Bringing plenty to the table

HE’S a New Zealander with myriad working experience ranging from the New Zealand Army to the University of Massachusetts. Meet Professor Garry Clayton, the new dean of the Bank Rakyat School of Business and Entrepreneurship at UNIRAZAK.

Professor Clayton started out his career some 20 years ago in the New Zealand Army as an infantry platoon commander, and when he left to pursue a career in academia he was the Director of the Military Studies Institute.

“One of the defining moments in my career in the army was establishing the Military Studies Institute where we moved from purely inward looking training to integrating training with external provider education so that all soldiers would end up with a recognised civilian qualification after leaving the service,” he elaborates.

During his stint at the institute, Professor Clayton together with his colleagues established a series of qualifications and associated research activities in defence and strategic studies.

“Professor Clayton says that this inculcated him with a passion of service to facilitating individuals to reach their potential through education. He adds that it also gave him a background and understanding of strategy as well as leadership including both their importance and challenges.

“There are many similarities between business strategies and military strategies. Most business strategies are fundamentally military strategies,” he says. “Even the terminology used in business is military terminology.”

Professor Clayton goes on to say that his time with the military was a very enriching experience. It also afforded him to travel extensively across the world to countries like Indonesia, New Caledonia, Fiji and Singapore. It also provided him the opportunity to run a stand-alone internationally acclaimed tourist enterprise, the Army Museum. Additionally Professor Clayton was the first serving officer in the New Zealand Army to obtain a doctorate, which set precedence for many other officers to follow suit.

His last job took Professor Clayton to Dartmouth in the US where he was the Assistant Dean of the Charlton College of Business at the University of Massachusetts. During his tenure there, Professor Clayton had the opportunity to take up a position at Universiti Teknologi Mara two years ago as a visiting professor of strategic management and sustainability at its Graduate School of Business.

While he was in Malaysia, Professor Clayton became intrigued with the Malaysian economy and it was also around that time that the New Economic Model was published by the government, which Professor Clayton was impressed by as its key pillars is sustainability — one of his passions.

“Although my focus lies mainly on strategic leadership and management, at the University of Massachusetts I was instrumental in developing a unique programme in sustainability studies because there is no strategy without sustainability in its true sense. What I mean by this is development that meets our needs but not at the expense of future generations and because of this I was impressed by the direction of the government and where it is going,” he elaborates.

When he was offered a job in UNIRAZAK, Professor Clayton came down from the US to pay the university a visit and was equally impressed with it as it encapsulates three factors of business that are very important — innovation, leadership and entrepreneurship.

“Innovation and entrepreneurship in particular are the growth engines of any economy and provide true prosperity for both individuals and communities. Without the key element of leadership that leads us to anywhere we want to go, everything else seems nonsensical. So I was attracted to the university in terms of its focus. Its clear specialisation and focus on excellence was something else that intrigued and attracted me,” Professor Clayton explains.

He adds that Malaysia is a hub nation with a strategic location in the heart of Asia and is a modern, progressive, stable Islamic nation that has the ability to utilise western methods of management and business but still retain its cultural identity.

“Malaysia is providing a model for the world in terms of progress,” Professor Clayton says.

As the new dean of the Bank Rakyat School of Business and Entrepreneurship, Professor Clayton says that Malaysian are incredibly entrepreneurial in many ways but what he feels lacking are the skills to grow their business.

“If you wander around, you will see a vast amount of enterprise going on. Malaysian entrepreneurs are definitely motivated to set up a business but they don’t necessarily possess the know-how to develop their business. We need to help boost the infrastructure that will accelerate the growth of these businesses,” he explains.

Professor Clayton says that UNIRAZAK is one of the least known quality-driven universities in the region and, in his new role, Professor Clayton wants to change this by further enhancing its current qualities and promoting it widely to the public.

“We also need to build on our strengths and as a business school we need to create new business models and create new ways of enhancing business. Scientists look for ways of curing diseases but we’re about creating a business environment that is more robust. The world has transitioned to a new economy and we have to help Malaysia prepare for that. Presently Malaysia is doing the foundation work and we academics have to carry out the conceptualisation and forward-thinking part,” Professor Clayton elaborates.
He also intends to use his international network of contacts and has reached out to colleagues at the Sustainability Centre and the Business Research Innovation Centre at the University of Massachusetts, the University of Auckland and La Trobe University in Australia.

“They’re all prepared to assist and become Fellows of UNIRAZAK enabling us to draw on their expertise and experience. This will allow us to future improve our international reputation and cement our ability to contribute to developing business leaders and models for the new economy,” he reveals.

Professor Clayton certainly has had an illustrious career. He says that he is very fortunate to have had ‘one of those accidental careers’ in which opportunities have always arisen to help him with his next role. By what he already has planned for the Bank Rakyat School of Business and Entrepreneurship, it is no doubt that the school will soar to great heights just like its new dean.
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