

Hinrich Honorary Leaders of Global Trade

Distinguished members of the international trade community who have demonstrated their commitment to developing the next generation of trade leaders.



“If you want to grow, learn from the best. Find great leaders whom you can learn from and ask for advice and feedback. Mentorship is a powerful catalyst for development.”

Van Nguyen

Vice President, Apparel Sourcing South East Asia, adidas Sourcing Limited Liaison Office in Ho Chi Minh City

Trade career highlights	
22 years	Global sporting goods industry
Executive positions	Vice President, Apparel Sourcing South East Asia
	Senior Director, Operations Management
	Director Strategy & Operations adidas Sourcing Limited
17 years in managerial roles for costing, strategy, project & operations	Senior Manager, Footwear Sourcing Operations, Hong Kong
	Operations Manager, LO Costing Head HCMC Liaison office adidas Sourcing Limited
Academics	Bachelor of Science in Chemistry

After earning her bachelor’s degree in Chemistry from the Science University in Vietnam, Van worked at a laboratory in a local sugar cane company. In her role, she established quality and testing standards, developed operational and troubleshooting procedures to ensure reliability and performance of the laboratory, and optimized production quality.

With the job market less-than-favorable at that time, Van felt fortunate to be making a good living right after graduation. But despite being grateful for the opportunity, Van still felt something was missing. “I felt a lack of fulfillment. I didn’t have that feeling of waking up every morning and going to work on something you really love,” she says. As her job became increasingly routine, she decided to leave the company and look for new opportunities.

Longing for career growth, she shifted gears and found a job as a Costing and Materials Control Supervisor at a large footwear company in Vietnam. “It was quite fascinating. I still vividly remember the feeling of finding a win-win solution with a business partner or contributing to positive changes in the company. I felt like I was making a real impact,” she says. “From that point onward, I started my career in trade.”

Passion for interacting with people

Van was impressed by the industry and people she worked with. Vietnam was heavily focused on boosting its economy. The influx of foreign direct investment in the manufacturing industry contributed to positive changes, and Van wanted to be part of that change.

“I was the first local to be given the opportunity to step up into the management role. That’s where I developed my leadership capability.”

“I knew it was important to be open to learn and build the best team possible. If we have a clear picture of what success looks like, a well-defined plan to achieve success and a strong team in place, we are going to win. The possibilities are endless.”

“I like interacting with people, connecting, sharing, and learning from them. At that time, all the senior and middle managers were foreigners,” Van recalls. “I was the first local to be given the opportunity to step up into the management role. That’s where I developed my leadership capability.”

Her first work experience in costing led her to join adidas Sourcing as Costing Specialist and was soon thereafter promoted to Assistant Costing Manager in the company’s Liaison Office (LO) in Ho Chi Minh City. She was then promoted to Head of LO Costing; she later moved to Operations Management. At that time, Operations Management was a male-dominated field and Van was the only female voice at the table. That did not stop her. She embraced this new field with courage and conviction as she saw opportunities to learn, explore, add value, and eventually she earned a seat at the table.

“I moved into an Operations Management role without any experience in the field, but I knew it was important to be open to learn and build the best team possible. If we have a clear picture of what success looks like, a well-defined plan to achieve success and a strong team in place, we are going to win,” she recalls. “The possibilities are endless.” Despite being in a male-dominated field, Van felt very grateful for the gender equality, diversity, and opportunities that her company offered to its employees.

After several years as Operations Manager, Van had a successful career, but she still felt something was missing. She found the answer when she moved to her company’s regional office in Hong Kong. “I decided to work overseas to learn about different cultures and aspects of business. It was extremely beneficial and a great experience,” she says.

“I was already part of the management team in Vietnam, but I needed to break out of that in order to further grow,” she added. “I wanted to expand my knowledge and skillset in an international environment by learning about new cultures and working in a different country with more diverse teams.”

Growth mindset

After living in Hong Kong for over three years, Van returned home and became Director for LO Strategy and Operations, where she led several transformational projects for the division. With her experience overseas, she wanted to elevate the local team and contribute to the development of her country.

