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# THE GREATER GOOD

**Life Lessons from Hawai‘i’s Leaders**

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# THE GREATER GOOD

**Life Lessons from Hawai‘i’s Leaders**

**Evan and Kari Leong**



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*Dedicated to our sons,  
Buddy and Kolton Leong*

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*“Find your passion.  
Dream big  
and don’t give up!”*



Duane Kurisu

*Partner*

**KURISU & FERGUS**

*Chairman and Chief Executive Officer*

**AIO GROUP**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Evan & Kari Leong, Co-Founders, Greater Good Inc.*

During this year's Greater Good interviews, we were often reminded of our community leaders and trailblazers who have paved the way to make things smoother and easier for all of us. "You did not get here alone," many said. "Think about all of those people who supported you and sacrificed so that you could go to a good school, get a good job, raise a healthy family ..."

We want to take this opportunity to thank the many special people who have guided us through this journey of living to learn. First to Duane Kurisu, who taught us that business is not healthy without the support of the community and the community is not healthy without the support of business. Because of the few minutes you took to explain to Evan the secret to your success, we have revamped our life and thought process. Without your advice and guidance, we would still be chasing the golden ring without a clear path or purpose. Thank you for always being available to listen and to guide and support our journey.

Thank you to our interviewees, who took time out of their busy schedules to share their stories and learning lessons with us. We appreciate your anecdotes, philosophies, stories of celebration and learning experiences. Many have learned from your voices over the radio waves, television, Internet, and now many will learn from your words. In all forms, you're helping our future leaders make positive changes in business while making a difference in our community.

A special thanks to Clint Arnoldus and Central Pacific Bank for believing in us and our vision from the start. Your support allowed us to take our message and stories of Hawai'i's business and community leaders to the global community. Mahalo to Rick Blangiardi and the KGMB9 team for expanding the message to television. Thank you for believing in our growth and ability to become "television people."

A big mahalo to Sara Uemura, Jan Hori, Katherine Nichols, Frank Bridgewater, Don Chapman, Chad Pata, Erika Engle, Ron Nagasawa, Dave Kennedy and Dennis Francis at the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* and *MidWeek*. Aloha Joan Bennet and the Bennet Group for 2006 PR. Thank you, Cathy and Brian Luke, for always helping; Louis Law

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An extended thanks to our Philippines Greater Good Team who spent countless hours helping us create this book—Dan-Gil, Jay-R and Davi. The team at Watermark Publishing, especially George Engbretson and Aimee Harris, for your patience and incredible eyes to help edit and create the attractive layout of our book.

And last, but not least, the people who have supported us continuously and unconditionally, our family. Mom, Dad and Popo Leong and Mom and Dad Okino, without your guidance, love and support, we could not have made it this far. You have allowed us to grow and develop as individuals and have sacrificed a lot to help us throughout our lives. Although you have not been quoted directly in this book, you have shared a lot of wisdom over the years. Most of all, your voices live in our minds and hearts, speaking loudly of the morals and values that make us good human beings. To our siblings, Tishya, Jon, Darin, Lisa, Kyle and Jocelyn, thank you for always encouraging us and supporting us. You have sacrificed a lot to help us succeed in all we do.

To our boys, Buddy and Kolton, we love you more than we can express. You have brought so much love and laughter into our relationship and you have veered us away from working all the time. We hope this book will be useful for you throughout your lives. We hope that you will use the knowledge to be successful in whatever you choose to do and whatever path you take. Just remember to be passionate, be a good person, say your prayers and never forget that we love you to the moon and back.

## FOREWORD

by Mufi Hannemann, Mayor of Honolulu

My life is guided by a number of precepts—I’ve dubbed them “Mufi’s Maxims”—that set forth many of the ideals and everyday practices I apply in my responsibilities as mayor of the City and County of Honolulu, and which I’ve encouraged the members of my cabinet to follow as they go about their duties.

