

International and overseas CEIBSers contribute to virus relief efforts

By Michael Thede & Lilly Zhang

The COVID-19 outbreak has inspired international and overseas students and alumni to show their true CEIBS spirit in contributing to the relief efforts. From helping to build a hospital to sourcing medical supplies to donating money to those in need, here are just a few of their stories.

A source of strength

For SOPREMA General Manager (Asia Pacific) Olivier Brault (GEMBA2019), Chinese New Year 2020 began in familiar fashion with operations at the waterproof systems manufacturer's Changzhou factory winding down for the holiday. Olivier was on his way to North America for an annual conference, however, when news of the coronavirus outbreak hit.



Over the next few days, as word of the epidemic spread, a sombre mood set in in many of the WeChat groups used by SOPREMA's staff. Hoping to turn things around, Olivier proposed that the company contribute materials to help build Leishenshan Hospital – one of two hospitals being constructed in Wuhan to treat coronavirus patients.

“Everybody wanted to do something, but not everybody could,” he says. “Instead of using our energy to worry, we wanted to use our energy to help people and the easiest way for us to help was by building stuff, because that’s what we do.”

Inspired by the suggestion, one of Olivier’s sales representatives reached out to some of the construction companies involved in the project to understand their needs. Less than 24 hours later, workers at SOPREMA’s warehouse were busy loading a truck with 11 tonnes of roofing materials destined for Hubei province.

“By doing good we also raised the mood of our employees,” Olivier says. “For at least a week, everybody in our company just talked about what we were doing. It had a really positive effect and we helped other people and the country at the same time – it was great.”

In all, the process took about five days from idea to installation. Watching the construction of the hospital being live-streamed on the internet filled Olivier with a sense of pride that extended to both the rest of his company and the local community.

“For me, it gave me strength. I realised the meaning of leadership when I put this idea into my employees’ minds,” he says. “In just a short time, it exploded into this really visible and meaningful event and I realised what we could achieve together.”



Coming together to make an effort

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Like many, Tmall Global Operations Manager Divya Anne Joseph (MBA2016) had planned to spend time with her family in Shanghai over the Chinese New Year. Instead, she and her co-workers spent over a month working from home to meet the sudden and unexpected surge in demand for supplies.

“There was a big need for health related products, so during the entire holiday everyone on my team was looking for masks, disinfectants, and other medical supplies to import into China,” Divya says.

“The difficulty was that it was during vacation time when everything was supposed to be standing still,” she says. “So, when we pulled the lever, there was some friction because things were all slowing down. And, all of a sudden, they needed to speed up again.”

She adds that the experience really drove home how much the migration of businesses to the digital economy has helped those in China be better prepared for these types of situations. In order to share the experiences of Chinese e-commerce with

international entrepreneurs, Divya contributed to the editing of Digital Action for Entrepreneurs in the Age of COVID-19, a book presented by Alibaba Global Initiatives which offers insights to help businesses rise above the coronavirus outbreak through digital technologies and innovations.

In between work, answering questions from those back in her native India and leveraging social media to let others know what was happening on the ground in China, Divya says she noticed a stronger bond forming amongst her colleagues.

“People on my team were working from different parts of the world, so it was good to see them coming together,” she says.



Support at home and from overseas

Olivier and Divya's stories are great examples of how businesses, driven by corporate social responsibility, mobilised resources to assist with relief efforts. Others in the CEIBS community, including international MBA students and overseas CEIBSers, also tried to make a difference through donations.

In January, along with several former CEIBS classmates, Puran Services Assistant General Manager Song Peijin (FMBA2017) launched a fundraising effort in China for hospitals in virus-stricken areas in Hubei, Henan and Anhui provinces.

“We just wanted to contribute our part to the outbreak, no matter how small that part was,” he says. “And, we were happy to see that many of our fellow classmates and alumni donated to the campaign with such great passion.”

More than 100 CEIBSers, including 9 international MBA students, participated in the fundraiser, which helped purchase over 10 tons of supplies, including medical gloves, safety goggles, face masks and disinfectants. Amongst those who were inspired to contribute was Shunya Ikeda (MBA2020).



“I really respect the strong leadership and also respect all the people who participated in the fundraising,” Shunya says. “This has inspired in me the importance of turning compassion into action and gathering many people’s support.”

CEIBS’ overseas chapters played a part, too. In February, under the guidance of chairman Tang Songrong (EMBA2010), the CEIBS Alumni US Chapter, for example, provided support with a fundraiser to buy supplies for a medical team from Shanghai Huashan Hospital dispatched to treat virus patients in Wuhan. Together with volunteers such as Wang Qian (MBA2012), the chapter helped collect more than 395,000RMB in donations from US-based alumni.

“During the peak of the outbreak, many US alumni sought help from us in sourcing medical supplies and logistics,” Wang Qian says. “Some wanted to help, but had no channels to do so. This is why we organised the campaign, so that we could contribute to the relief together in an efficient way.”



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