

March 2020

As part of the Café Insights series of interviews with insightful speakers, The Insight Bureau recently caught-up with Steve Stine, Chief Executive Insider at *Inside Asia* and a consultant and advisor to leaders in business. Steve shares some of his observations on what makes Asia tick, and the new themes, like profits-with-purpose, which he sees being rapidly adopted by business leaders.



**Andrew Vine**

Well, hello and welcome to another in the series of Café Insights. I'm Andrew Vine, the head of The Insight Bureau, and today my guest is Steve Stine. How are you?

**Steve Stine**

A pleasure to be here. Thank you.

**AV**

Great to see you. Now, Steve is a 30-year veteran of Asia. We first met, I think, when you were at IBM -- a long, long while ago -- and you've had an interesting transition; you were a journalist, you moved into technology as a technology executive, you were a strategy consultant, a headhunter, and now, finally, out on your own doing a few very interesting things, including being the founder of *Inside Asia*. So, we'll talk about that in a little while, but it's quite a progression. But what I think it is a very powerful one too, because it does tie-in so much wonderful experience that you've had personally, and I know you're joining the dots on what makes Asia work, and managers effective in the region. So, I'm really interested to talk to you about that ... And it's nice that since you're doing the interviewing quite a lot of the time for *Inside Asia* - that I now get to turn the tables. I'm interviewing you!

**SS**

I love it! I love the questions. And to your point, some people would argue I have a bit of professional attention deficit disorder, and so, therefore, after three to five years, I get bored and I move. But I think also part of it is just Asia is a dynamic, fast moving, always present. It's the opportunity that's presented itself through the years to do different things, and I've jumped at it, from start-ups to working with major corporates to being in advisory roles. It's really the content that has actually driven me point to point and role to role, and which brings me to why I introduced *Inside Asia* podcast because there are so many extraordinary stories to be told in the region.

**AV**

And my Café Insights are very short. You go into lots of detail, and these things are like 30, 40 minutes long with wonderful content!

**SS**

Yeah, my producer asked me to cut it down. They were about an hour each, but we realized the optimal point was 25-35 minutes, and we do a little scripting and editing around it as well.

**AV**

But you're sitting-down with individuals, talking about what basically makes Asia tick.

**SS**

Yes, that's right. I think I typically look for veterans, either Asians themselves or long-term expats who've been to the region who have either domain expertise, geographic insights, have lived and operated, and have something to say. So, they're storytellers, but they also cut across all areas of specialization. We've done 120-plus episodes over three years, and it continues to--

**AV**

Wow. I didn't realize it was that many...

**SS**

Yes, it's rolling, and I think we have a wonderful captive audience. I'm very pleased with where it is. It's not a money-making venture -- it's a passion. And by virtue of that passion, and my access to these thought leaders, I've been able to kind of create a view on what Asia was and what it's becoming, and that's where I am today.

- AV** Well, I was going to ask you, having done all of these, what would you say are the top issues that are on the minds of leaders in Asia? What would you say are the real emerging trends?
- SS** I think absolutely it's about how to maintain and perpetuate growth. I think issues around what we call 'future-fluent' issues, whether it be artificial intelligence, the future of jobs, issues around sustainability, it's all kind of Asia's, and Asian leaders are starting to think about what the future holds for them and how they're going to address it. One of the most interesting parts that comes out in almost every podcast one way or the other is the ability of Asia corporations or organizations to leap-frog the West. That idea of taking an idea, learning from the West, and then just going further than anything-- I mean, look at digital commerce or look at digital payments or look at some of the ways that they're incorporating different infrastructure projects. I mean -- you name it -- it's an extraordinary track record, and we try to flesh that out in our conversations.
- AV** Brilliant. And I know you've got a new collaboration going with The Conference Board and the Center for Creative Learning, and it's around 'purpose' in business, purpose and profits.
- SS** I did. I did. This has been brewing for about five or six months for me, and I've been ravenously devouring the information on this and having conversations around the world. In August of last year, The Business Roundtable in the US issued a statement saying that no longer did they believe Milton Friedman's statement that, at all cost, a corporation should simply support the interest of the shareholder. There was a broader requirement and responsibility to the stakeholders, whether they be internal employees, suppliers, even customers. And with that, we decided that there's an opportunity in Asia to get in front of it instead of being reactive, so we put together a council with The Conference Board and the Center for Creative Leadership called the Asia Corporate Leadership Council to actually approach these issues, research them, and generate, for our council members, insights that allow them to get ahead of this.
- AV** That sounds very progressive. And the kind of deep conversations that you're having with business executives, that's how we work, of course, where organizations want to step away with their teams and think about their future strategies, about managing today but with an eye to the future, making sure that they have good, solid, sustainable businesses for the future to manage.
- SS** That's right. And I think with this idea of, "can profit and purpose coexist?" is extremely interesting, only because it's now been proven that in fact you can profit and have purpose. You don't have to trade-off one for the other. Now, a lot of organizations don't know that, and also a lot of organizations haven't invested in what it takes to get there. That's the purpose of the council. That's where we're spending our time and energy. And this is where we want to have discussions with companies around the region.
- AV** That sounds really good. Great. Before you go, you mentioned you are writing a book. On what exactly?
- SS** Well, this is a bit of a different take. So I noticed in my 10 years as a headhunter working with Heidrick and others, I was seeing lots of senior executives come through my office who were either dying, they were in soul-sucking experiences, they'd run the gauntlet and done as much as they felt they could, or they were being pushed into retirement. And so much talent is available and drifting off to the golf course that I decided it's time to write a book about what I'm calling crossing the threshold. What can you do to actually reinvent yourself in your late 50s, come out the other end, and create a venture or explore a new opportunity that you never thought possible before? So, the books about that. I'm just finishing up some of the case studies. Hope to come out with it later this year. But we'll be building different retreats and bringing executives off to wonderful locations to really reboot and rethink their lives and their professions.

- AV** Great. It's always good to see you. You kind of re-energize me every time I talk to you. It's great.
- SS** And you me, Andrew! Thank you so much.
- AV** All right. Thanks, Steve. See you soon.

Steve is a 30-year veteran of Asia. His career has been a rich and diverse one which culminate in a deep understanding and broad appreciate of what drives business in Asia and what it takes to be a successful business leader in this region. Steve ties together the threads of his career, and taps into an Asia-wide network spanning ten markets and six industries. Seeing an opportunity to extend the reach of his conversations with senior corporate leaders and key influencers across the region, Steve launched the Inside Asia podcast in 2017, and today this is the most widely listened-to podcast on Asia business and politics, from Asia, on Asia.

He not only chairs and moderates discussions for events and corporate meetings, but can advise and curate the programme with clients to ensure that they pull together the critical issues and address the burning issues of the day.

To learn more about Steve Stine's experience and insights, please visit:

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