

INSPIRED BY THE WCO CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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“Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.” - Albert Einstein

The artistry of a great training programme is to inspire the trainees to persist in their professional development, and enrich them with pride, passion, motivation and self-confidence. I am fully convinced that the energy resulting from this medley can simply do miracles on this planet!

From my own experience as a Professional Associate (PA) at the WCO Secretariat for the 2009/10 period, I know that a good professional training programme like the WCO Career Development Programme (CDP), which is sponsored by the Government of Japan, can draw out the very best from Customs personnel, encouraging them to excel at what interests them, and instill this within them so firmly that they continue their hard work for the rest of their careers. It demands dedication, drive, tenacity and self-belief to design a good training programme.

I came from a country, where educational, professional and economic circumstances limit the opportunities for females. The CDP, under the guidance of Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, the WCO Secretary General, fully prepared me to compete in a male-dominated society and brought a lot of learning desire, passion and diversity of perspective to me. Mr. Mikuriya always led by example; he had a strong sense of purpose and high standards in everything he would do. A role model can transfer his/her own passion for learning to trainees. Passion is like fire; anything in the vicinity of which is likely to catch it.

“True leaders bring out your personal best. They ignite your human potential.” - John Paul Warren

Through a strong working relationship with my senior colleagues, I was provided an environment where creativity flourishes; where there is freedom of thought and speech, and where PAs are allowed to choose the research topics which interest them the most. My cultural competency got nourished.

Always surrounded by cultures different from my own, I was encouraged to identify and value both the commonalities and differences of the human experience. As a PA, exposure to diverse peoples was instrumental in shaping my worldview and values. My awareness and appreciation of cross-cultural understanding grew continually.

The objective of the CDP is to impart knowledge of working in an international environment to the PAs who are new to that. As they come from the Customs administrations in their home countries, they already have an idea, or at least a starting point, on which to build. However, the eminence of the CDP comes from the fact that it has been designed, keeping in perspective the diversity of the backgrounds of the PAs and to exploit their full potential irrespective of their initial level of competency.

Regardless of the fact that my placement was in the Compliance and Facilitation Directorate, I was offered an opportunity to learn about the various components of Customs' functions, i.e.

nomenclature and classification of goods, valuation, origin, enforcement, compliance, procedures, facilitation, and capacity building.

Under the supervision of Mr. S. Asano, Head of the External Relations Unit and responsible for the CDP, and Mr. M. Okura, a Technical Attaché in the Compliance and Facilitation Directorate, I got a unique and a lifetime experience, gaining an understanding of how the Sub-Directorates function in assisting WCO Members to implement effective and efficient controls, ensure fair and accurate revenue collection, protect society by intercepting and suppressing illicit and criminal activities, and develop international standards and recommendations within various committees by working with Members, other international organizations and the private sector.

My visit to Japan was among the richest learning experiences of my life. Enthusiasm balanced with composure was the tone of the learning event. I took a lesson from the action guidelines that Japanese Customs personnel follow, i.e. integrity, commitment, teamwork, 'kaizen' (continual improvement) and professionalism. Japan Customs provided a lot of exposure to the workings of Customs through presentations, group discussions, workshops and site visits. They also demonstrated how their systems function to achieve their key objectives, i.e. appropriate collection of taxes, ensuring a safe and secure society, and trade facilitation.

A study of the Japanese systems and the technology employed for risk management was influential in the successful completion of my research project on risk management. The study also revealed how Customs facilitates and promotes the international harmonization of trade procedures to expand the world economy and improve lives. A brief description of post-war history clearly indicated that the international environment surrounding Japan Customs had undergone enormous changes and how the functions of Customs in one country could no longer stand on their own, but could be more fully achieved by collective international cooperation.

“An organization’s ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage.” - Jack Welch

The CDP has a clear agenda of the training components as well as the achievement targets. It is the essence of the transformation of Customs administrations in developing countries, which face lots of weaknesses in their systems on account of a lack of resources, education, competence, training, and technical knowhow.

“At one time I thought the most important thing was talent. I think now that – the young man or the young woman must possess or teach himself, train himself, in infinite patience, which is to try and to try and to try until it comes right. He must train himself in ruthless intolerance. That is, to throw away anything that is false no matter how much he might love that page or that paragraph.” - William Faulkner

By working to ensure we live in a world that gives hope to those who are far less privileged, which prioritizes public safety, education and innovation, and where countries embrace the benefit of cooperating with one another, the CDP with its generous support has been contributing a lot to the people of developing countries, and creating a better world for all of us to live in!

The best lesson I learnt from the WCO Secretary General is to let integrity, humility, kindness, compassion, peace, and unity follow you wherever you go. The best the world has to offer comes from the best you have to give to others. It would be nice to feel that we are a better

world, a world of more compassion, and a world of more humanity, and to believe in the basic goodness of humankind.

“When we set about accounting for a Napoleon or a Shakespeare or a Raphael or a Wagner or an Edison or some other extraordinary person, we understand that the measure of his talent will not explain the whole result, nor even the largest part of it; no, it is the atmosphere in which the talent was cradled that explains; it is the training it received while it grew.” - Mark Twain
