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# [Haven: Leadership Food for Thought](#)

Posted by [Sheri Staak](#) in [Inspiration | Motivation](#), [Leadership](#), [On The Road](#) on Jun 23rd, 2012 | [0 comments](#)

Throughout my career, via my work experiences and travels, I've discovered that examples of innovative leadership can be found in some very unlikely places. While I've come across my share of WOW leaders in the business world, it's clear that great leaders aren't just sitting around in the boardrooms of large corporations, they're out there in the world accomplishing amazing things.



**On a recent trip to Cambodia, my family was privileged to meet with Swiss couple Sara and Paul Wallimann,**

**founders of Haven, a unique restaurant, training facility, and sanctuary for young adult orphans.**



Sara and Paul Wallimann,  
founders of Haven.

The premise behind Haven is to empower young Cambodians, who, after spending their childhood years in an orphanage, must now learn to support themselves in the outside world. Under the guidance of the Wallimanns, the displaced orphans are taught how to succeed in the culinary arts, providing them with a marketable skill.

Paul and Sara originally spent time in Cambodia working with kids in the orphanages. For months, they tutored the children in English and helped with fundraising and awareness. But what they discovered was a need beyond the protective walls of the facility. They found that after the children had grown, there was no infrastructure in place to transition them beyond the orphanage. As a result, they returned home to Switzerland to spread awareness and set up DRAGONFLY- A Project for Cambodia's Youth, the non-profit organization behind

Haven.

Sara explains that ventures like their restaurant, rather than handouts, is what really helps the locals. “When people give money, the Cambodians are as helpless tomorrow as they were yesterday,” she shares. “Our goal is to support and train these young people in their emotional and professional development, and give them a real chance in life. We believe that helping them to help themselves is the best form of support.”

The facility, which opened in December 2011, serves Asian and Western cuisine to the public, but is more than just another restaurant.

**Those eating lunch or dinner at Haven not only get a great meal, but are supporting the training program that enables young Cambodians realize a secure and independent future.**

Sara and Paul explain that their philosophy is to train the staff in life skills as well as restaurant skills. They provide these young people with accommodations, food, and medical treatment as well as a place to work and train in food service.

The training kitchen is set up so restaurant patrons can watch the cooking action. “A large window reveals everything our kitchen family is doing, so customers can relax, knowing they are eating good, well-prepared food,” says Paul.



Haven's classroom.

In addition to the kitchen, there is a small classroom where Paul educates the Cambodian's in the importance of cleanliness and sanitary preparation. "Anyone can show them what to do," he explains, "but it is also important to teach them the health and safety reasons behind the process. Only when we lead them through knowledge and example do we really lead them to a future."

Like truly great innovators and leaders, Sara and Paul are humble, and not self-serving."We entered this business not because we wanted to be in the hospitality industry, but because we want to help people. We think of our staff as family, and by treating them well, they work hard, the restaurant thrives, and we all get good results."

Good results, however, does not mean buckets of profits. Although the restaurant is enjoying a positive initial success, the facility is currently operating off the Wallimann's savings, and is not expected to become self-supporting for at least a few years. Haven's current and future profits are reinvested in additional trainees, making it a

truly philanthropic endeavor.

The Wallimann's are inspirational archetypes of my definition of WOW leaders. They are decisive problem-solvers who are passionately driven to succeed. While risking everything for the greater good of those willing to follow them, they put a plan into action based on blind faith, courage, and hard work. Best of all, the basis of their entire venture is investing in the growth of their protégés. Not only are Sara and Paul WOW leaders, but they are training and motivating the next generation of leaders.

Are you willing to go the extra mile to be a WOW leader? Do you have the motivation and drive to take a risk, lead with passion, and set the example for others? Whatever your job title, career ambition, or life dream may be, you can set yourself on the path towards becoming a WOW leader. Now that's food for thought!

*-Sheri Staak*

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