

# BOILD

TOO

Stories Of Entrepreneurs  
From Temasek Polytechnic

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# FOREWORD

***By Mr Ted Tan  
Deputy Chief Executive Officer  
Enterprise Singapore***

Entrepreneurship is intricately linked to the Singapore story. Our streets and landmarks are named after prominent pioneers such as Lim Nee Soon, Syed Omar bin Ali Aljunied and Naraina Pillai. Over the years, we are proud to have our very own home-grown businesses making their mark beyond our shores. From local food favourites like Old Chang Kee to technology companies like Razer, we are seeing more Singapore brands grow their footprints internationally. Our ever-enterprising local businesses have also been at the forefront of innovation, transforming their businesses to remain relevant in this age of digital disruption. Hospitality company Ascott is one such example – it set up a Centre of Excellence to test bed novel solutions that complement their business.

The spirit of entrepreneurship in Singapore continues to flourish. According to the Singapore Department of Statistics, there were just 22,000 startups in 2003; today, in 2019, there are more than 40,000 startups.

Enterprise Singapore works together with many partners to build a conducive business environment for enterprises to grow, innovate and venture overseas. In 2018, we launched the Startup SG Network, a virtual ecosystem of Singapore's tech startup community to encourage innovation and collaborative partnerships.

The Institutes of Higher Learning play a critical role as an ecosystem builder for innovation and enterprise development. Temasek Polytechnic (TP) for instance, actively champions activities to promote the spirit of entrepreneurship among its students and alumni. TP, together with Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Singapore Polytechnic launched Pollinate two years ago, which has been well received by students and entrepreneurs. Supported by Enterprise Singapore, Pollinate is a first-of-its-kind platform that enables cross-collaboration of various innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives among the polytechnics, and provides startups with their wide industry networks. In 2019, TP led the

establishment of the Aquaculture Innovation Centre (AIC) with Enterprise Singapore's support. Headquartered in its premise, the AIC seeks to ignite innovation and improve farm productivity of local aquaculture enterprises, helping them achieve greater growth.

This book shares the journeys and achievements of TP alumni's entrepreneurs. Enterprise Singapore is delighted to have supported some of them in their ventures. I hope that these stories will inspire the next generation of our young talent to take the leap of faith to start their own businesses, and build more global brands from Singapore. I wish TP all the best in its efforts to educate and unleash the potential of our bright, young minds for Singapore's future.

Let us work together to help our aspiring entrepreneurs Start Small, Think Big and Act Fast, as they grow into globally successful enterprises.



# PRINCIPAL'S MESSA

***By Mr Peter Lam,  
Principal and CEO***

Temasek Polytechnic (TP) aims to develop students holistically for them to thrive in the future workplace. Through our focus on Domain Skills, Life Skills and Future Skills, we are making education real for our students. One area that TP deems essential for future-ready students is innovation and entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneurship and innovative mindset learned will benefit the students in whatever career they will choose. They can solve problems creatively, seize the right business opportunities and leverage teamwork skills in the workplace.

Entrepreneurs among our students and alumni address real-world problems and turn them into viable business opportunities. They build up businesses through instincts, grit, diligence, perseverance and a can-do attitude. Through their startup journey, they grow stronger in character with a keen sense of judgment and toughness of spirit.

On September 2018, we launched Temasek Launchpad, our one-stop innovation and entrepreneurship hub. In this hub, we have a comprehensive ecosystem that guides innovators and entrepreneurs at every stage of their venture. Temasek Launchpad conducts more than a hundred workshops and seminars a year on innovation and business skills. It has a team of expert mentors, such as business leaders and entrepreneurs, to guide entrepreneurs in overcoming obstacles. It also has a MakerSpace+ Studio, which houses many cutting - edge equipment for students and alumni to tinker innovatively.

Since Oct 2018, Innova, an innovation and entrepreneurship course, is taken by all TP students to give them a foundation in human-centric problem-solving and commercialisation of ideas. Students also participate in Hackathons to apply their skills in solving real-world industry and community

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problems creatively. Together with the programmes offered in Temasek Launchpad, students get a rigorous education in innovation and entrepreneurship.

This "Bold Too" book is a testament to TP's focus on entrepreneurship and innovation. "Bold Too" celebrates journeys of TP alumni entrepreneurs who courageously followed their dreams and rose above their challenges.

I trust you will relish reading and sharing these stories. We are proud of the achievements of our alumni entrepreneurs, and we strive to be a constituent of more of such bold journeys in future.



# THE ENTREPRENEURS HEROIC JOURNEYS

***Introduction by Gabriel Chu  
Bold Too Project Leader***

In a classic hero's story, the protagonist went on an adventure to answer a calling for the greater good. During the journey he met with seemingly insurmountable obstacles that left him beaten, defeated, and discouraged. With the guidance of a mentor, he rose from the ashes and won victoriously, coming home as a hero transformed.

We are familiar with such heroic stories. Luke Skywalker answered the call to save the galaxy from the evil empire, became dispirited after a defeat, but gained eventual victory under the tutelage of Yoda. Frodo answered the call to destroy the ring and triumphed over many ordeals, tests and inner turmoils with the help of Gandalf and the Fellowship. Similarly, many of our TP entrepreneurs are heroes in their entrepreneurship journeys.

In this book, Bold Too, we bring you twenty outstanding TP entrepreneurs that boldly answered the call for entrepreneurship. They got derailed by many obstacles during their own hero's journey but emerged victorious, stronger, and wiser. In many of these journeys, we are glad that TP and Temasek Launchpad were able to provide much-needed guidance, resources or connections.

We recognise common virtues of authenticity, bodacious-ness, creativity, and dynamism in them, thus they form the headers of our chapters in this book. Let us begin to delve into the inspirational stories of our twenty individuals, as they share their secret recipes on rising above the odds to achieve their eventual successes.





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CHAPTER 1



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CHAPTER 2





# ZAPPING TO SUCCESS

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*By Chelsea Chan*

*Founded in 2014, FoodZaps provides restaurants with affordable subscription-based ordering software, helping F&B businesses manage their outlets more efficiently. FoodZaps is both functional and intuitive, and it runs on Android operating devices.*

## Dreams from Afar

I was born in Tianjin, China, but my early years were spent in Zhuhai and Tianjin. At the age of 12, I came to Singapore. Having experienced the education systems in China and Singapore, I was exhilarated at the opportunities that the education system here provides.

Being a Diploma in Information Technology student in Temasek Polytechnic (TP) paved my entrepreneurial journey. With TP, I had a paradigm shift towards my attitude in learning. I realised that learning is more than going to school and achieving good academic results. For instance, I also had the chance to network with like-minded individuals who were passionate about being an entrepreneur someday!

The holistic education at TP was eye-opening – as students, we were not only supported in gaining employment but also equipped with intangible life skills through various school and community projects. In the process, we honed our resourcefulness, teamwork and project management skills, and dreamt of new business ideas.

## Breaking New Grounds with FoodZaps

Before running my current business, I held various jobs as a programmer, software developer, project manager, and restaurant owner – all of which taught me a great deal and contributed to the success of my business. I first got the idea of starting a business several years ago while I was taking my degree in computer science. With a couple of friends from China and Japan, we ventured into the F&B industry with a Japanese restaurant.

Starting a restaurant turned out to be much more difficult than I imagined. I had to manage every detail: the acquisition of the venue, renovation, furnishing, procurement of food ingredients, hiring of restaurant staff, and even the design of the table napkins. As the orders were manually processed, human errors were unavoidable. Waiters were placing wrong orders, and requests were sometimes forgotten or served to the wrong tables.



*Chelsea shows us the FoodZaps app*

After receiving some poor feedback from customers, I started to study systems available in the market to improve our efficiency. I soon realised that most of the existing F&B software packages were complicated for a small-to-mid-sized restaurant and came with hefty prices. Hence, I was motivated to think of alternative solutions.

With the ingenuity of my Chief Technical Officer, Winson, we created an affordable prototype that ran on a hybrid technology, where it can operate with or without an Internet connection.

Thus, FoodZaps was born in 2014.

FoodZaps went onto clinch the gold prize for Singapore's Infocomm Technology (IT) Federation's "Best Innovative Digital Product/Solution" award. With our

hybrid solution patented in Singapore, we managed to beat Carousell, DBS and Singtel at their own game in a major competition. The accolade launched our global expansion. Today, FoodZaps has over 100,000 downloads worldwide.

We have successfully collaborated with bigwigs like *Samsung, CapitaLand, Asian Culinary Institute (ACI), DBS, Nets, Grab* and *Google*, to name a few. We also have in the works an integrated and seamless digital mobile solution for businesses, to be launched in Singapore.

## A Missed Goodbye

As an entrepreneur, the line between our work life and personal life blurs. Time becomes the most significant sacrifice we have to make.

There is a sense of guilt that we carry as entrepreneurs because we are seldom fully present in the lives of our loved ones. While I place customers at the forefront of my business, I have missed out on precious moments with my family and friends. Time is priceless, and I had to learn it the hard way.

In January 2019, I received devastating news in Singapore. My father had passed away in China of a heart attack. As everything happened suddenly, I did not get a chance to see him during his last

moments. He was only 56 years old. My family fell into a dark realm of sadness as we mourned our loss. It was a time that shook me to my core and made me question the entrepreneurial journey that I took. It felt like the career I chose had stolen the time I could have had with my father.

My father was a successful businessman in the construction industry. While I was writing his eulogy, I took comfort in the fact that he had led a meaningful and fulfilling life.

His demise made me question my sense of purpose. I pondered on what I wanted to achieve in life, and what would give me the greatest sense of satisfaction and joy. Was entrepreneurship worth the valuable time I was missing with my loved ones? To answer this, I had to re-evaluate my intent to pursue entrepreneurship.

Was it money or passion that drove me? While money is a motivating factor, it is the by-product of my entrepreneurship journey. Though my father's passing was sudden, he had abundance in life because he courageously pursued his goals in entrepreneurship. I gained a precious lesson that life is a pursuit of the things we want and love. If there is one thing I genuinely enjoy, it is entrepreneurship.

Ultimately, we should not live life with any regrets. The value of life lies in how we choose to live each moment. Therefore, I learned that I should continue to persevere in the things that I firmly believe in. My father's passing made me recognise the importance of managing time between work and family. Planning my time well becomes an imperative part of my life.

*Chelsea received the SITF Gold Award for Best Innovative Infocomm Product in Digital Services (now known as SG:D TECHBLAZER AWARD).*





## Plan, Planning, Planned

As an entrepreneur, we wear multiple hats, and that leads to an endless list of daily tasks. So how can we manage our time wisely so that we do not feel overwhelmed by the many pressing tasks?

Through personal experience, I have understood the importance of planning, planning, and more planning! Understanding your workday and thinking about how you would like to maximise each day is very important.

Every single day of an entrepreneur's life presents itself with different challenges and needs. Hence a system that helps manage the daily work that needs to be carried out is essential.

## The Journey is Yours

Entrepreneurship is never about feel-good moments. So never start a company just because you feel like it.

That would be my advice to all students in TP who wish to venture into business. It would be best if you only start a business when you feel compelled by a particular problem, and know that you have found a better way to solve it. In this regard, I guess passion comes first, and the business second. You may have plenty of great ideas to solve different problems but always work on the one that is most compelling to you and frequently on your mind.

Start with building something that you or others may need. Spend an ample amount of time understanding the problems

I manage my time using the Eisenhower Matrix, where I categorise my daily tasks with tags like Immediate Resuscitation, Very Urgent, Urgent, Standard, and Non-urgent.

Once I have tagged all the tasks based on their priorities, I use the Pomodoro Technique, which involves a timer to help me power through distractions. I can then focus and get things done in short bursts while taking frequent quick breaks. Patience is vital in this process.

I believe I have found a productive routine that fits me. With these methods, my workflow is manageable. Now I have time for everything and everyone!

customers face. It helps to talk to different people who may have experienced similar difficulties to acquire insights.

Luckily for me, I have managed to build an exceptional support system over the years. I have a great circle of influential entrepreneurs who provide constant guidance and advice, and who have now become dear friends in my life.

