

Climbing the ladder: Kann Kunthy

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At the beginning of this decade, Kann Kunthy was farming on his family's land after failing to pass his high school exit exams. "I realised that was not the ideal situation for me," he said.

Now the 30-year-old is the General Manager of the Phnom Penh office of Digital Divide Data* (DDD), one of few large-scale organisations in Cambodia that combined a profitable business structure with a holistic social mission. DDD trains under-privileged Cambodians in specific technology skills such as data entry, and then outsources their labour to companies in Cambodia and abroad.

While working for DDD, the income young workers generate is used to support them as they pursue career advancement by studying at university or in other training courses. Kann Kunthy is in charge of 120 people, making sure that DDD continues to make a profit in Cambodia so that the social impact can continue as well.

Although Kann Kunthy now speaks fluent English, passable Japanese and has a wealth of technology and management qualifications, it has not come easily. He has worked tirelessly since leaving his mother's farm in Kampong Speu.

Despite his mother's protests, Kann Kunthy came to Phnom Penh by himself. He found the New Life Foundation* in early 2000 and it was there that he began to study English and computers.

"It was very difficult at the beginning because I didn't have these skills," he explained. But after attending every class he possibly could for 3 months, he began to gain some confidence. "After a year I could speak ok English because in and out of class I would talk to everyone I could."

With his new skills Kann Kunthy hit the street to look for a job. He found one as an English teacher making \$65 a month, but teaching was not for him. One day he walked by the DDD offices on St. 360 and asked a person standing outside what skills one would need to get a job there. "They said if I could speak English and knew about computers I could get a job," Kann Kunthy said.

He took the job a week after meeting with the office manager at the time and almost immediately began his upward climb towards management. After three months he became assistant team leader. Six months later he was promoted to team leader, and after a year and a half in that position he became the branch manager for DDD in Battambang. "We became the first DDD branch to be fully sustainable," he told Lift, meaning that the social cost of running DDD was totally covered by their commercial profitability.

In 2007 Kann Kunthy went to study Human Resources Management at the Nippon-Keidanren International Cooperation Center in Japan*. He said that the discipline and work ethic of his peers inspired him and the corporate culture was very surprising. "Sometimes people work for the same company for 50 years because the company really cares about their employees and their families."

"I have worked many 24-hour days and had many sleepless nights at DDD," said Kann Kunthy. "I have received offers to make much more money, but I stay here because I believe in our social impact."

