

## A Leadership Lesson in Viet Nam

By Dave Wondra

As I sit before my laptop, mulling over what to write, my mind keeps returning to a final lesson I learned while in Viet Nam this past summer. This particular learning was about finding one's way as a leader. At that point in our journey, we were in a city called Hue, and we were staying at a hotel on the east bank of the Perfume River. We had been traveling for 12 days and were starting to crave western food. The clerk at the front desk told us that there was an Italian restaurant about 8 blocks from the hotel. That sounded simple enough for us to find on our own, so we struck out by foot in search of pasta.

Sometimes what seems simple isn't necessarily the case, practically speaking. Not all streets in Vietnamese cities were laid out by city planners. Some twist and turn at odd angles, following old footpaths around even older buildings. It can be challenging territory for people like me who are accustomed to navigating the square grids of Minneapolis.

I decided that I would lead the way. Needless to say, the walk was taking longer than expected and my three hungry fellow travelers were getting impatient. Eventually my daughter Laura asked, "Do you know where you are going?" I ignored her question as I kept looking for the right street. A few minutes later, a chorus started to build behind me as Theresa and Roselee joined the inquisition "Do you KNOW where you are going?" All of a sudden I spun around and blurted out "NO, I DON'T!" We all looked at each other in silence for just a moment, then I turned around and we continued our search.

I surprised myself with my answer to the question. I realized that this was a vivid example of what is at the heart of leading. People follow leaders because they want guidance in moving to a better, more fulfilling future; and leaders rarely can predict all of the specific steps of the journey prior to departure.

Finding the way can be difficult. It's one thing to articulate a future vision; it's quite another to do the hard work of getting there. The journey is challenging because we need to leave the safety of the hotel with only a general sense of direction, we often run into unexpected twists and turns, and in the middle of the journey we sometimes hear voices that question our ability to get to where we want to go.

What makes the difference is nothing short of faith in one's ability to lead. It requires faith in the value of the destination, faith in one's ability to navigate the unexpected, and faith in knowing that those who ask questions are good people who simply want assurance that everything will turn out okay. Without faith, the journey will never begin.

By the way, the pasta was delicious.