My concluding advice for aspiring entrepreneurs is always to practise caution and plan well. Even if you have the most brilliant of ideas, poor planning could lead to failure in the long run.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Every entrepreneur will greatly benefit from a strong support group.
- In your entrepreneurial journey, be passionate about your pursuit, practise good time management and do an ample amount of planning!



# POPPING THE RIGHT AMBITIONS

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*By Zac Chua Zong You*

*The Kettle Gourmet is a business borne out of a singular passion. It creates a unique spin on traditional popcorn, one that is both flavourful and healthy.*



## Popping Dreams

Growing up, I was always the guy with a bit more 'gamble' in my blood than my peers. I always wanted to explore and take bigger risks. But if you had told me that I was going to be in the popcorn business when I was younger, I would not have believed you. I mean, nobody would dream of becoming a popcorn seller!

I first tried my hand in business when I was a Diploma in Accounting and Finance student in Temasek Polytechnic (TP). I started a tech company and was lucky enough to sell it off to an investor. That early success motivated me to become an entrepreneur.

Being a huge foodie and snack-lover, I wanted to be behind a food project. So, I decided on popcorn as my first product. My partner and I started The Kettle Gourmet on a part-time basis while we were still studying at the Singapore Management University. Upon graduation, I started running The Kettle Gourmet as a full-time business.

In the beginning, we introduced our popcorn at a tech event where we distributed our cheaply printed name cards and let the guests sample our popcorn. On the night of the event, we clinched close to 10 deals, one of whom was a lady who

worked in a multinational corporation (MNC). She wanted to engage our popcorn supply service to regularly stock her office pantry. The deal gave us the idea of servicing pantries on a subscription model.

Soon after, we were invited to set up a booth at the Singapore Airport Terminal Services (SATS) Ltd for her company event. More people got to know about us, and that was the start of a huge exponential growth curve for the business.

During this period, we also created a landing page to elicit more responses. Sales started coming in, and we managed to secure more corporate retainer accounts. We got our first big break when a tenant at the now-defunct water theme park "Big Splash", approached us to cater for one of their events. When we learned that they wanted to engage our services, we were over the moon. We worked hard and made sure we gave our best that day. It was a memorable experience that I will never forget.

Now there are 16 employees on the team. It has been the ride of a lifetime, indeed!

## No Stranger to Rejections

Rejection is an everyday affair for me. The biggest one to date was a deal with an established cinema chain. I remember feeling excited and optimistic when the partnership was proposed. However, they decided to work with a cheaper supplier in the end, and all my hopes were dashed. I felt defeated, but I learned that rejections are part of being an entrepreneur.

When you first embark on the journey as an entrepreneur, you will meet different kinds of people. Most are out to sell you their ideas and concepts, and one of your biggest challenges will be learning to differentiate the sincere partners from the dishonest ones.

Dealing with brushoffs and difficult people is not easy, so I continuously find ways to keep my team and I motivated. Thankfully, our clients and customers have been incredibly supportive of us. When I see them enjoying our products, it motivates me to work even harder.

## Overcoming a Loss

Throughout my entire career, my family, especially my father, has always been supportive of me. I owe everything I am today to him. When The Kettle Gourmet was in its infancy, my father was diagnosed with cancer. It was devastating to my family and me, but we prepared for the worst.

In 2018, my father passed away. It felt like my entire world had collapsed. The man who raised, inspired, and reassured me throughout my life was gone. To say that it was heartbreaking would be an understatement, as his death made everything in my life feel meaningless. I decided to take some time off from work to properly mourn my loss so that I could move on.

With time, living in a world without my father became a little more bearable. Eventually, I returned to my business. Having lost someone so dear and close to me has made me a much stronger person today. My father's passing taught me that life is too short to let it pass us by. It is powerful to be fearless in our pursuit of the dreams we want to achieve. You only need to be right once, and the rest is history, so "just whack"!

*The Kettle Gourmet's first two staff (interns)*



## Your Gut Instinct Is Worth a Thousand Words

I am fortunate to have immense supports rallying me on. There are four groups of people to whom I can credit my success: dependable stakeholders, reliable suppliers, loyal customers, and a strong team. Not to forget, we have great products too! I hope to build a food and beverage conglomerate with an extensive range of products soon. Currently, I am expanding our business channels and developing more products.

Last year, I appeared in the news a total of 38 times. The Kettle Gourmet went viral in 2018 because of our Bak Kwa Popcorn, which was introduced during Chinese New Year. It caught the attention of one journalist who wrote about us, and many others began to feature us in their articles.



If I have to advise young entrepreneurs who want to start their business, I would say one thing – trust your gut. When I first began, I had doubts and would always be asking people if I was doing the right thing. Some would say yes, and others would say no, which had me confused. In the end, I chose to trust myself.

My next advice is not to be afraid to socialise! My most memorable experiences in TP were the times my friends and I helped one another out in projects and lectures. Later in university, I spent a lot more time networking, and it became a significant part of my school life. It is important to expand your connections and interact with new people, for you never know when they may offer you help or opportunities. So, do not be afraid to speak up and reach out to others!

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- As an entrepreneur, always brace yourself for setbacks and rejections because these are part of the journey.
- You only need to be right once, and the rest is history, so just do it!
- It's not what you know, but who you know – networking is everything.



# BY NATURE, FOR NATURE

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*By Sunny Chuah Sun Soon*

*At Bamboobee, bike lovers and enthusiasts have the unique experience of building their bicycles from bamboo and riding bamboo bicycles. As a leader in affordable luxury products inspired by nature, Bamboobee fuses art and function into its designs, crafting works of beauty for both children and adults.*



Sunny with a couple from the Netherlands and a solo rider from Denmark at the no-man land border crossing (Irkeshtam Border) from Kyrgyzstan to North-west China.

## Project Creator, Not Entrepreneur

The term 'entrepreneur' gives me goosebumps. I have always been excited about creating and experimenting with new things. To me, being an entrepreneur comes with too many fanciful illusions and too little realism on hardship and perseverance.

When I studied the Diploma in Mechatronics at Temasek Polytechnic (TP), I thrived in the innovative school environment where students are encouraged to be creative. TP inculcated in me the ability to see a problem as an opportunity. I had a myriad of experiences that pushed me outside of my comfort zone. For instance, I took part in the Odyssey of the Mind National Competition, a global creative problem-solving contest for tertiary institutions. I firmly believe that it is crucial to invest time and effort in innovation and problem-solving as an entrepreneur because the journey is all about seeking solutions and better ideas.

From a young age, I have always felt the thrill of creating something new and presenting it to the world. In Secondary 4, I participated in a national business case competition on green energy and won. The competition was challenging because we were also juggling our studies. However, it was worth every minute. Now and then, when I hit a slump, the poignant memories of that competition would surface. It is encouraging that students these days are increasingly exposed to innovation and entrepreneurship.

## The World is our Classroom

I remember starting this journey over a summer trip during my university days. I was planning a 6,000km cycling expedition that would bring me across Central and East Asia, on the long-forgotten Silk Road with a bicycle made of bamboo.

As a third-year undergraduate planning and executing this expedition, I was exhilarated in spite of the pressure. To me, it was not so much about exploring the world, but rather a trip to discover myself while retracing the glory of the Silk Route. I experienced the roughest terrains and the most erratic climate with nothing but a traditional bamboo bicycle. It was life-changing.

The "Circle of Life" expedition is analogous to the journey of an entrepreneur. For five and a half months, I travelled from Kazakhstan to Tajikistan and from China back to Singapore all by myself. It was very lonely and energy-consuming. Thankfully, I met many kind people on the trip who offered a helping hand. The bamboo bicycle turned out to be a great conversation starter!

From the "Circle of Life", I noticed that people had an interest in bamboo bikes. That was when inspiration struck. I thought, why not turn it into a business where people can customise and create their unique bamboo bicycles? That's how Bamboobee was born in 2011. Since then, we have won several awards including the 'Taipei Cycle d&i Awards 2015', 'Gold Award for Young Enterprise' and 'Core 77 Design Award for The Best of Design 2013'.

Despite being a company based in Singapore, most of our customers are from Europe and the United States. I am proud to say that we disrupted the traditional norms of what bicycles are and how they should look. Locally, it is still a challenge penetrating the corporate scene and getting people to see bike-building as a team-building activity. In Singapore, people would much rather build wallets than bikes!

As an entrepreneur, it is important not to ignore how the market reacts to our products and services. There is no commercial value to what we create if there are no monetary rewards. Many local entrepreneurs are opting for tried-and-tested formulas with more predictable returns rather than starting something completely new.

However, I believe it is vital to find a balance between doing something safe and coming up with an innovative concept.

Due to the nature of my business, I travel a lot. I have come to realise that Singapore is well-respected globally as a business hub. Despite this, we find it harder to step out of our comfort zones.

## China Calling

During my younger days, I would pay annual visits to my grandparents in their hometown at Dongshi, Fujian, an old province in China. Each time I would spend a couple of weeks or months there. Back then, I was only a 12-year-old, and it was difficult to leave behind a comfortable and secure environment in Singapore. I always felt that the streets in the prefecture were frightening, and it was dangerous to venture beyond the comfort zone.

In Dongshi, where most people embark on entrepreneurship and set up their businesses, there is a deeply-rooted trading culture. My time in China allowed me to gain a new perspective, and I was able to immerse in a new culture and way of life. Today, as I operate my business in China, I find it

*Pictured are the bicycles from Bamboobee and Sunny Chuah giving a thumbs up!*







easier to break the barriers and connect with the local Chinese since I am familiar with the local practices.

## **Don't Start If You Are Going to Stop**

Good advice is like bitter medicine – it is hard to swallow.

My mentor, who is a business owner in adventure sports, once shared a hard truth with me. He said it is easy for entrepreneurs to spot a business idea and start a project. However, if they are only creating something spontaneously with no intention to persevere through hardships, then it is better not to start the business. To me, that was a wake-up call.

Passion may run out one day, but one must remember their initial resolve and be consistent. It is an essential ingredient for Bamboobee because the life of an entrepreneur is not as glamorous as it seems. When you invest a lot of time and effort, there will be days when you feel like giving up because you feel like you have had enough. I would always think of the positive feedback our customers have provided and remember our fundamental purpose behind Bamboobee.

Entrepreneurship is more than a job. It is a life partner that will grow old with you. However, I often find myself longing for personal time. I am always thinking about work, even while eating! It later dawned on me that I need to learn to let go, make an effort to live in the present and enjoy the moment with my loved ones

## **Every Second Is a Moment to Learn**

I like keeping my mind fresh and alert so that I can come up with new ideas. I make it a point to exercise before each day ends and get adequate sleep to face the new day. Inspiration can come from anywhere and everywhere. Even when I am browsing Facebook, I am looking for business opportunities! I am a visionary who prefers the creative aspect of our business. I want to give bike lovers a platform to have fun and to experiment with their bicycles. Trust me, the experience of riding a bamboo bike is really out of this world!

If I had a chance to restart my life's journey, I would still become an entrepreneur.

However, I wish to inspire more people to work with me and build a more sustainable future with Bamboobee. I believe there is always a handcrafted bicycle for everyone, and Bamboobee can kick-start the journey.

## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

- Inspiration can strike from anywhere, so be open-minded and be ready for it.
- When the going gets tough, remember your initial resolve, be courageous, and persist in what you want to achieve.



# ONE-STORY

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*By Alvin Lee*

*Onezine is a Retail Marketing Technology (MarTech) company that provides innovative and integrated solutions for branding, content marketing, and technology to champion business growth for its clients.*

## From Zero to Hero

Back when I was pursuing a Diploma in Mechatronics at Temasek Polytechnic (TP), I was a listless student who had no inclination towards studying hard. I barely managed to scrape through my examinations in the first two years. Things got worse in my final year when my laziness finally caused me to be retained. In a way, having my graduation delayed was a blessing in disguise because I received the wake-up call I needed. I promised myself to work harder and tried my best to improve my attitude and behaviour in school. When I was rewarded with good academic results after I put in consistent effort and hard work, I learned that nothing is impossible if I am just willing to try.