In 2017, she became Senior Director of Operations Management, where she oversaw multiple factories in Vietnam and Myanmar. Van led a high-performance, cross-functional team of over 50 people to build new capabilities and accelerate the company’s large-scale growth in Vietnam, as well as increase supply-based capacity and expansion in Myanmar. Van continued her strategic work when she stepped into her current position as Vice President of Apparel Sourcing, Southeast Asia. In her role, she is excited to build regional infrastructure and organizational capacity to support long-term growth. She is particularly focused on driving the transformation of the apparel industry in the use of sustainability practices, technology, and digital systems. This, Van believes, will create a positive impact in the industry, local communities and beyond.

Van emphasizes the importance of maintaining both humility and a growth mindset to learn and develop. “The key is understanding how to deal with failure,” she says. “My greatest lesson in my professional life is how to treat failure or a challenge the same way I did when I was a child.

Van strongly believes that leadership is a skill that is learned, practiced, developed and refined over time.

“When children learn how to walk, they fail, and they stand up. They might get bruises and be upset, but then they stand up again, adjust and continue to walk. They easily forget and continue into the next day until eventually they can run. This is how you treat failure as part of your life. Try to embrace it and learn from it. Keep a positive outlook and don’t let failure knock you down,” Van advises.

Self-learning and mentorship

“When I stepped into a completely new field, or had to lead a new team, I tried to reset myself,” she recalls. “Self-learning is important. I tried to find good books related to costing, business management and leadership. Our company focused on training and developing people, so I joined many impactful courses.” Van strongly believes that leadership is a skill that is learned, practiced, developed and refined over time.

Aside from her self-learning efforts, she also actively engages in mentoring programs, both as a mentee and mentor. “If you want to grow, learn from the best. Find some great leaders in the company and industries who you can learn from and ask for advice and feedback. Mentorship is a powerful catalyst for development,” she says. I have had several great mentors who I really respect and have learned a lot from.”

For those considering a career change, Van says it is crucial to build their flexibility when they plan their next career move and be prepared. “Don’t be afraid to move out of your comfort zone,” she adds. “You may struggle in the beginning, but when you find your formula and you know how to adapt, it is a rewarding feeling.”

Her diverse experience working in various capacities related to trade and business helped Van build flexibility in her career.

“Perhaps at a certain stage in your career, you will no longer only be thinking about yourself, but also about how you impact the people around you, the industry, the community and beyond. I will continue to support the younger generation in the company and in the industry.”

Van encourages everyone to “keep a growth mindset and positive attitude. Follow what you believe in and are passionate about. And perhaps at a certain stage in your career, you will no longer only be thinking about yourself, but also about how you impact the people around you, the industry, community and beyond. I will continue to support the younger generation in the company and in the industry.”

Next generation of trade leaders

Van’s strong passion for building the next generation of global trade leaders does not stop at her current organization. She has been collaborating with the Hinrich Foundation and RMIT University Vietnam to develop resources for the Master of Global Trade program.

While managing a diverse team in multiple countries as well as the company’s sourcing strategy in the region, Van wants to contribute to the transformation of the industry through education and the use of technology, automation, sustainable practices and digital solutions. “The world keeps changing and we have to adapt and transform ourselves,” she says.

Her next step will focus on developing her organization and infrastructure to support long-term growth in the region. “I don’t have the answer for everything, but what I do have is a talented and passionate team,” she says. “My job is to support them to perform at their best.”

“Trade touches every part of people’s lives. It can contribute to the development of the economy and country and make the world better.”

Over the last 20 years, Van has developed her diverse expertise and leadership in costing, operations management, regional strategy, and sourcing operations, as well as trade and government relations, and talent development.

Through her work in trade, she has discovered her passion and purpose. “Trade touches every part of people’s lives. It can contribute to the development of the economy and country and make the world better.”

Read more inspiring stories from our Hinrich Honorary Leaders of Global Trade [here](#).



“Trade has the power to create peace. Trade helps improve the environment, gives people more choices and improves their quality of life.”

Dr Steve Clarke
Senior Program Manager,
Master of Global Trade, RMIT University



“Don’t limit your opportunities by not knowing what your next step is. Just keep reaching out and something will come through for you.”

Dr Lynne Sprugel
Founder and CEO, Abuzz Global



“A global trade leader is a pathfinder — it’s blazing the trail for others to follow in an area that is not well enough understood or appreciated.”

Zoe Dodge
Asia Production Head, Allbirds, Inc.



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