

The Way She Sees IT



Mention feminism and many people would cringe at the countless connotations associated with it. Before, it was simply aggressive females taking a knock off some rights from their male counterparts. Today, it's spontaneous sloganeering from bustier-bursting girl bands a la "Spice Girls". Feminism seems to have somewhat evolved into a culture, the likes of what we've seen in most girl-power movements. The women of the new millennium seem to have blended the best of both genders - men's bravado, aggression, assertion combined with women's feminine qualities like compassion, understanding and tenderness. On March 8, the world celebrates International Women's Day. Here, four women who have taken leading positions in the Information Technology (IT) field share some thoughts on their work and achievements.

By Joey Phua

20-planet

cover story



Cindy Payne,
 Founder and Managing
 Director,
 Asia Pacific Connections
 Pte Ltd

A woman dressed in a smart business suit took strong, brisk steps right across the hotel lobby towards its entrance to greet me when she caught sight of me walking in. It was only 9.05 a.m. on a gloomy, drizzling Monday morning but Cindy Payne lit up the room, being all bright, cheerful and full of energy bursting to be released.

This dynamic lady owns a business that provides integrated marketing services to IT companies. She is also one of the founders of Singapore Women In Technology (SWIT), an interest group for women working in the IT industry with a membership of 90 women and still growing; and currently its Chairperson.

"We had a vision for women in the IT industry, helping them to network and receive education on the various trends and developments in the IT arena," said



Payne. SWIT's events are strictly open to females only.

At many IT events, Payne observed that women were usually more conservative and restricted when it came to networking. "If women were given an equal playing field, taking away the male factor, then maybe they would be more confident to network," she added.

SWIT also aims to give women working in Singapore an opportunity to build a profile for public speaking. At its monthly meetings, speakers are invited to give speeches on female-oriented topics. Payne herself is a frequent speaker at industry conferences, including the Comdex events held in Asia and the US. She also has to her credit several articles contributed in industry journals.

Payne's involvement in women's organisations started when she

was staying in Hong Kong. She was involved in several professional women's associations, including the Hong Kong Women's Business Owner's Club, and in Singapore, she joined the Singapore PrimeTime Business and Singapore Business and Professional Women's Association.

When asked of her inclination towards working for the cause of women, she said that her aim is to "influence other women by encouraging them not to accept a secondary position in life". This she demonstrates by taking the lead. Payne appears very focused and competitive. She does not submit to external limitations, and said, "they will only make me work harder".

Still, Payne recognises that there are "certain limitations" imposed

her a critical lesson on the building and maintaining of relationships with people. Today, Payne still keeps in contact with people she met 20 years ago. Since everyone has moved on in their careers, they have now become very valuable resources.

Her company, Asia Pacific (AP) Connections, was launched in Hong Kong in 1993 and moved its operations to Singapore in 1996. Prior to this, Payne has more than 20 years of experience working with various IT firms in the Silicon Valley doing business development. In her earlier positions, she traveled widely and became familiar with the living, and working conditions of Greater China, Southeast Asia, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, among others.



on females and said, "you have to compete and accept that if there are any discrimination and bias, you just have to work harder to overcome them."

An advice Payne has for women who want to build up their careers is, "It is important find a mentor, someone who believes in you, helps you build confidence, learn from your mistakes and help you make some of the many tough choices in life."

Along her career line, Payne herself has several mentors. One was a male manager who taught her that "you don't bring problems to your manager, you bring them solutions". As a young manager then, this advice helped her developed her analytical and problem-solving skills.

When she moved on to work for a large corporation, she met another male mentor who taught



After summing up sufficient confidence in her capabilities, Payne started AP Connections to help IT firms bring their businesses into the Asia Pacific region.

On her future, Payne hopes to eventually become a consultant for companies across the globe, fully exploiting her skills and expertise. She said, "I'm working to see beyond the 'here and now', and start building for that."

Her experience as an American who has lived and worked overseas for more than 10 years has helped Payne become a more balanced person - allowing her to view other people's perspective in a more humanitarian light and to accept and appreciate cultures other than her own.

This has certainly made her the true "global citizen" she sees herself as.