At TP, I gained skills that until today, I can apply in both my personal life and work. Two courses especially stood out for me. In 'Intelligent Systems', I learned to map out scenarios through an 'if-this-then-that' approach that aids my business decisions, product developments and interface designs. In 'Project Management', I learned how to allocate my resources properly and put them to good use.

## The Book That Started It All

Before I became an entrepreneur, I tried my hand at many different career paths. In my first job, I was a sales engineer selling barcode equipment and supplies for three years. My then-boss, who was also my mentor, honed my skills in sales and business development. He taught me how to ask the right questions and communicate effectively with customers and teammates because any misunderstanding might cost a lot of money. Afterwards, I worked as a part-time secondary school teacher for two years while exploring opportunities in multi-level marketing. During this period, I learned the importance of communication and leadership, especially in guiding my students and sales team.

The truth is, entrepreneurship had never crossed my mind as an employee. One day I had a chance encounter that would change my entire life. I came across the book 'Rich Dad, Poor Dad' that left a significant impact on me and shaped my perspectives on how the world worked.



In the book, author Robert Kiyosaki recounted his experiences with two different fathers. He shares the various ways they shape his thoughts about money. I was intrigued by Kiyosaki's realisation that hunger and desperation are the keys to success. The book also touched on how we should be fulfilling our own life goals instead of fulfilling someone else's dreams by working for them. That truly struck a chord with me.

I resigned from my job shortly after reading the book. 'Rich Dad, Poor Dad' set me on a path of self-exploration and discovery. Till today, its philosophies continue to influence my entrepreneurship journey immensely.

## The Journey Begins

I started Haven Solutions, a sole-proprietor home services and marketing company in 2004. I had an idea of making advertising stickers or magnets to promote air conditioner repair and service, just like the stickers gas enterprises used to sell household gas cylinders. Without such ads, no wonder people did not know whom to turn to for their air conditioner servicing!

The organisations I approached loved the idea, but they wanted me to manage the whole design process. That is when I decided to partner with my friend, Noel, to start a design company called T Creations LLP.

Onezine was created when Noel and I had the thought of venturing into print publications. However, the high costs of paper, content creation and distribution were huge deterrents. In late 2005, I met a Chinese scholar who was working for a client of ours. He introduced me to an e-magazine engine that allowed users to "flip the page" through a software on a tablet. I had an epiphany then – what if we used this engine to host interactive content like videos and games for brands?

With that idea, we partnered with Motion Computing, one of the most popular tablets in the mid-2000s, and pitched to an investor. Our concept was so ahead of the time that we received a six-figure investment within two months. We developed our e-magazine as an app and began collaborating with brands to promote their products and campaigns on a fully interactive e-magazine.



## Turning Setbacks into Success

Sales are painfully slow during festive periods, mainly because the multinational corporations (MNC) are on holiday breaks. There was a year Onezine suffered severe cash flow issues, and I had to let my staff go. It was bleak, and the future of my company was at stake. It was heart-breaking because it felt like everything I worked so hard for was falling apart. Nevertheless, I was determined to piece the company back together.

I worked hard at turning things around, and I was blessed when major deals suddenly started coming in, and what was supposed to be the worst year for Onezine, turned out to be its best!

The journey of an entrepreneur can be lonely because I am unable to share my concerns and difficulties with others and expecting them to understand. While they could be there to provide me with a listening ear, I am still the one solving my problems at the end of the day.

I know that be it my colleagues, suppliers, or even business partners, anyone could break my trust one day and affect the business. Hence, self-reliance is an essential virtue of entrepreneurship. Being prepared for the worst is the best defence for an entrepreneur.



## Overcoming a Wavering Passion

As I grappled with many different problems seven years into the business, I could feel my enthusiasm waning. At that time, I had to juggle between running the business operations and bringing in sales for the company.

Self-doubt crept in, and I began to wonder if I would be happier doing something else.

I have come to realise that uncertainties are part and parcel of our lives, and it is how we overcome them that matters. Today, I am thankful for all the opportunities, setbacks, and struggles that I went through for they have made me a stronger person, and a more resilient entrepreneur.

Deep down, I know that my passion is in entrepreneurship, and I would always strive to make my business better. To keep myself inspired, I would listen to motivational podcasts and enrich myself with the experiences of other entrepreneurs through business books.

## The Power of Faith

Running a business is a roller-coaster journey. It is crucial that we cultivate a reliable support system to survive the ups and downs. My wife, who is the most important person in my life, is a huge encourager to me.

As a devout Christian, my faith gives me hope and strength to persevere. Bible verses provide me with the confidence and consolation that I need for the tough times.

## Discipline to Drive Success

Discipline is vital for an entrepreneur. We have to admit and recognise our flaws and come up with ways to improve on our shortcomings.

For me, I struggle with punctuality. My solution?

I would send my children to school and my wife to work, leaving me with little choice but to wake up early. I also ensure that I clear my work during the weekdays so that I can rest and spend quality time with family and friends over the weekend. By doing so, I can organise and prepare for the new week with a clear mind.

Another rule I have set for myself is to borrow books from the library instead of purchasing them. This way, I will be compelled to finish the book within the allocated time.

Having been through the journey, I urge aspiring entrepreneurs to look at where they are today, as it is determined by the decisions they made in the past. In a similar vein, where they want to be in the future is based on the choices they make today. It is essential to learn from your mistakes and make sure you do not repeat them. You have the responsibility not to let your mistakes become your failures.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- **Discipline and having an independent mind are key ingredients to an entrepreneur's journey.**
- **Other than keeping yourself inspired with passion and dreams, it is important to persevere in the face of hardships and keep on going!**





# THORNY AMBITIONS

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*By Eugene Ong*

*Headquartered in China and Singapore,  
Guangzhou Wan Teng Supply Chain  
Pte Ltd ships fresh, delicious durians directly  
from Malaysia and Thailand farms to China,  
for the enjoyment of its customers.*

## Raring to be Different

Raised in a family of entrepreneurs, I was always drawn to the startup journey and knew I was going to be an entrepreneur myself one day. In the early 90s, my parents ran a business in the car trade and loan financing. However, along the way, they ran into financial difficulties and had to declare bankruptcy. For the first time in my life, I understood the significance of money. Strangely, instead of being fearful of the business world, I fully embraced it.

I have always had a business mind since primary school. For instance, I would buy Dragon Ball collectable cards that were priced at 20 cents each and sell them to my peers for 30 dollars. There were times I would even make 100 dollars from a prized card! I would also go to the bookstore and purchase all the latest comics before selling these 'limited edition' comics back to my classmates at higher prices.

In secondary school, I offered better deals and commissions to handphone sellers than retailers, so all the good phones would come to me. I would then resell these phones at higher prices on eBay.

Those were my early entrepreneurial streaks. Nevertheless, the pivotal moment happened when I was a student at Temasek Polytechnic (TP) studying the Diploma in Accounting and Finance. My lecturer asked me what my dreams were, and I confidently replied, *"My dream is to be an entrepreneur."*

I have never looked back since.



*Eugene stands with his pride and joy: freshly harvested durians!*

## Young and Ready

At 17 years old, I partnered with my childhood friend, Mark on several small business opportunities. Mark and I studied in the same primary school, secondary school, and later enrolled in TP together. Like me, he had lofty entrepreneurial dreams.

Instead of waiting for an opportunity, we decided to create one. We had read somewhere that students were organising parties for their peers at nightclubs. As students ourselves, we understood the target consumers very well, so we decided to give it a go. One of our friends owned a nightclub, so we asked to use the venue on weekdays when the place was less busy. We had no money to pay the club upfront, but they agreed to let us pay after the event, and we were in business!

My first foray into business as a young adult was on track. We did well and saw profits quickly. Filled with confidence from our success, we searched for the next big business opportunity.

One of our close friends' father, the founder of Singapore's famous Pontian Wanton Noodles, heard that we were looking for business opportunities, and that led to our second business venture. We became Pontian's first franchisee, and it was a big deal for us. However, before long, Mark and I realised that being part of a franchise was neither our passion nor our brand.

## Insightful Intuition

In one of Singapore's worst financial crises from 2007-2009, the compressed natural gas (CNG) automotive business that I started took a strong hit. My factory was already profitable in the first month of operations, but when government regulations changed suddenly and the industry stopped receiving the necessary support, I knew that everything was lost.

I have learned that entrepreneurship is all about risk management and intuition. The lessons were apparent in this case: It is less risky entering markets that can quickly turn cash flow positive. On the other hand, heavily regulated businesses can be extremely volatile.

Even though I had no money in my pocket, I was ambitious to start a new business. This quote by Steve Jobs speaks to me as an entrepreneur: "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future."

## Carpe Diem

In 2010, I left Singapore for China at the age of 24. I remember feeling aimless after the failed CNG business venture, and a mentor reached out to me and said I should use this time to "go and help others." And so I did just that.

I have helped friends in various sectors, never expecting anything in return. One of them was in the durian trade. Over time, I realised many people were investing or planning to invest in the durian business as it was lucrative. The observation piqued my interest. As I continued to help out, my network of business partners in the durian trade grew exponentially. In mid-2018, I eventually worked with one to start Guangzhou Wan Teng Supply Chain, importing durians to China.

*Eugene attends a business forum in China.*

# 第四届东盟-中国一体化投资战略合作论坛 The 4<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-China Economic & Investment Forum

主办单位: 东盟-中国工商总会  
Organizer: ASEAN-China Commerce Association

中国 西 南宁 2018. 9. 14  
Nanning Guangxi China September 14, 2018





## Bringing Joy, One Durian at a Time

Everyone knows the story of Robert Kuok, Asia's Sugar King. His company controlled 80 percent of the sugar trade in Malaysia, and 10 percent of the world's sugar business. Heeding his mother's advice, he managed the price of sugar so that it could remain affordable. His story is a tremendous driving force for me, and I want to recreate the same happiness with durians.

My passion as an entrepreneur has never diminished. Of course, the worst that can happen to me is bankruptcy. But many bankrupt entrepreneurs have risen above their hardships, despite hitting rock bottom. Till today, I do not celebrate even when I have secured huge investments, because I know it is for the long haul and every milestone is the beginning of many more to come. I am always ready to seize new opportunities!

## A Servant Leader

My life motto is to lead, but always for the greater good. In leading a business, I tend to ask myself this – are entrepreneurs born or made? I believe true entrepreneurs are born leaders.

In Mandarin, the word 'enterprise' is written as '企业' with a human character '人' on top and a stop character '止' at the bottom. I always remember my teacher saying, "When you stop learning how to be a better human, your enterprise will stop growing." It became my guiding principle to become a better person, leader, and entrepreneur. Through experiences and self-reflection, I have discovered that servant leadership is a powerful way to transform work culture and positively influence those working alongside me.

## Be Your Biggest Cheerleader

Everyone thought I had gone bonkers when I decided to invest every cent I had into a new durian venture. It made me realise that sometimes in life, you have to follow your heart and be your own biggest cheerleader. It takes time for people to understand what you are pursuing, and this is not achievable in a matter of days or weeks.