These maxims were not a revelation, not some creation whipped up in a burst of creative energy. Rather, they were gathered and refined through years of living and work experience in Hawai‘i and around the world, both positive and negative, much like the ideas and thoughts being shared in *The Greater Good: Life Lessons from Hawai‘i’s Leaders*.

One of them is, “Leave this a better place than you found it.” It’s a maxim I’ve followed throughout my career in public service. Public service, for me, has never been about power or prestige or the usual trappings of elected office. It has always been about using God’s gifts to make this a better place, to serve and sacrifice for others, to contribute to the greater good; these have been motivating factors in driving me to public service and to creating the Pacific Century Fellows leadership program.

It hasn’t been easy, believe me. Ours is a democracy, not an autocracy. People have a say in the directions and goals of our city, the state and the nation, and they’re not hesitant about expressing those views. It’s a near-impossibility to get a group of people to agree on what they want to eat for lunch, let alone getting them to agree on a complex issue. But I think that if your intentions are good, you keep the debate open and honest, and you’re motivated by a sincere desire to make a meaningful contribution, then you can achieve great things and make this a better place than you found it.

There’s one more point to be made about the purpose of this book. The day I received my high school diploma, I was on top of the world. Surrounded by my parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends; oodles of flower leis; a wonderful high school education behind me and a Harvard University degree before me, I couldn’t have felt more assured of my place on earth.

My father, Gustav, a soft-spoken, humble immigrant who had labored tirelessly without complaint for many years and who helped my mother, Faiaso, to raise their seven children, then stepped up to me to put a lei around my neck. As he did, he whispered in my ear, “Son, you know nothing.”

I had just completed six years at one of the finest college prep schools in the United States, earned the Iolani Headmaster’s Award, been named an all-star in basketball and football, completed a term as student body president and been accepted to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Cornell and Stanford—and I still knew nothing, in my dad’s eyes. In essence, he was encouraging me to be humble, stay focused on education and keep thirsting for knowledge.

My Dad’s Dictum, if you will, has stayed with me for the past 35 years. Indeed, we know nothing. There’s always more to learn, a new idea on the horizon, a different opinion, a unique perspective to add to the mix. The people who have generously shared their unique wisdom, experiences, and thoughts in *The Greater Good* tell us that learning is a life long journey, and that we should continue to learn from the experience and wisdom of others.

We can all be grateful to Evan and Kari Leong for their commitment to the betterment of our community, our state and our nation and their inspiring work for the good of all.

# INTRODUCTION

*Evan Leong, Chief Executive Officer, Greater Good Inc.*

I hate doing yard work but I'm fascinated with farming. I have no desire to be a farmer, yet I love the potential in farming—taking a little seed and growing it into a productive crop to be harvested year after year.

I learned this sense of providence in the same yard where my grandfather planted his first tree. My Gung Gung (Chinese for grandfather) was a Chinese-American who worked extremely hard to educate and provide for his family. In his free time he planted and cared for many fruit trees in our yard. We have five mango trees, six lychee trees, orange trees, lemon trees, pomelo trees and several others.

I wasn't there to watch him prepare the ground, plant the seeds and nurture the growth, but I definitely enjoyed eating the fruit. Generations have been raised at my Gung Gung's home in Mānoa Valley, that verdant suburb of Honolulu. It has been more than 20 years since my Gung Gung passed away, but the fruit from the seeds he planted, almost a century ago, is still enjoyed by our family.

Fruit trees weren't the only thing he passed down to the generations. My Gung Gung also taught us important lessons in life based on his own experiences. These experiences were the “seeds of knowledge” of his life, which shaped him into who he was and later helped shape the people that we have become.

Each experience is like a small seed of knowledge. A fruit tree can feed people for generations to come, and the same goes for these trees of success. The beauty of seeds of knowledge is that they don't have to be our own.

I once heard at a seminar: “Find someone who has what you want. Think how they think. Do what they do and you'll get what they have.”

