



**Asian Productivity Organization**  
**“The APO in the News”**

Name of publication: ABS-CBN News (15 November 2014, Philippines)

Page: <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/business/11/15/14/why-i-became-social-entrepreneur>

## **Why I became a social entrepreneur**

by Pacita Juan

Posted at 11/15/2014 1:15 PM | Updated as of 11/15/2014 1:15 PM

(In this column, The Business Mentor invited Pacita Juan to write about how she became a social entrepreneur. Pacita founded ECHOstore in 2008, and it now has 6 branches around the country. She was named Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year in Social Enterprise in 2011, Go Negosyo Social Entrepreneur in 2010 and PLDT Bossing award for social enterprise in 2012. On November 18, 2014, she will be an awardee of the International Women's Entrepreneurial Challenge in Stockholm, Sweden. She has written many books on coffee and cacao besides writing for newspapers and magazines.)

MANILA, Philippines - There are many detractors who think that Social Entrepreneurs are simply the same business people but with a "marketing" gimmick or spin. Some even think it is a whitewashing or "green washing" for the same profit-takers which entrepreneurs are known to be.

Some even surmise that Social Enterprises just call themselves such to be in fashion; Or to appeal to a consumers' heart and charity.

When we thought of setting up a social enterprise we knew many would raise their eyebrows or have a doubting opinion of the concept. And more over, some detractors even doubted we would last beyond a year.



Pacita Juan visiting Benguet Coffee Farm.

More than a decade ago, I was very active in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In my previous corporate life, I made sure the company had heart, had CSR. I was also active in the League of Corporate Foundations(LCF), an esteemed group of corporate foundations like Petron, Ayala and Shell whose members welcomed me even if I was representing a small foundation.

We held CSR celebrations every year; we held seminars and trainings on how to do CSR that was aligned with business. We differentiated CSR from Philanthropy. I attended regional CSR forum in Malaysia, Jakarta and Bangkok and learned so much from our ASEAN brothers and sisters on connecting CSR with the ASEAN culture. I even was sent to Japan to attend a CSR Sharing of Best Practices under the Asian Productivity Organization or APO.

In 2008, my life took another turn. I stepped down as CEO of a major coffee chain and left the foundation, as well. I said goodbye to my good friends in LCF with a heavy heart. But I knew something was brewing inside me. I was looking for a better way to reach out to our small farmers, our small producers.

The next thing I knew, two of my friends were also looking for something to do in our “midlifying” years. We wanted to give back through our business. We wanted a business whose main mission is to solve a particular social challenge.



Pacita Juan addressing a Women Entrepreneur Forum in Vietnam.

We founded our first social enterprise and called it ECHOstore. I went on an Entrepreneurial exchange visit to the United States right about the same period we were building the ECHOstore.

To my pleasant surprise, I saw a similar concept in a fair trade store called Ten Thousand Villages. Exactly what I imagined ECHOstore to be. It was a confirmation of my vision...a store with a social mission.

Then we made sure our love for the environment could also be expressed in this new venture. What a great combination, we thought. Our friends thought otherwise. They thoughtfully warned me “Kikita ka ba dyan?” (Will that business actually be profitable?). I said “yes, not much, but it will.”

I could not explain that it was fulfillment we were after. Not all the money in the world can buy the happiness we get when we see small producers having hope for a sustainable business. If you measure profit in terms of our visits to many places, we are indeed profitable. But more than that, it is fulfilling emotionally and psychologically. Yes, it is a lot of psychic income, as they say. And guess what? The same detractors who doubted our sustainability are now our buyers and advocates.





ECHOstore's three partners (left to right) Reena Francisco, Pacita Juan and Jeannie Javelosa.

Somehow the Universe leads us to a better place if we allow room for change in our lives. I allowed it by stepping down and moving on. And now in a happier place, I can only convince more people and speak about joining the Social Enterprise revolution.

It is sustainable. It is fulfilling. It is the way all business should really become. Think social mission first. Then apply a business model that would be sustainable. The world will be a happier place. Below are tips I would like to share with the readers.

Here are tips to be a social entrepreneur:

1. Find your passion.

2. Find a social mission closest to your passion.

Ex: coffee, women farmers, heirloom rice, organic farming

3. Make a business plan.

4. Look for potential partners and suppliers aligned with your cause.

5. Have a benchmark or model company or person. Align your dreams and steps with how they succeeded.

6. Pitch your plan to angel investors or impact investors for additional resources.

7. Start small. Dream big.