I am a vegetarian and practise meditation as I value the clarity it brings to my mind. I make it a habit to write my goals every morning and meditate before I go to bed. By doing so, I have come up with many business solutions

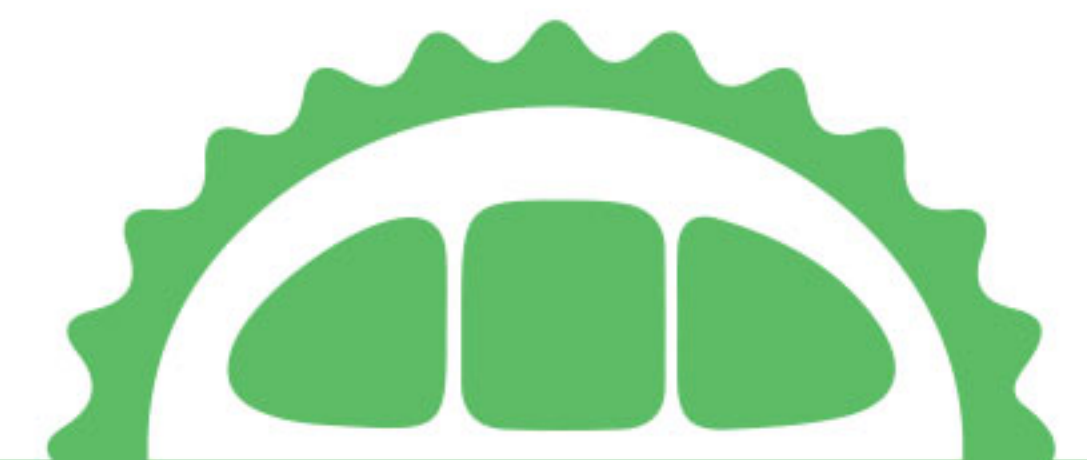
## A Better You

Life is full of epiphanies and opportunities. So never see obstacles in your path as the end of your journey. Instead, see them as markers pointing the way to new routes and opportunities. My advice for young, aspiring entrepreneurs is to make all your mistakes before you turn 30! Your twenties are the golden ten years where you should maximise your windows of opportunities.

Before you start anything, always do ample market research. You need to understand the customers' needs, even before they discover it for themselves. I also believe in living in the present. I see no point worrying about tomorrow when it's not even here. Neither should we dwell on the past because that is already behind us.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Be courageous and resilient in your journey as an entrepreneur.
- Instead of waiting for opportunities to appear, be proactive, and create them for yourself!



CRE



# ACTIVE

CHAPTER 3





# A MEATY KIND OF LOVE

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*By Chris Lim*

*The MeatMen Channel is a social media platform best known for its videos on food recipes. First started as a hobby by four enthusiasts in 2013, The MeatMen Channel was officially incorporated in 2016. It continues to create more recipes and explore different culinary styles that are easy to do at home, celebrating the diverse Asian food culture in Singapore and the Southeast Asia region.*

## A Serial Entrepreneur



The MeatMen Channel is not my first entrepreneurship venture. After graduating from university, I received the Entrepreneurial Talent Development Funding grant from the then SPRING Singapore to start a business. Temasek Polytechnic (TP) facilitated the process. With it, I set up my design company in 2008. The venture, however, did not turn out well due to difficulties. After five years, we decided to cease operations in 2012.

Running my own business for half a decade, while still in my early twenties, felt like an achievement. Therefore, prematurely ending it was heavy to bear. In hindsight, admitting defeat was not the best solution. However, I have no regrets, as it was a necessary decision given the circumstances at that time. With the support of my wife and for the sake of my two children, I managed to pick myself up again.

After a year, I ran solo and set up another company in web development. Subsequently, I found other business partners and merged our agencies as a combined entity to do digital development until today.

I view entrepreneurship as more of a culture than a journey. Entrepreneurship is an immersive experience that we can relish and admire when we walk through it.

## Bringing Education to Life

During my polytechnic years, I was young and hopeful. I forged strong friendships and gained a glimpse of the real world. I studied Interactive Media Design in TP. Being around students who were project-driven and task-focused motivated me to learn autonomously. I gained a lot during my time in the polytechnic. Having graduated from the Temasek School of Design, I attained not just visual arts and communication skills, but also presentation skills, life skills, and useful industry-relevant skills from my internships.

The mentors from the TP Entrepreneurship Centre Temasek Launchpad were supportive and genuinely



helped me in many ways. One individual is my friend Alice, an advisor for TP's Innovation & Entrepreneurship programme. Other than just receiving funds from the Centre, aspiring entrepreneurs like myself were often encouraged and empowered to do better in our business pursuits.

The hardest aspect of being an entrepreneur is not having like-minded people to share the trials and tribulations of the journey. So, it is encouraging that TP has offered me a platform to interact with other entrepreneurs and learn from my mistakes. The direction I have received has spurred me on to try different things in life.

Entrepreneurship is not a cushy and comfortable path. However, TP prepares its students for this possibility if and when it occurs, as it did for me.

## A Foodie's Calling

I started The MeatMen Channel with my army mates in 2013. We spent time every weekend and had fun together. In the beginning, it was just the three of us. We were all creative designers, so we figured we should collaborate to explore fun ideas. We would cook, film the entire process, and upload the videos on Facebook. JJ, my partner who enjoys cooking, is the main chef of the channel and produces most of the food recipes. After a few videos, we started seeing a spike in traffic. Our followers on the Facebook page had increased from 3,000 to 10,000 overnight, and the numbers continued to snowball.

Though it was fabulous fun, we could only release a video every couple of weeks as we still held full-time jobs. It was stressful as we had to film on weekends and edit at night.

Gradually, we received several queries from local food brands and supermarkets who wanted to engage in commercial work with us. It was truly a surprise, as we had no idea that a social media channel could be sustainable!

Over time, we began to see the viability of The MeatMen Channel as a business and a content marketing platform. We turned our hobby into an actual business in 2016.

Despite having little experience in the fields of editorial and advertorial, we were not hindered and set our minds to learn as we embarked on the journey. We maintain high standards for the content we produce, and we were thrilled when more people started getting on board to collaborate with us.

## The Art of Cooking

Most online recipe videos feature chef-hosts demonstrating their culinary techniques. The MeatMen Channel, however, adopts an unconventional approach where most of our videos only feature hands and food. You do not see the person preparing the dish! The video style places the focus on the recipe instead. We also make sure our videos are concise and relatable. From an analytical point-of-view, the shorter a video is, the more people would catch it. We trust our viewers can discover and explore the artistic production of cooking by channelling their inner Master Chefs. It is pleasing to us when we see our fans try our recipes.

One of the main perks of this job is travelling. In 2016, we collaborated with Discovery Networks Asia Pacific (DNAP) for a short series of vignettes called 'Wok With Us'. The show aired on lifestyle channel TLC and took us around Asia to show how to make local cuisine. It was an incredibly fulfilling experience where we could share our passion for food with others, and these are the moments that truly make all our hard work worth it.

Other than our main chef, JJ, we are also able to celebrate the passion that many others have for food, by featuring them on our channel. These people range from chefs, home cooks to food enthusiasts like us.



## Failure Does Not Define Us

As a company, it is essential to keep The MeatMen Channel growing. My role in the business is in engaging business partners. Having to manage client portfolios, build relationships with our business partners, and consult with our production team is pressurising. No matter how busy we are, as a team, we still insist on creating high-quality work every time. Our success with The MeatMen Channel is a team victory and not so much a personal triumph. My accomplishments are attributed to my team, the people who make me who I am. Without them, The MeatMen Channel would never have reached this level of popularity.

When I first embarked on this journey as an entrepreneur, I had grand plans on how life should be. Nevertheless, I have come to realise that we cannot anticipate all of life's upcoming moments. The past 12 years have been a wild ride, but I would not trade this experience for the world. If there is one advice I could give, it is to follow the scent of your passion and do not be afraid of challenging work because nothing worth having in life comes easy.

If you are keen to become a content producer, know that relevance is key. Understand your target audience, and you will see the route to success eventually.

I have made blunders along the way, but I am thankful for the way things turned out. Instead of letting my mistakes define me, I focused on learning about my strengths and weaknesses, while fortifying my mindset for more to come.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- **A sense of adventure is vital to your journey as an entrepreneur. Hold on tight and learn to enjoy the ride!**
- **Be passionate about what you do. Have your mind direct your business and your heart engage your work.**



# BRINGING MAGIC TO LIFE

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*By Lovelynne Chong*

*Fyreflyz is a Singaporean marketing company that specialises in producing successful O2O (online-to-offline) strategies. Fyreflyz focuses on building original content uniquely tailored to engage the client's customers through various mediums.*



## Budding Leader

I have a strong personality and am outspoken by nature. I never shy away from sharing my views. With these qualities, I always felt compelled to lead a team. What better way to do this than run my own business? In Temasek Polytechnic (TP), I did the Diploma in Business Information Technology (BIT). The course highly emphasised problem-based learning and had mentorship programmes, which gave budding BIT entrepreneurs a holistic education.

These valuable lessons provided me with the knowledge I needed as an entrepreneur. They inspired me to think out of the box and gave me the confidence to start my own business.

## Early Lessons

In the business world, we gain real-life experiences that go beyond the facts and forms we learn in school. It is just then that we really see the nature of entrepreneurship.

When I first started, I thought I just had to be diligent for my business to flourish, but that was only part of the truth. It is vital for the company to portray a positive image and give off a good impression because you need to convince people that you can be trusted. I remember feeling a rush of anxiety, adrenaline, and excitement when I dealt with my first clients. I was overwhelmed, but the nerves eased after the initial stages.

You would face a lot of uncertainties such as: Are you on the right track? Is this client dependable and loyal? Do the results match the amount of effort you have put in? To address these concerns, you need to put in the hours and keep a strong focus on your end goal. When you genuinely know what you want to achieve, you can make it happen despite your fears.



Being self-employed and the boss means that I must give a hundred percent to my company. There are no regular office hours, and working round the clock is a norm. However, I still make it a point to bond with my team, and we do it over food. We have supper together all the time!

In 2018, Fyreflyz had the chance to launch our event, the Super Japan Festival at Millenia Walk. Over the two days, more than 50,000 people attended. The result is our crowning achievement to date, and a testimony to all the demanding work my team and I have put in over the past ten years.



## Burnt out Boss

As an entrepreneur, there comes a point when you feel jaded and burnt out from work. However, it has never occurred to me to give up because I know it is easy to enjoy the benefits of being an entrepreneur, but I also need to acknowledge and accept the hard work that comes with it.

As a boss, I am accountable for the livelihood of my team, so that makes what I do daily even more meaningful and important. As a mother myself, I also feel responsible for working hard and supporting my child. Giving up becomes less of an alternative.

## Empowering the Youth

I enjoy meeting young people and learning new things from them. Their perspectives of the world are vastly different from mine since we grew up in different times. Being raised in a digital era that is powered by technology and trends can be both exciting and debilitating, yet many of them navigate the difficulties in life very well. I realise so much potential in the future generation, and the opportunities that they can follow if they are motivated. Hence aside from

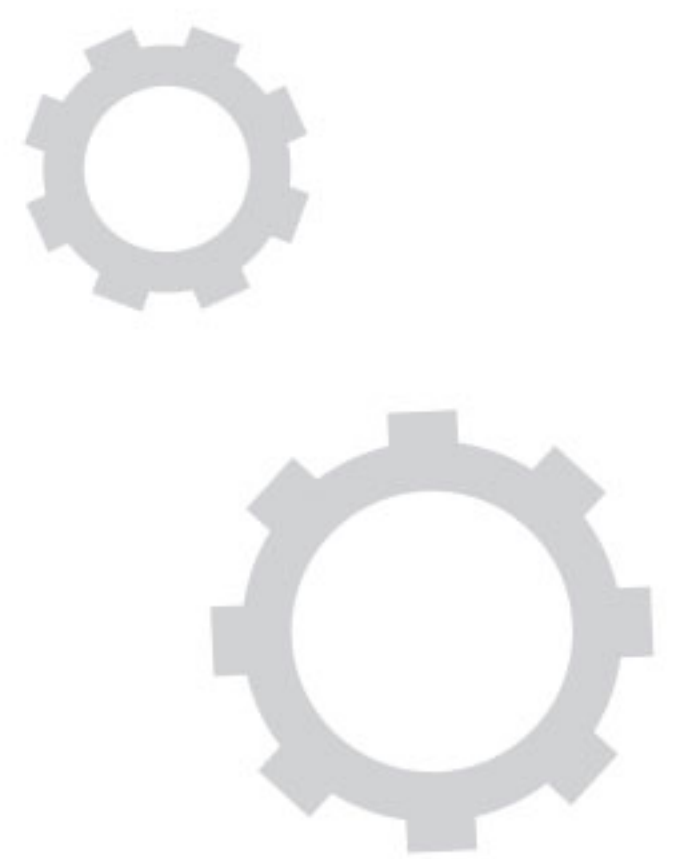
running my business, I also teach. I love sharing my knowledge with future generations to groom the youth to become the best versions of themselves.