That is what this book is all about. In the past year and a half, my wife, Kari, and I have interviewed hundreds of the most prominent business, community and government leaders in Hawai'i and around the world to find out how they think and what their life experiences have been. We are on a quest to find the very best “seeds of knowledge” that these people are planting.

On this journey, we found the same underlying core values mentioned over and over again in the interviews. Even though the stories and experiences are quite different, they're each built on the same basic foundations.

Our goal at Greater Good is to be a vehicle to pass along values that were a part of each leader's foundation for success, to help you create your own definition of a successful life.

While conducting the interviews, we also noticed something intriguing. No matter what preconceived notion we had of our interviewees, we always came out of the interviews with a different perspective. We realized that many of these successful people started out like you and I and developed into high achievers. Childhood pictures are under each of the quotes as a reminder that we all start off as children and our choices and decisions along the way make up who we become.

While each person has his or her own definition of success, we can all agree that we'd like to live a fulfilling life. The good news is that life can be even better than what we expect, if we know what to focus on. The main point is to climb the right "ladder of life." Many people climb the ladder of life and reach the top only to realize that they've been on the wrong ladder.

In the Adam Sandler movie *Click*, Sandler's character is asked, "Remember the leprechaun? The one from the cereal ad. He's always chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but when he gets there, at the end of the day, it's just corn flakes."

As it turns out, what was first envisioned as a success-in-business book has become a book on life itself. It's a book about making our lives and making a difference. It's about finding the pot of gold instead of the corn flakes. And it all starts with finding our purpose, which is where we begin ...

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*“Sometimes you cannot see  
with your eyes (therefore)  
you have to look inside here;  
meaning close to your  
chest in your heart.  
And navigate with your heart.”*



Nainoa Thompson  
*Navigator and Sail Master of the Hōkūle‘a*  
**TRUSTEE AT KAMEHAMEHA SCHOOLS**



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# 1

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# WHAT'S YOUR PURPOSE?

## 1

## WHAT'S YOUR PURPOSE?

*Evan Leong, Chief Executive Officer, Greater Good Inc.*

I was waiting in line at the airport one day, when I overheard the ticket agent ask the person in front of me for her ticket. She responded that she hadn't bought one yet, but that she had a voucher for a free ticket and wanted to redeem it. When the agent asked where she wanted to go, she said, "I'm not sure. Why don't you choose a place for me?"

I know this sounds silly, but this is how many of us live our lives. We may have a ticket to live our life, but we often let others choose the destination.

Mike May, CEO of Hawaiian Electric Company, Hawai'i's largest utility, said it best:

"If you don't have a plan, you're going to be part of somebody else's."

This is how I lived my life for many years. I plodded along with no real destination, and grew frustrated because I wasn't getting where I thought I should be. I'd let someone else tell me what my destination should be and just headed in the direction they set. I realize now that I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing—pursuing the goals I should have been following—but I did it anyway. I was not in control of my life's destination. I had not yet discovered my purpose.

Finding our purpose is about finding our destination in life.

I asked myself:

*What is my life really supposed to amount to?*

*What contribution am I supposed to make?*

*Why am I here?*

*When I die, will I have accomplished what I was meant to accomplish?*

These are questions that I think a great deal about, and one day I received the answers: that my purpose is to inspire as many people as possible and to help them make a positive difference in their lives. To empower people with tools to make changes themselves—the proverbial "give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach a man how to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." To make the world

a better place through tangible solutions. To use business as a tool to make an impact on our local, national and global community. It is my purpose to do these things in whatever time I'm allowed here on earth.

While others can help us, our real purpose is a personal calling that can only be discovered and determined by each of us individually. Our parents can tell us to go to school, get good grades and get a certain job. Our teachers can tell us what to be when we grow up. Friends can tell us one thing and the media can tell us another. But here's the dilemma: If we listen to everyone under the sun except ourselves, we inevitably allow our destination to be set by others. Is it any wonder why at that point we feel we've strayed off course? Then frustration and confusion set in, and we either accept that this is how it's going to be or we decide to make a change.

