



Putting Shoes on the Children

By Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA

Last summer I received a call from Erwin Gunawan, president of Matrix Seafood. Erwin had seen me give speech on leadership and he asked me if I could help him. He already was the owner of a successful restaurant, *Taste of Bali*; an Indonesian focused eatery serving delicacies from his homeland. But Erwin is not a man who likes to sit still. He, and several of his colleagues, Sadikin Djumin, Tom Chang, and Meiliana Kuswanti, were in the early stages of developing an international seafood importing company. Erwin said he wanted my help because he said he was inspired by my message of leadership. He told me he felt overwhelmed by the prospect of starting this company.

I have to admit, I liked Erwin immediately. He is a charming man with an unusual combination of humility and intense drive. Therefore I really wanted to help him, but I also wished to make sure that the services we offered were a fit for Matrix Seafood. Since I believe that the mission of a company is critical to its success, I asked Erwin why he had started Matrix Seafood. His answer made it impossible to say no to his request. It also is an inspiring story that I want to share with our readers.

Erwin told me that he grew up on Java, an island in Indonesia. His father had run a bus line on the island and was a successful businessman. But Erwin told me that there was great deal of poverty in his country and this really bothered him. He told me that the fisherman in his country were so poor that they could not afford to put shoes on their children. Erwin started Matrix because he felt that he could help these fishermen put shoes on their children if only he could provide a market for their seafood.

After Erwin told me this story I knew that I had to help him. Since July I have worked with the Matrix team to make this dream a reality. Let me tell you this team has taken on a daunting task. The seafood business in Indonesia is very unorganized. In order for Matrix to achieve its goal it must try to accomplish three enormous tasks:

- 1) Try to organize the fisherman in Indonesia so that Matrix can receive a consistent supply of high quality seafood in Columbus, Ohio.
- 2) Figure out the most efficient and rapid method of transporting this seafood to Columbus.
- 3) And find markets in this region of the United States for this seafood.

It is a daunting task, but they are succeeding. This intelligent, highly motivated team has already made several large sales. They have set their budget for 2009 at two million dollars in seafood sales. Presently, one of their customers is considering committing to \$250,000 per month in purchases. This is remarkable considering that Matrix just started doing business last summer. Also, every one of the four owners has a full time job outside of Matrix. Talk about work ethic! This team gets it done!

I don't know if Matrix will succeed in their goal, but it is hard to imagine that they will fail. I believe this story illustrates that there is no limit to what human beings can accomplish if they have a deeper purpose of helping their fellowman and are willing to do whatever it takes to make their dream come true. I believe that some day because of the efforts of these four courageous people, those children in Indonesia will be wearing shoes.