Fyreflyz offers internships to university, polytechnic and Institute of Technical Education (ITE) students and fresh graduates. They can pick up new skills such as design and marketing. Now, we have a hands-on teaching programme where interns are given actual client projects to work on. They get to participate in meetings, events, and pitches to gain experiences and enhance their portfolios.

## Kindness is Gold

My advice for aspiring entrepreneurs is always to be brave and kind, not only to others but also to yourself. You will run into nasty people on the way but remember to have faith in the greater good of life constantly. As an entrepreneur, you need to keep an open mind so that you can continually grow. You do get certain privileges as a boss, but always be mindful to stay grounded and count your blessings.

Lovelynn pictured with the Fyreflyz team.



## Learn from Your Mistakes and Keep Going!

Aside from challenging work and occasional pressure, doing business can be so much fun! When you love what you do and give your best to it, happiness and satisfaction will come naturally. Fyreflyz just celebrated its 10th anniversary, and things could not be better.

It is normal to be afraid to fail, and there is absolutely no shame in that. I have encountered failures as an entrepreneur too. The most important thing is to dust yourself off and keep moving because you cannot stay stagnant. It is unhealthy to always look back at the past, for it is just a black hole that will suck you into more profound despair. If you look forward, you will discover possibilities and can work towards producing the future you desire.

Mistakes are inevitable, so do not be too hard on yourself. Forgive yourself for your past erring, because the most important thing is that you have learned from your mistakes and not repeat them. You need to have a healthy body and mind for the arduous journey of an entrepreneur.

I believe that success is a choice. You must decide not to let failures get the better of you, instead, choose to let success motivate you.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Learning opportunities exist everywhere if you humble yourself.
- Be responsible and accountable for your business, and remember, a good reputation is key!
- Mistakes are inevitable, so learn from them and move forward for greater success.



# LEADING RETAIL TRANS- FORMATION

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*By Dominic Ng*

*Established in 2011, Fastflex provides logistical delivery support with its fleet of vehicles and Automated Guided Vehicle (AGV) technology. It also offers customisation and automation solutions to its clients.*



## The Power of Sales in Businesses

A business is a venture birthed by creative and critical minds. It is an avenue to explore ideas, evaluate limits, and discover the endless possibilities that await us.

Before I ventured out on my own, I was a salesperson in the oil and gas industry. Salesmanship is the heartbeat of a business, and my job was to source for new customers while servicing the existing clientele. A salesperson and a businessman are remarkably similar in nature. I had to learn to face rejections while asking for business opportunities. Thus, after ten years in the sales line, I decided to switch and apply my knowledge to my entrepreneurial journey.

## From Sales to Entrepreneurship

Business is about meeting people's needs optimally. When I first started Fastflex, I decided to provide something different than what was already in the marketplace. That was in the year 2011 when many other companies were offering frozen food in vending machines. My initial concept was ready-to-eat hot meals in vending machines. Fastflex has since evolved to offer logistic support with our own fleets of vehicles and delivery specialists, AGV technology and automation solutions, as well as customisation services to remain competitive.

When I decided to become an entrepreneur, I felt prepared and determined. Having been in sales, I was ready to take on the worst. There were many rejections, but I never gave up, and that has been a key to sustaining my business thus far. On hindsight, the initial phase was hard as I had no point of reference. There were no existing protocols or guidebooks to follow. It was all more or less trial and error. It made me understand that in business, you must learn through mistakes and failures before you



eventually succeed and that there is no one way to achieving your goals. There are many ways to get to where you want to go, and if the route you are on is unfruitful, be daring and try a different one. That was what I told myself when I first started as a businessman, and I still stay true to this mantra today.

Putting my concepts to reality is something that will always give me the most joy. It is satisfying to get people to trust my ideas, and even more so to see those ideas materialise into something real. Fastflex has done well to get recognitions and certifications from the various governmental agencies, which are essential in our industry.

## Risky Business

Being an entrepreneur is like going through an obstacle course. On the brink of bankruptcy twice from having a partner exit the company and bad business decisions, I had to pick myself up and continue moving forward. I looked for new customers, reorganised the business model and started afresh with new team members.

Self-doubt crept in at my lowest point. I felt lost, confused, and even had emotional breakdowns. During times like this, the isolation faced by an entrepreneur is the most difficult. While I got through it with the support of my wife, parents, and faith, I still felt alone in the turmoil. It is rare to find someone who can understand the pains and troubles of running a business. Even if you do share your woes, people can only sympathise, but not fully empathise unless they have walked in the shoes of an entrepreneur. However, I always tell myself that dreadful things are bound to occur, and I must continue going ahead.

I seek guidance from the people around me. I owe a lot to my father, who has always been my number one supporter. As he was also an entrepreneur, he offered me plenty of advice, and relentlessly encouraged me through dark times. I will forever remember him telling me, "If you never try, you never know."

## Learning for Growth

To come through the tough times and scale the business, I constantly had to equip myself with new knowledge. Learning is necessary for me. I think that any entrepreneur worth their salt should never stop learning and continually acquire new experiences and information.

Entrepreneurs tend to be know-it-alls, and I too have been guilty of that during the early years of the business. Truth is a bitter pill to swallow, and for many entrepreneurs like us, pride and ego become our obstacles as we get defensive when facing criticisms from others.

However, time educates you, and you soon learn that criticisms help you grow. Whether it is good or bad feedback, always be ready to listen and be perceptive on whether the advice can be helpful to you.



The ready-to-eat hot meals vending machines.





The Fastflex logistics team

## See with New Eyes

For all those who dream of becoming an entrepreneur, I would tell them that failure is not their enemy, for to fail is human. Nobody gets through life succeeding every single time. Failure gives us the strength and endurance to tackle future challenges. Failure is an indicator that you are moving closer to your goals, and it is better to try something and fail rather than not to have tried it at all.

Have a big heart to explore the wonders of the world. Do not be restrained by your comfort zone. The world is your oyster, explore the uncharted territories, challenge the norms, seek answers, and break down barriers. We never know what challenges lie ahead, so always be open-minded.

I feel that the education system in Singapore can be stifling, as students are classified from an early age according to their academic competencies. The grades I had in school were usually C's and D's. I do not have a degree of any kind. The alphabets on your transcripts do not stand for anything. It is merely a passport to get you into places. Study hard because you want to and not because you must. Your credentials do not dictate your future, you do. If you do not develop as a person and try new things, you cannot achieve important things. Be bold and brave enough to prove that you are better than what society says about you.

It is amazing how we learn more about ourselves when we are willing to put ourselves out there, so spread your wings and fly. The sky is the limit, and various possibilities can become opportunities. We only need to look hard and work hard to make things happen.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT



- Always adopt a curious and inquisitive outlook in life, and build on past experiences to achieve greater things.
- Mistakes and failures are part of entrepreneurship, so keep your eyes on the prize and do not give up!
- Criticisms are important for growth and success, so embrace them.



# A YAKITORI HAWKER'S TALE

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*By Jeremy Han*

*The Burning Oak is a Yakitori outlet at the Simpang Bedok Marketplace Food Centre. Known for serving tasty but affordable Wagyu beef bowls, pork cheek bowls and a range of Japanese donburis, The Burning Oak has been lauded by its customers for bringing something fresh and exciting to the teriyaki scene in Singapore.*



## Inspirations from Lamb Keema

My foray into cooking began in Victoria Secondary School. The first dish I ever cooked in Home Economics class was Lamb Keema. I was surprised at how much I loved the cooking experience. From that instant, I knew that cooking would be worth exploring with passion.

I shaped the concept of my business during a family trip to Osaka after my GCE "O" level exams. There, I was exposed to many exotic and authentic Japanese cuisine. One of our preferred spots in Osaka was a quaint and quirky restaurant. It was a small hole in the wall, but the restaurant caught our attention with its uniqueness. Moreover, they served delicious Yakitori!

What struck me as a teenager, though, was the warm and friendly ambience. It made me feel at home in a place that was far away from home. I realised that tasty food is not only celebrated for its taste but its presentation and most importantly, its ability to evoke emotions as well. I feel that it is important for every food and beverage (F&B) business to build a community with their customers. I stayed true to my beliefs when I opened The Burning Oak.

## From Burning Desire to Burning Oak

I received immense support when I started the business at the age of 23. My mother helped me with accounting while my father played a significant role in the supply chain. I covered the operational part of the business, and my family and friends also chipped in whenever they could.

I gained a solid foundation in cooking at Temasek Polytechnic (TP) when I was studying for the Diploma in Culinary and Catering Management. During my internship in TP, I was also fortunate enough to have been placed under the tutelage of French chef Arnaud Tabarec. I worked alongside him in his Michelin starred restaurant, St. Pierre. His



*Pictured here with a smile is Jeremy outside his outlet at The Bedok Marketplace.*

mentorship allowed me to gain a wider perspective and skillsets for the culinary industry. When chef Tabarec visited my stall and wrote a lovely review for me, I was deeply honoured.

TP provided me with an avenue to learn from the best, and I could not have asked for more. I gained not just technical skills, but also soft skills such as learning how to take the initiative and interact with guests at TP. Many core fundamentals are still adopted at my stall today.

My business has allowed me to share my passion with those who want to improve their lives. For instance, there was a boy who came to me when I was first looking to put together a team. He was 16, had no idea what he wanted to do, and was shy and quiet. I offered him the role of barbecue chef, and quickly took him under my tutelage. Today, he is one of the best chefs on my team. I have come to understand that when you teach someone, you are learning as well. I have learned a great deal from these mentoring experiences.

## Early Drawbacks

One of the most challenging moments in my career was when I had to choose between work and spending time with my parents. At that point, I was often buried in work and was relentless in my pursuit of success. What brought me to my senses was when my parents' health started failing in 2015, the year I set up The Burning Oak.

In the same year, my mother suffered a retinal detachment in her eye, while my father just received a heart bypass. Unfortunately, due to the demanding nature of my work, I could not take care of them as I would like to have. I struggled a lot, both mentally and spiritually, during those times.

Time was tight, but I tried my best. I remember a hospital visit to my mother was almost cut short because I missed the visiting hours, but the security officer was considerate to my plight and granted me entry. Surprisingly, the first thing my mum asked when she saw me was why I was not resting at such a late hour.

