastating consequences of their actions?

Humans are social creatures and we aim to conform to social norms to demonstrate that we are willing to fit in. However, this in itself cannot justify destructive behaviour, but all too often the gap between actions and consequences is too large in time or space for us to draw the link. Users of rhino horn are not a large group and consumption is a new fad, having only started in 2007. Although some of the people who buy and use this product are upheld as leading

members of the business community in Vietnam, their actions in this regard are not what we look for in our leaders or even in our business partners.

Many businesspeople are delicate creatures. As someone who has made a living as a business coach for over a decade and worked with a multitude of executives, I know how fragile their egos can be. When they are struggling with their self-image, they often reach for 'badges of status', such as a corner office, luxury cars, and executive programmes at international business schools to help them feel on top of their game and demonstrate that they are still on the A-team.

As we work together during coaching

sessions, they build a stronger inner self-image. They learn to control their ego rather than the other way around, and become less needy of status symbols or reassurance. Ego blurs judgement and does not make for quality long-term relationships, professional or personal. As ego is corralled, people become more emotionally grounded, which gives them the capacity to have more empathy for the people and the world around them.

Our experience and intuition tells us that good leaders - true leaders - evolve, in part, into custodians. They look to make a positive difference in the world. They begin to consider the consequences of their actions, even the ones they are not directly responsible for.

As the Vietnamese economy has grown at an unprecedented pace, local businessmen have come by significant wealth. These men want to be seen as leaders and, given the recent Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, more Vietnamese businessmen will seek global opportunities. The TPP is not only about promoting economic growth and opportunities, it is also about fostering greater transparency and good governance.

Regrettably, many Vietnamese businessmen are notorious users of rhino horn, and are thus driving the current killing spree. More businesses around the world will look to the quality of Vietnamese corporate leadership, and future business potentially hinges upon the conclusions they draw.

Wild rhinos became extinct in Vietnam in 2010, lost forever on this current generation's watch. Will the world's remaining wild rhinos be lost on their watch too, because of their hunger for a status symbol, their drive to fit into the local business elite? In taking the next step from local to global business, it is critical for those involved to see that their behaviour—using rhino horn to gain favours—inspires repulsion rather than awe.

If they continue to serve their unethical cravings, all they will turn out to be is another generation of ordinary businessmen, who in a decade or two will be forgotten to all but a few family members and friends, if that.

But if a small group of influential men could work together to influence each other and those around them, to stop using rhino horns as a useless detox drink or a needless business gift, they will be remembered for a hundred and more years as the generation of Vietnamese businessmen that stood together and saved a 50 million-year-old iconic animal species. This would show quality leadership, true and transformational leadership. This could demonstrate that they are the type of people the world should want to do business with. They would become the generation known as the 'Rhino Custodians'—a far more captivating legacy. I hope they choose this path—for the world is watching. ■



The trade in rhino horn to Viet Nam is wiping out a species.



WHAT DOES A WILDLIFE CRIMINAL LOOK LIKE?



Who do you see? A businessman cementing a deal or a man desperate to impress who has become the last link in an illegal chain?

Worldwide public opinion is becoming focused on the Vietnamese elite and asking: Who are the real wildlife criminals? If your reputation is damaged because you are known to use rhino horn, it may impact opportunities for you in the future.

Any recently bought rhino horn given as a business gift will almost certainly have come from a rhinoceros that was killed illegally. To date the focus has been on the poachers and criminal syndicates who traffic the horn. But now more and more people are scrutinising the buyers.

All this illegal activity and wildlife destruction is driven by the act of purchasing rhino horn. Together with poachers and traffickers, users of rhino horn must see themselves for what they are.



*If you buy rhino horn
you are a wildlife criminal.*



More and more world leaders say that the survival of Africa's wildlife is intrinsically linked to its people's prosperity. The poaching of rhinos to feed businessmen's egos takes away valuable tourist dollars from local communities who depend on them.

But ruthless poachers don't just kill rhinos to fulfil your desire for horn. Every week they also kill two or more rangers who are working to protect these animals. The rangers' wives become widows, their children fatherless; families lose their income and their children's education is disrupted.

Furthermore you could be poisoning yourself and those you give it to. Horns are being infused with toxins that will cause suffering to anybody who consumes it.

By using rhino horn you are taking away the livelihoods of families in Africa; you may be unlucky enough to negatively impact your own.



*Using rhino horn
may cause your
luck to run out.*



The rhino horn you give to a potential business partner will not only kill a magnificent animal. It's quite possible it will poison him.

In both Africa and Asia they are serious about protecting rhinoceroses from extinction. So the horns are being injected with toxins such as organophosphates while on the live animal.

The poachers know this. If they illegally kill the animals and sell the horns to dealers in Viet Nam, they know they will poison anybody who consumes it.

The only way you will know if you have poisoned someone you want to impress with rhino horn is when they call the next day to say they have become very sick with nausea and diarrhoea.

It's not worth ruining a business relationship with poisoned rhino horn.