In 2004 I attended 12 funerals. In 2005, a close friend's wife was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 40. At the time, this couple's three boys were all under seven years old. She nearly died several times and I saw first-hand how quickly, and suddenly, life can end. I decided to make a change. And once I consciously identified my purpose, my whole life was transformed.

There's a lot of time to think about life—and death—while you're sitting at a funeral. A funeral can be a celebration of life or a reflection of unfulfilled potential. And while no one ever says anything negative in a eulogy, I can't help but wonder:

*Did this person fulfill their purpose?*

*Why were they here?*

*Did they make a difference that will have an impact now that they are gone?*

*Did they live the life they were meant to live?*

I wondered how a eulogy would sound if it were written for what a person's life could have been, instead of what it was. I wondered what my eulogy would be if I died suddenly? Would I have lived the life I was supposed to live? I started thinking about all the accomplishments that I thought were important, all the accolades and ego-building materializations. But in the end I could only think of whether or not I became the best I could be at that moment, and if I'd helped anyone else besides myself? My purpose and destination became clear, and I am happy to say that I am finally pursuing it.

When my time comes to leave this world, I aim to have done everything I could to inspire a eulogy like this:

“Evan Leong achieved his life’s purpose. He lived every minute with passion. He made a long-lasting, positive impact on his family, his friends and his community.”

I hope that the stories and insights in these pages will help educate, motivate and inspire you to discover your own purpose, so that your eulogy reflects what life can be when it is lived to its maximum potential.

*“The only strategy in life is to find something you were meant to do, and if you love it you’re going to do it well. When you wake up in the morning you have to say, ‘Man, I can’t wait to go to work.’”*



Marc C. Tilker  
*President and Chief Executive Officer*  
**BEI HAWAII AND HT&T TRUCK CENTER**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Evan Leong** attended Punahou School and graduated cum laude from Hawai'i Pacific University, where he was the first recipient of the Distinguished Certificate of Business Excellence. Evan is also a member of the Delta Mu Delta Honor Society and was the 2007 recipient of the Paul C.T. Loo Young Alumni Award from Hawai'i Pacific University. He obtained his Executive Masters of Business Administration from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 2005.

In 2006, Evan was recognized by *Pacific Business News* in its "Forty under 40" business award, and selected as one of Hawai'i's 2006 Top High Tech Leaders on behalf of the Pacific Technology

Foundation and the Technology News Network. In 2007, he and his wife, Kari, won the state and regional Small Business Administration (SBA) Small Business Journalist of the Year Award.

Evan coaches for the University of Hawai'i Pacific Asian Center for Entrepreneurship Business Plan Competition to develop future entrepreneurs. He is on the board of directors for the University of Hawai'i Alumni Association and University Community Partnership. Evan is the chairman of the City and County of Honolulu's Month in Chinatown Celebration. He also serves on the Boy Scouts of America committee of the Aloha Council's Learning for Life Program, which teaches character building to Hawai'i's youth. Evan was chosen in 2005 to participate in Mayor Mufi Hannemann's Pacific Century Fellows (PCF). PCF is a year-long leadership development program modeled after the White House Fellows.

Evan also co-founded Bubble Tea Supply in 2001 with Kari. He is married with two boys and enjoys stand-up paddle surfing and kite surfing.



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**Kari Leong** holds a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Elementary School Education, plus a master's degree in Administration, Curriculum and Instruction, both from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Graduating cum laude for her degrees, she is also a certified elementary teacher and a member of the Educator's Honor Society, Kappa Delta Pi.

In 2006, Kari was recognized by *Pacific Business News* in its "Forty under 40" business award. She was the female winner in the 2007 *Hawaii Business* magazine "Fittest CEO" Contest. Also in 2007, Kari and Evan won the state and regional Small Business Administration (SBA) Small Business Journalist of the Year Award.