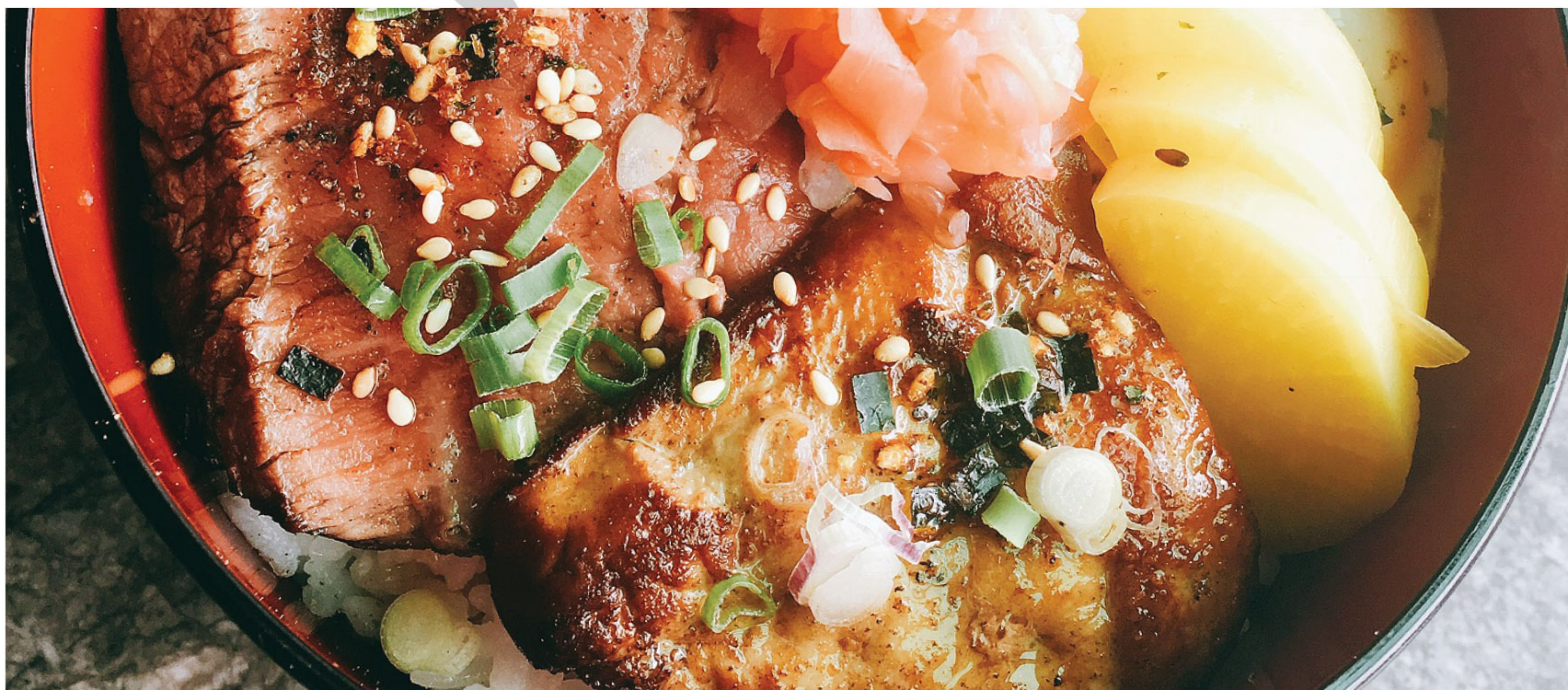
I will never forget the conversation we shared that night. It made me see that we often look outwards for strength and support, when all we must do is to look inwards at the people closest to us, at our families.

## Building a Community

As an entrepreneur, I believe that the most important thing is to have confidence in your products. It is not easy to get recurring customers, so I am always thankful to my loyal legion of supporters. They advise me on my business, and I can see they want me to do well. It motivates me to work even harder for my business.

My parents raised my sibling and me to have faith in our respective journeys. To them, it does not matter if we fail in our endeavours, but that we tried.

Fortunately, my friends share the same drive and are anchored by similar family values as me. Having a healthy support system lends a strong morale boost during challenging times. The guidance and encouragements from family and friends are particularly encouraging when you feel helpless and alone in your entrepreneurial journey.





Jeremy (pictured in the middle) with his team outside the The Burning Oak Outlet.

## A Battle of Will

Running a business is no walk in the park – you must prepare yourself to face daily operational challenges. Things may not turn out the way you want them to, so you must expect changes and prepare yourself to handle them.

There are times when I feel like I am losing my passion. When this happens, I always look at my staff and tell myself to have faith. If my team members believe in the work that we do, why shouldn't I?

Many people have the misconception that the F&B industry is easy, but that is hardly the case. I started my shop because I wanted to preserve our hawker culture. Joining the F&B industry gives you real-world experiences, which can help you grow as a person and enrich your life. Be proud of what you are selling, and at the end of the day, keep your core values intact.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT



- The entrepreneurial journey can be a lonely one, so always build a strong support system.
- When you teach others, you can learn from them too.
- It is always more important to try and fail than not to have tried at all.



# Q-RATING CONTEMPO- RARY MEN'S FASHION

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*By Chong Han San*

*Q Menswear is the modern gentlemen's lifestyle emporium. The menswear fashion label offers a comprehensive range of bespoke tailored clothing and shoes, as well as ready-to-wear clothing and fashion accessories for casual and dedicated events.*

## Childhood Ambitions

I have witnessed businesses fail. My father was an entrepreneur himself, but his company did not do well. As a kid, I lived through the bitter experience of bankruptcy and saw first hand how it was like being brought up in a financially tough environment. My father's failures became a catalyst for me to become an entrepreneur. Through him, I learned that one's education does not determine one's success in life. Although a wise and well-educated man, my father was not suited to the ways of the business world. He has an analytical and problem-solving mind, but executing a business requires more than that. From his failures, I knew not to repeat the same mistakes he made in my business.

Since young, I have always had an interest in fashion design. So, I enrolled in Temasek Polytechnic (TP) to study the Diploma in Apparel Design & Merchandising. When I first expressed an interest to study fashion, my family was sceptical as they did not think fashion design could land me a job. However, they still supported me because they knew how determined I was.

Many of us studied fashion thinking we would eventually end up in Paris as a world-famous fashion designer. There is a heavy deal of backbreaking work that goes into achieving what you set out to be. I was lucky to have met inspiring lecturers in TP who shared realistic expectations and helped me remain grounded.

Compelled by the sense of ownership and freedom that I could exercise, I knew that someday I would become an entrepreneur. Upon graduation, I decided to join the workforce to gain the experience I needed. I took on several roles in the fashion sector, ranging from manufacturing, merchandising, branding, marketing, retail, and sales. I planned my career so that I would eventually pursue entrepreneurship, and that is what I did!

It would require more years before my Paris dream finally came true with Q Menswear.



## Gaining Global Recognition

I find myself enjoying the process of dressing men up, beyond just making or selling clothes. A sense of pride envelopes me when I see clients gain new confidence in their newfound appearance. They would share with me how they started receiving praises at work and even gained business opportunities! I also had shy and introverted customers who managed to land dates by dressing better!

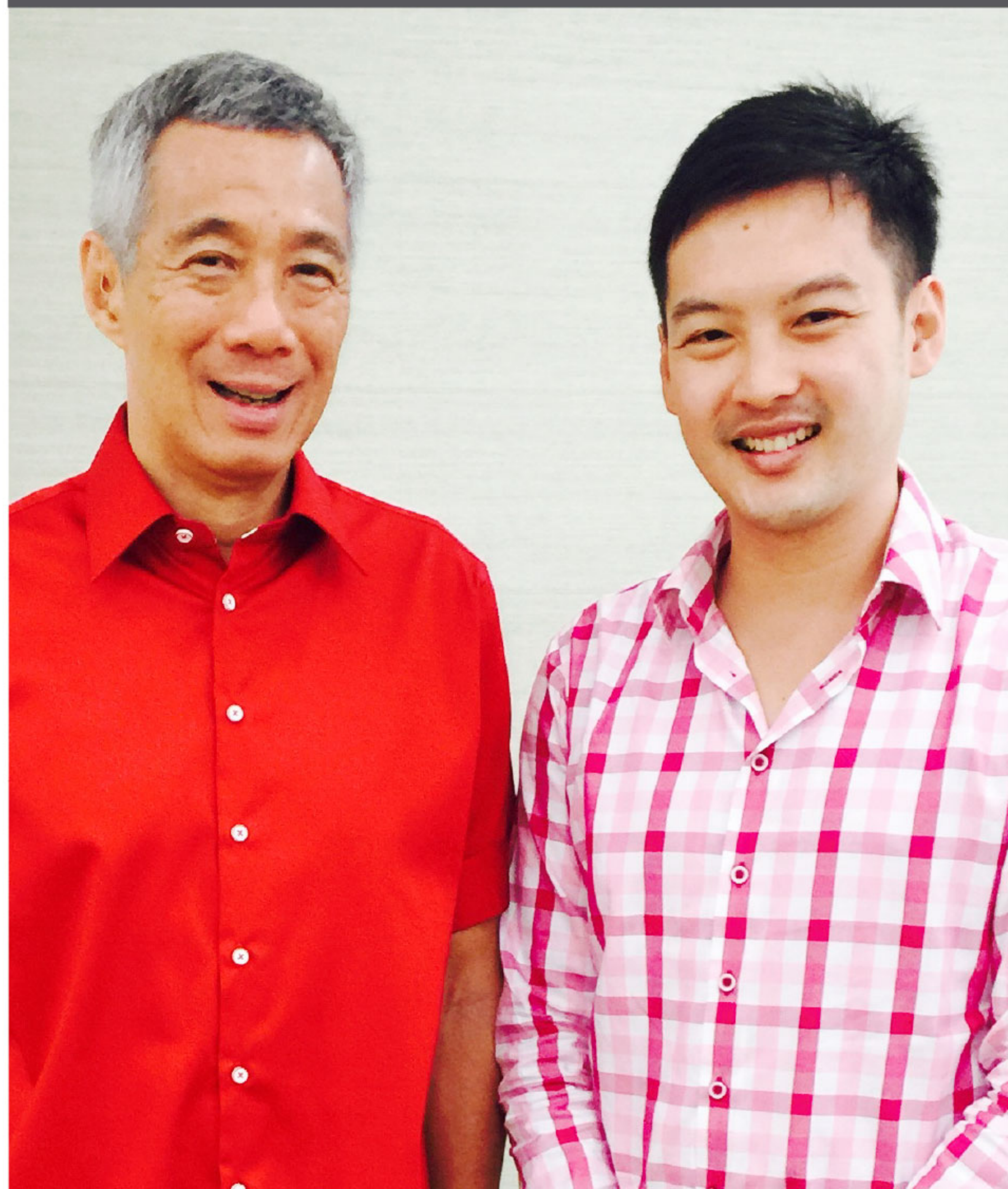
It has been eight years since I launched my fashion brand, Q Menswear, and I am thankful for the support of my loyal customers. 2012 was the year Q Menswear gained global recognition. I dressed some of the fashion directors from Singapore for London, Paris and Milan Menswear Fashion

Week. They had so much attention from the street-fashion photographers and were featured in trendy fashion and lifestyle websites and renowned magazines like Vogue Italia and Style.com. Suddenly, Q Menswear was an international hit, and people started recognising my designs. In 2015, I also had the honour to dress Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for the National Day Rally. It was truly memorable seeing the Prime Minister in a Q Menswear outfit on national television.

I am proud to have a team of trained designers. As designers, the service we provide our customers is unique. We do not just sell; we design an image for our customers.

Before you start a business, you need human resources. It will help if you have people collaborating with you whom you can trust and invest in. I am happy to have an energetic and driven team who is committed to the success of Q Menswear.

*Han San (pictured on the right) with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Istana office in 2015.*



## Bouncing Back from Failures

While my journey may seem like a bed of roses, I faced my fair share of setbacks too. Armed with valuable knowledge and experience, I thought my business would be a success from the beginning. I found out the hard way that I was a naive and idealistic entrepreneur. When I launched a ready-to-wear collection in departmental stores, I thought our brand reputation would ensure robust sales. Still, nobody was buying our clothes!

It hit me that I was a young and unfamiliar brand to them, and they were not going to fork out a few hundred bucks for a shirt. We had huge losses from the venture, and our cash flow was severely debilitated. I had to get loans and learned how to budget and control our finances. As the revenue was not ideal during the first year, I had to prioritise the required expenses and my team's interests, so I took a significant pay cut.

Through it all, I never thought of giving up. The steadfast support of my customers and dedicated team makes this journey worth every moment. Flexibility and adaptability have been the cornerstones of my success so far. For example, I took early steps to adopt digital marketing, and that has helped to further our business.

Q Menswear is driven more by passion than money because money can be made from any job. Entrepreneurship was a journey I chose and one that I really enjoy and love. The enthusiasm I have is what drives me to overcome barriers and strive to be better for our customers. As we grow as a company, I am less involved in doing the things I love, such as ideating and designing. These days, I spend more time meeting clients, crunching numbers and seeking creative solutions for the business. However, these are just some of the sacrifices an entrepreneur must make – I cannot be drawing all my life because my team depends on me for business direction. Nevertheless, the creative experience for clients is always at the forefront of my mind. Now that I travel for work, I seek inspiration from the diverse cultures and artwork of the locals in the countries that I visit.





Framed fashion spreads of Q Menswear.

