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## For the Greater Good

Evan and Kari Leong started 'Greater Good Radio' hoping to learn the secrets of successful professionals. It turns out community service is big for each of those individuals, and now the Leongs push people in their generation to volunteer and give

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# For the Greater Good

**The name of Evan and Kari Leong's radio/TV show and podcasts — 'Greater Good' — says it all: Let's create a business community in which volunteer service and giving benefit everyone**

BY CHAD PATA

In the louche world of talk radio, where the Rush Limbaughs and Howard Sterns hold sway over the troglodytes of the world, *Greater Good Radio* would seem like a losing proposition.

For the uninitiated, *GGR* tries to appeal to mankind's desire to succeed rather than its baser desire to celebrate others' failures.

They interview successful people from all walks of life and talk about what has helped them move ahead, and what we all can learn from their methods.

This premise has not only allowed them to survive in the talk radio world, but they have just been selected as the Small Business Administration's Journalists of the Year for Region IX, which includes California, Arizona, Nevada and Hawaii.

"We looked at it as a research project," says Evan Leong, who dreamed up *GGR* along with his wife Kari, a teacher at Queen Kaahumanu Elementary.

"We talk to people at their peak in life, or close to it, and correlate similarities — from a senator to a CEO to the director of a community organization — to see what things are prevalent in all of them, and if we took and applied that to our own lives to see if we can have that same type of success. After 130 interviews, you start hearing the same thing over and over again, just with a different story."

The concept occurred to him after a pair of events, both negative, convinced him that he needed to act outside his own personal best interests and seek out ways to help the community.

The first incident that put Leong on his path to success was



The Leongs have been attracting some powerful guests to 'Greater Good,' including Sen. Dan Inouye

a failed attempt to receive financial support for a scholarship fund in 2002.

Leong was coaching pole vaulting at his alma mater, Punahou, and one of his athletes was the daughter of Duane Kurisu, who owns a piece of everything from this newspaper to the San Francisco Giants. Surely he had enough money to help out with a few grand in scholarships for worthy kids.

"He told me no, because I used no leverage," remembers Evan. "He said if he gave me \$5,000 we would give it to a school and it would be gone. But for every \$5,000 he spends, he gets \$150,000 worth of scholarships."

Instead of just giving the money away, Kurisu paid people to find scholarships and connect them with needy kids. That way his money got them more than just a year's tuition by finding what was out there the kids couldn't find on

their own.

"When I met Duane I wanted to know what is with this guy," says Evan. "He started off dirt poor and now he owns everything in sight. A half-hour discussion with him just totally tweaked out the way we think. He told me he wouldn't do any business unless it benefits this community."

This concept of using leverage and helping the community was still swirling in Leong's head when the second event happened in 2004 — the passing of his uncle, Sen. Hiram Fong, whom Leong had always sought out for advice.

"I'd always wanted to record my late uncle and I never did," says Evan. "Once he passed away I knew we were missing the boat."

"I remember my uncle and I were talking about my business, and he said 'That's good and all, but what do you do for anyone else besides yourself?' I really had no answer for him, and he did not give

me any judgment for it, but it got me thinking."

Leong's thought was, what if he could share these great men's knowledge with everyone? He was truly blessed to get to learn at their feet. How much better off would the world be if they all could learn from them?

He had found his leverage.

"It got me thinking, I can only give so much money, so much time," says Leong. "But if we could capture these conversations like I had with Duane, and that could have the same kind of impact on one, 10, 1,000, 1 million people, now we have something pretty interesting."

He wrote up the blueprint for *GGR* as a business plan for an entrepreneurship class he took while getting his executive MBA at UH.

Homework turned into reality in September '05 when *GGR* aired its first episode with Kent

Unterman, the former UH football star and owner of Pictures Plus. The program found its home on ESPN 1420, a sports station, but it quickly expanded onto the Internet. In January of this year it moved on to television on KGMB, with half-hour shows on Saturday and Sunday preceding the news.

While they are excited about the move to television, the Internet is where Leong believes they can have their most lasting impact as a source that can be accessed at any time.

"This is where we took the leverage piece," says Evan. "We can record these people once — that ends up on radio, TV, the Internet, print pieces and archives. So they can mentor people they have never met, in different countries, even after they are dead. That is something else."

In their best month so far they had more than 24,000 podcasts

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downloaded, and from as far away as Arizona they receive testimonials from people who have been affected by the show.

Many of the recurring themes they have uncovered from the interviews would seem obvious to most — things like having a strong sense of purpose and valuing family. But what surprised them was how important charity and giving back led to these business owners' success.

"I thought, you make money now and give it away when you get older," says Evan about his mindset before meeting Kurisu. "But you need to give back now, totally the opposite of how I think. But who am I to disagree with him? Who am I and who is he?"

Kari echoes her husband's thoughts as she tries to use the program to help change the way her contemporaries view helping out non-profits.

"We are trying to inspire our friends," says Kari, "because it seems like our generation is like 'Of course, I'll do that in 50 years, when I am just about to retire and I have the money in the bank.'"

"We are just trying to encourage them: No, you do that now while you are trying to build your career. And the show allows us to say don't just listen to us, listen to him, he did it; listen to her, she did it."

They have taken the message to heart. All profits generated from GGR are funneled into the Kokua Project, which aids student at UH in creating student-run business-



Evan and Kari Leong with sons Buddy, 4, and Colton, 2

es to give them practical knowledge of the world prior to graduation.

Another lesson that could be gleaned from the Leongs is how a couple remains together while trying to run three businesses and taking care of two kids. To them, it is the trial by fire that helps them be better together.

"When you start a business, if it is one person and not the other, the amount of pain you go through creates the same amount of growth," says Evan.

"If you're not doing it at the

same time, then one grows way more than the other — and then you have an issue, because one's not keeping up. And that is where couples tend to get into problems."

So their juggling act continues. They have a book scheduled to come out in September, and the guests keep getting bigger. In the second season of the TV program they will feature U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, and have hopes to net presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama, and popular Island musician Jack Johnson.

But in the end, to the Leongs, it is truly about getting out the message they learned from the Kurisus and Fongs of the world.

"I think we can create a business community that is second to none," says Evan. "One that benefits the community, works together with the community and becomes a model for the rest of the world."

Owen and Owen Photography

## STRANGE BREW By John Deering



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