Kari was a semifinalist judge for the University of Hawai'i Pacific Asian Center for Entrepreneurship Business Plan Competition designed to develop new entrepreneurs and small businesses. She is an active participant with Mid-Pacific Institute's Alumni Association, serving as a class representative and chaperone for Project Graduations. Kari is a member of the Boy Scouts of America Committee of the Aloha Council's Learning for Life Program, which teaches character building to Hawai'i's youth. She serves on the board of directors for the Women's Fund of Hawai'i and is the In-Service Coordinator for Honolulu's Meals on Wheels program to provide training for the site's volunteers.

Kari was chosen in 2006 to participate in Mayor Mufi Hannemann's Pacific Century Fellows (PCF). PCF is a year-long leadership development program modeled after the White House Fellows.

Kari also co-founded Bubble Tea Supply in 2001 with Evan. She is married with two boys and enjoys shopping and exercise.



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# INTRODUCTION

*Evan Leong, Chief Executive Officer, Greater Good Inc.*

I hate doing yard work but I'm fascinated with farming. I have no desire to be a farmer, yet I love the potential in farming—taking a little seed and growing it into a productive crop to be harvested year after year.

I learned this sense of providence in the same yard where my grandfather planted his first tree. My Gung Gung (Chinese for grandfather) was a Chinese-American who worked extremely hard to educate and provide for his family. In his free time he planted and cared for many fruit trees in our yard. We have five mango trees, six lychee trees, orange trees, lemon trees, pomelo trees and several others.

I wasn't there to watch him prepare the ground, plant the seeds and nurture the growth, but I definitely enjoyed eating the fruit. Generations have been raised at my Gung Gung's home in Mānoa Valley, that verdant suburb of Honolulu. It has been more than 20 years since my Gung Gung passed away, but the fruit from the seeds he planted, almost a century ago, is still enjoyed by our family.

Fruit trees weren't the only thing he passed down to the generations. My Gung Gung also taught us important lessons in life based on his own experiences. These experiences were the "seeds of knowledge" of his life, which shaped him into who he was and later helped shape the people that we have become.

Each experience is like a small seed of knowledge. A fruit tree can feed people for generations to come, and the same goes for these trees of success. The beauty of seeds of knowledge is that they don't have to be our own.

I once heard at a seminar: "Find someone who has what you want. Think how they think. Do what they do and you'll get what they have."

That is what this book is all about. In the past year and a half, my wife, Kari, and I have interviewed hundreds of the most prominent business, community and government leaders in Hawai'i and around the world to find out how they think and what their life experiences have been. We are on a quest to find the very best "seeds of knowledge" that these people are planting.

On this journey, we found the same underlying core values mentioned over and over again in the interviews. Even though the stories and experiences are quite different, they're each built on the same basic foundations.

Our goal at Greater Good is to be a vehicle to pass along values that were a part of each leader's foundation for success, to help you create your own definition of a successful life.

While conducting the interviews, we also noticed something intriguing. No matter what preconceived notion we had of our interviewees, we always came out of the interviews with a different perspective. We realized that many of these successful people started out like you and I and developed into high achievers. Childhood pictures are under each of the quotes as a reminder that we all start off as children and our choices and decisions along the way make up who we become.

While each person has his or her own definition of success, we can all agree that we'd like to live a fulfilling life. The good news is that life can be even better than what we expect, if we know what to focus on. The main point is to climb the right "ladder of life." Many people climb the ladder of life and reach the top only to realize that they've been on the wrong ladder.

In the Adam Sandler movie *Click*, Sandler's character is asked, "Remember the leprechaun? The one from the cereal ad. He's always chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but when he gets there, at the end of the day, it's just corn flakes."

As it turns out, what was first envisioned as a success-in-business book has become a book on life itself. It's a book about making our lives and making a difference. It's about finding the pot of gold instead of the corn flakes. And it all starts with finding our purpose, which is where we begin ...