## Nobody Is 100% Ready to Be an Entrepreneur

The media tends to portray entrepreneurship as the epitome of success, full of glitz and glamour. However, the truth is there are many sacrifices and struggles involved. Entrepreneurship is a solitary journey, and it is hard to share the problems I face at work with family, employees, and stakeholders. Thankfully, I found a network of entrepreneurs who come together to learn, bounce ideas, and share knowledge and resources. It is interesting how some of their problems and solutions overlap with mine. Since most of my friends are in the fashion industry, having this network helps me see things from a different lens.

If I could restart my journey as an entrepreneur, I would learn more about finances before embarking on this path. I might be good at branding and designing, but at the end of the day, every business is a numbers and figures game.

The entrepreneurial landscape today is more vibrant and approachable. It is easier to do businesses now with the various grants available.

For aspiring entrepreneurs, my advice is to make as many mistakes as you can and be as creative as possible in school. When you enter the workforce, be grounded, be humble, and learn as much as you can. Be ready for failures and perform your best

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- The journey of an entrepreneur requires persistence, humility, and a thirst to learn learn and excel.
- Understand the importance of having a dedicated team who can help you strengthen your business.
- Make mistakes and be willing to learn wherever your entrepreneurial journey may take you.

DYNN





# AMIC

CHAPTER 4





# MAKING EVERY MOMENT PERFECT



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*By Andrew Koh Xian Wei*

*Established in 2005, Events Architects is an event management and consultancy company that offers a full suite of turnkey services. Since 2017, the company has diversified to focus on research and development and is looking to introduce innovative technologies for the events and securities industry in 2020.*



## A Party of Possibilities

To be an entrepreneur is a calling. I found my knack for business early while I was still in primary school, where I would sell to my classmates limited edition "Heavenly King" idol cards for ten times the purchase value. It was thrilling to earn a ninety percent profit from this initiative. I carried the same enthusiasm throughout my school years. When I pondered on which career to pursue, being an entrepreneur was the first thing that came to my mind.

I studied Communications and Media Management in Temasek Polytechnic (TP). As I was not keen on a desk-bound position, I chose an events agency for my internship though I was supposed to join Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) as a journalist. Six months into my internship, I decided to put my newly acquired experience to the test and see if I could make a living out of organising parties.

Eventually, I realised that the income from organising parties was neither sustainable nor stable. So, I decided to diversify and started coordinating corporate events instead. My first event was a roadshow for L'Oréal, and that opened my eyes to a completely new lucrative market. Here is my story on this new venture right from the start.



## Young and Daring

Back then, as a 20-year-old, I could not incorporate a company in Singapore because an individual had to be 21 years old and above to do so. So, I sought my mother's help to register Events Architects, and I was officially in business. However, I soon realised that my age would become a stumbling block. For instance, as an events company, I had to work with many vendors and suppliers to successfully carry out an event. However, they did not trust that I could pay them. So, I had to carry blank checks, pre-signed by my mother, so that I could pay them on the spot.

Nevertheless, I did not let that deter me. I worked out of my bedroom, armed with a fax machine and an old computer. I made cold calls to various companies, and surprisingly, managed to catch the attention of a brand manager in L'Oréal, who requested for a quotation. Despite my age and inexperience, L'Oréal gave Events Architects a chance, and we went on to strike a great partnership with the company after a successful event.

## From Van to Victory

As a company, we lacked logistical resources like a proper office or a company vehicle, which constrained operations. So, I saved up for a few months before finally getting a van, which we worked out of to keep costs low.

We also had to do everything by ourselves: lifting bulky goods, setting up and tearing down, and driving. It caused emotional conflicts within me as I saw my peers enjoy their social lives while my weekends were spent handling events. However, the strong will to succeed gave me the tenacity and guts to survive the hard work and long hours.

Events Architects eventually progressed well and bonded as a team. I understood right from the start that demanding work was instrumental to my success, so that I would be able to enjoy the fruits of my labour later on. Soon we were doing well enough to secure an office space at Riverwalk along Clarke Quay. The new office, a former art gallery, was modest and seemed better suited for retail. Regardless, it was better than working out of a bedroom or a van.

## Remember, Age is Just a Number

During our early days, there was an incident that left a significant impression on me. A tyre company offered us the opportunity to organise one of their internal events but changed their minds before they signed the contract due to my age. The management associated my age with a lack of experience and hence did not feel confident in giving us the contract.

Shocked by the news, I felt despondent about the situation. We had invested time and effort into securing this deal, and I wondered if age was a fair yardstick for my abilities. While age is a great teacher of life, how old we are should not correlate with the level of trust in us, and the quality of our work. I was certain that despite our young age, we have much to offer our clients.

This incident has become a constant reminder for me not to judge a person's aptitude based on his or her age. When I hire, I assess the candidates according to the passion, creativity, and personality that they can bring to the position. In the events industry, job experience is next to nothing without fortitude and excellent people skills.

As I was a new and zealous entrepreneur then, the acrid taste of that rejection was hard to accept. Today, I am thankful for that setback because it spurred me on to do better.

*A special moment for Andrew (seated in the middle) on his wedding day.*



## Prepare for the Worst

I have learned that we can never predict when a crisis will hit, so it is always vital to be prepared. In 2009, the Lehman Brothers financial crisis carried grim prospects for the companies in Asia, many of whom were our customers. Events were scaled down or cancelled indefinitely, hitting our industry badly. Thankfully, due to our expertise and good reputation, we were still able to procure a few high profile events.

## The Power of Passion and Grit

Being an entrepreneur sometimes feels like being a hamster on a wheel, constantly moving without a destination.

Entrepreneurship is also likened to a long-distance marathon because the rewards do not materialise at once.

Business owners never have the luxury of time, particularly in the early days. Work is always piling up, and there are never enough hours in a day. We often sacrifice time with family and friends to get the job done. As an entrepreneur, I have struggled between quitting and persevering. There have been times when I wanted to return to a 9-to-5 job so that I do not have to juggle so many roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, I have always known that my passion lies in wanting to create and innovate every single day. The autonomy of ideation and actualisation will be hard to achieve if I am working as an employee.

After I entered the business world, I was surprised by how much it changed me. I had challenged myself so much and pushed my limits to the extreme. It was a revelation of sorts and indeed, a journey of self-discovery. To this day, I still enjoy what I do and have never hated going to work.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Have courage and be bold in working towards the success you want.
- Fortify yourself with grit and never fail to believe in your worth. Amazing things will happen.
- Remember, age is nothing but a number. Continue learning, love what you do, and have good work ethics to gain customers' trusts.



Team trip to Bangkok

## Trust Your Journey

Are entrepreneurs born or made? I think that most entrepreneurs are made. While many have the instincts of a businessperson, nothing will happen unless they act on them. True entrepreneurs are motivated to find out what they can achieve through acute business visions and hard work. When opportunities meet hard work, we achieve success.

Dream big and work towards your dreams courageously. Never belittle what passion, tenacity, and persistence can do for you. One day, you will look back and marvel at what you have done. I am glad I have never underestimated the potential of my abilities, and relentlessly pressed on and pursued my goals even through the rough times.



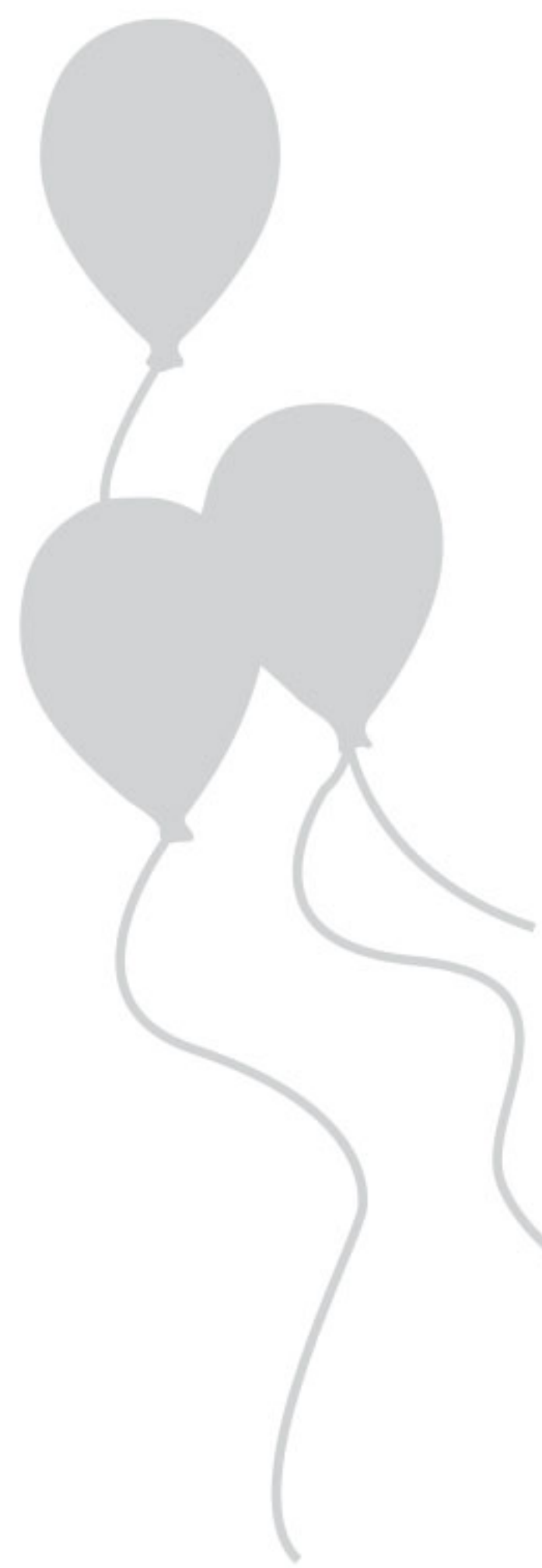


# ROLLIN' GOOD TIMES

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*By Jane Alethea Seet*

*Party Parlour is an events management company that specialises in planning birthday parties, carnivals, corporate events, and other fun activities. Damn Worth It is a media company that produces interesting food recommendations through videos and editorial content, and shares them via its social media platforms. The sites have over 150,000 fans and followers.*



## Becoming Self-Employed

My first exposure to business happened when I was a teenager. During the school vacations, I would take on part-time jobs working in retail shops or selling clothes in pushcarts at Orchard Road. I was eager to start my own business as the female bosses who owned these businesses inspired me.

After I graduated from Oklahoma City University, I started working in the media and marketing industry. However, the stressful nature of the job and the long working hours took a toll on my health, and I resigned at 25 years old. I took a leap of faith to try something new. I had many business ideas back then, but due to the exacting nature of my full-time job, I never had the opportunity to explore them.

My first business, My Skinny Aunt, was a blog shop created in 2010, where I sold my aunt's second-hand clothes. It was a very brief venture that ended after four months because the bulk of the clothes came in one size, and there was a limited supply. My second shot at starting a business was selling Instax cameras in Singapore. Back then, I had to import these cameras from the USA, as they were not available here. However, fierce competition crept in six months after and I could not foresee sustained profits. This venture ended in a year. In hindsight, both business attempts were not my best ideas.

## Ready to Party?

The idea for Party Parlour came to me unexpectedly. I had volunteered to do body art for children at a party in my condominium. After I uploaded pictures of the event on my blog, people started calling me up to inquire about my services. The demand grew steadily, so I decided to widen my services by setting up the Party Parlour company in 2010.

In Party Parlour's first year of operations, I met Jazz, a balloon artist and magician. He was working in the events sector with his younger brother, William. Interestingly, they also ran the media company, Damn Worth It, which curates food recommendations. Despite coming from the same industry, we collaborated instead of competing with each other. I would engage them to conduct magic performances and balloon sculpting services for events on a bigger scale.

In December 2017, Damn Worth It experienced a manpower shortage when one of their partners left. They approached me to work with them, and without hesitation, I joined their team as a partner and co-founder, as I felt the social media market had great business potential.

## Fight or Flight

I struggled financially during the third year of business with Party Parlour. My income was unstable, and I would take public transport even when I was carrying heavy items for work. Additionally, I had home-cooked meals to save on the costs of eating out. The lack of stability cast self-doubts, and I began to question what was in store for my future.

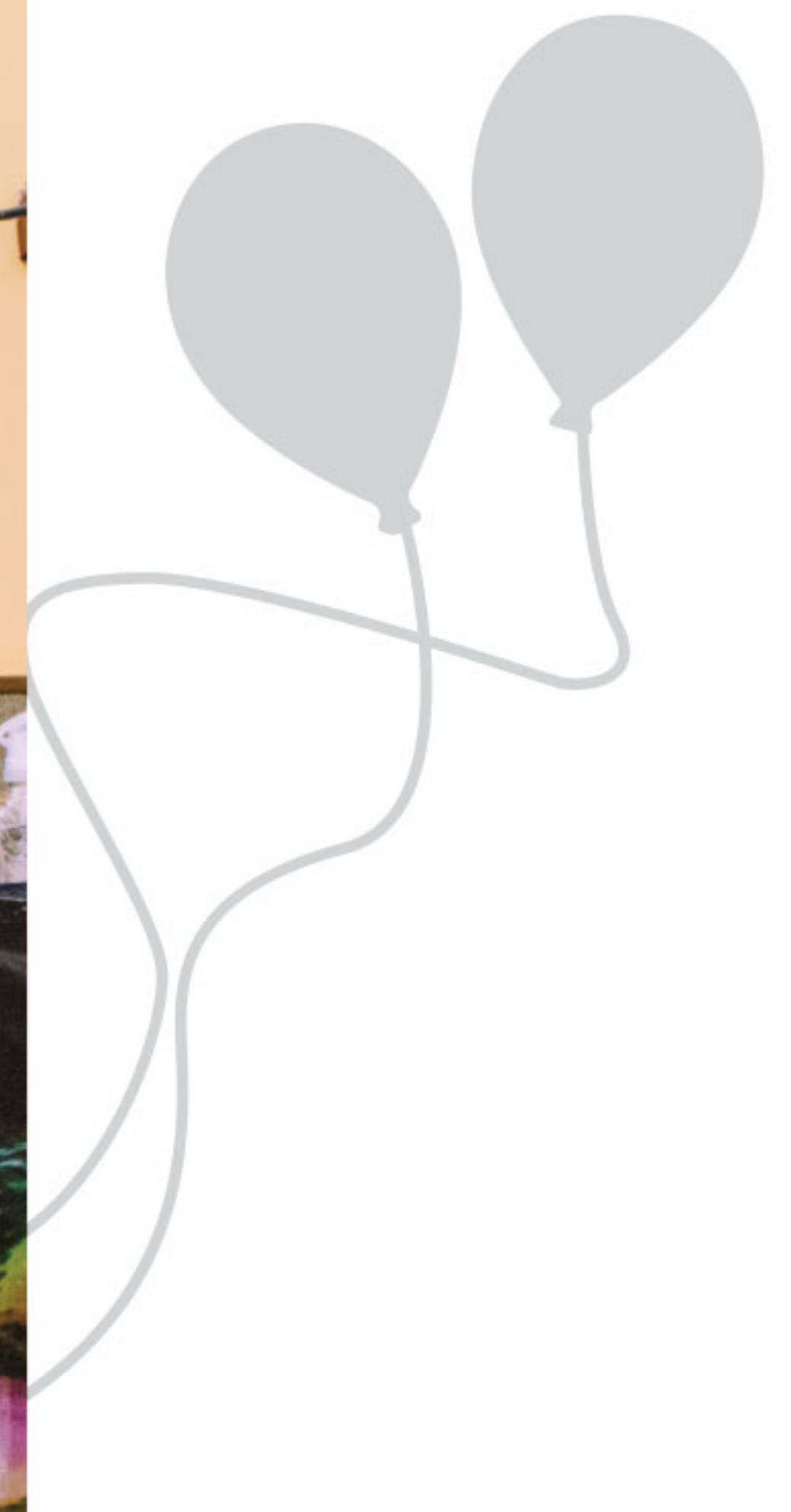
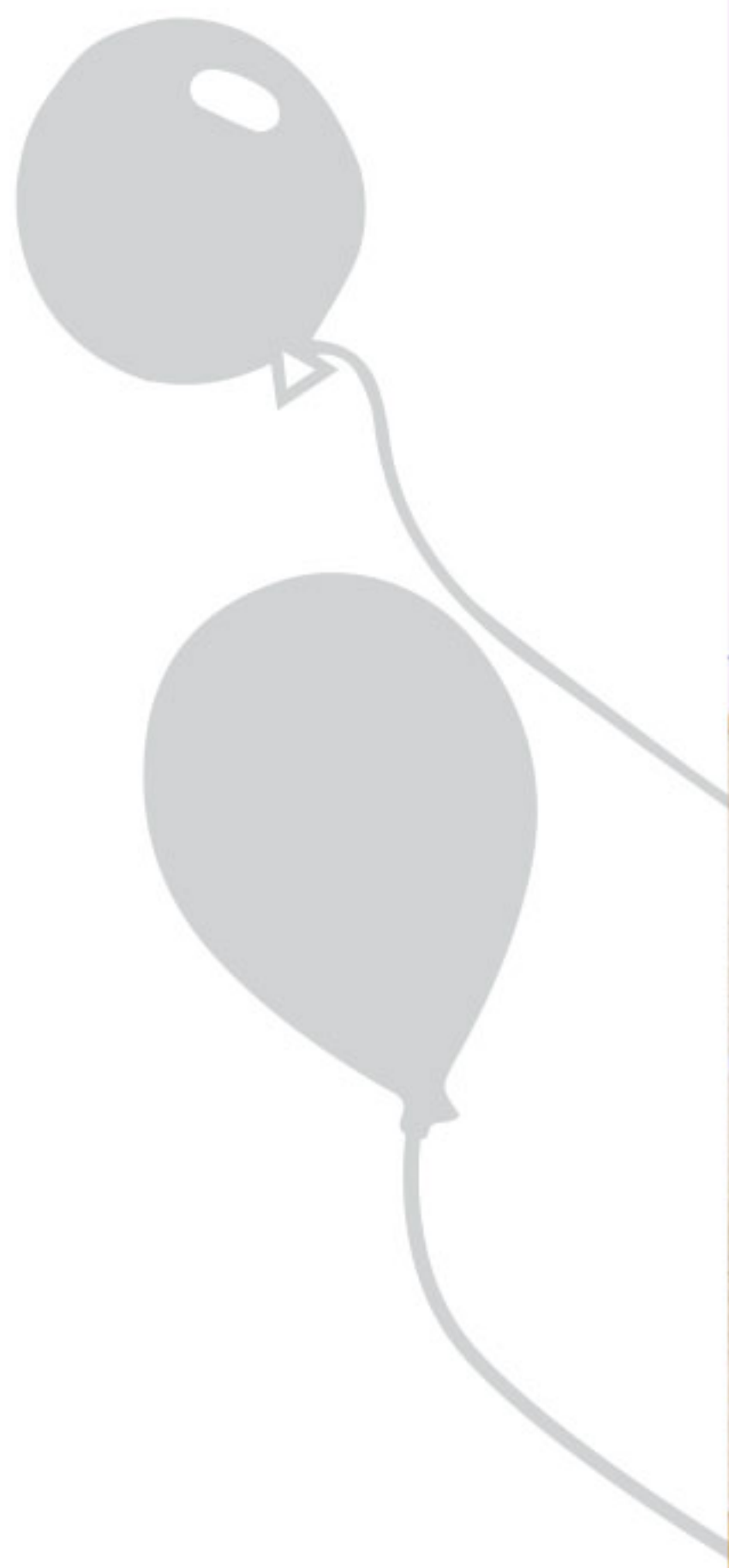
I confided in my ex-boss, who readily offered me a position in marketing and communications. I was tempted to return to the workforce, as that would provide me with a steady source of income.

However, I chose not to allow a moment of weakness derail my ambitions. It was clear that success will not be mine unless I was willing to put up a good fight. With a positive mindset in tow, I gave my all in Party Parlour, and thankfully, my income soon started stabilising. It made me realise that in times of turmoil, I should hold my head high and press on. After all, you will never know what is waiting for you around the corner.

In my entrepreneurial journey, I aim to ensure that my businesses run independently from me so that I can explore new business opportunities and learn more about the market. As an entrepreneur, learning never stops, and it must always lead us to progress. For instance, I would like to evolve to become an investor or a serial entrepreneur. Richard Branson and Lilly Singh are two entrepreneurs that deeply inspire me with their grit, hard work, and personal branding. As an entrepreneur, I enjoy what I do as it grants me the flexibility of time to be there for my loved ones. If I had not quit my corporate job, I would not have been present for my dog's last moments. I am truly appreciative of the flexibility my work schedule affords me.

## Supportive Family and Friends

In grim times, it is crucial to have those you love standing right by your side. Luckily for me, I have the best support system. My family and then-boyfriend (current husband) were always encouraging and supportive during the tough days. My mother is one of my biggest cheerleaders and is always ready to help whenever I am struggling. I also make it a point to surround myself with like-minded entrepreneurs who are driven and





fearless, like Jazz and William. These guys have always rallied me on, and they play a big part in pushing me to become who I am today.

Positive relationships with our loved ones provide an encouraging support system that we can rely on in times of need. Outside of work, I try to make time for the people in my life, especially my parents, who are in their late 60s.

## Life is all about balance and choice

Health is equally as important as wealth, and this applies to both our physical and mental well-being. As an entrepreneur, I deal with pressing issues every day, and this can take a toll on my health. Therefore, self-care is important to keep my mind and body healthy. To keep up with the challenges that come with operating two businesses, I go to the gym regularly and engage in aerial fitness. By doing so, I can confidently manage and deal with work tensions daily.

To stay inspired and motivated, I engage in new endeavours that expand my perspective on things. I frequently sign up for art workshops like pottery

making, leather crafting, and calligraphy. I believe a wholesome mind is critical when it comes to running a business since there are many important decisions to make. Mindfulness helps enormously with sound decision-making.


## Be Fearless

Aspiring entrepreneurs need to have the courage to stand up for their dreams. When a close friend of mine expressed interest to start his own business, his mother was unsupportive. Regardless, he pursued his aspirations and has done well for himself. Today, his mother sees value in her son's aspirations. The truth is while our parents are our biggest advocates, they may not always know what is best for us as they grew up in a different era. Thus, if you put your mind to go after something that you feel passionately about, do not let others deter you, instead, be courageous and live up to your aspirations.

Do not wait for perfection to start up your business. You do not need to plan for every single detail before you begin your entrepreneurship journey. The funny thing about entrepreneurship is that the imperfections make the journey exciting. Brace yourself for the long, challenging road ahead, and learn as you go. Just like writing, if we do not put words on a paper, there is nothing to improve with editing. So, focus on getting your journey started – you can always perfect things along the way.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Be fearless and step out of your comfort zone in pursuit of your goals.
- A dedicated support system helps the entrepreneur navigate through treacherous waters. So always remember to cherish quality time with family and friends.



# CONNECTING THE DOTS...

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*By Peter Yeo*

*XinFin.org has developed an Open Source Protocol XDC01 Hybrid Blockchain technology with XDCE tokens for optimizing international trade and finance. LXF Pte Ltd helps governments and companies understand, customise, and implement this blockchain technology for their organisations.*



## Choosing my passion

Back in Junior College (JC), I took computer science as I always had an affinity for technology and was attracted to the huge potential behind it. My hunger to learn more about the impact and influence of technology grew, and I wanted to pursue a tech career. It was also the dot-com boom period, where computer science courses at universities were in great demand, as even applicants who qualified for medicine, biology or law were trying to enroll in it.

The factors above led me to join the Business Information Technology (BIT) course in Temasek Poly (TP). I was the oldest student in my class because I had completed my JC studies before enrolling in TP. This became an advantage as the lecturers entrusted me with various projects and initiatives due to my maturity, aptitude, and attitude.

## LAN-ding Great Opportunities with TP

During those days, I loved playing Local Area Network (LAN) games. Hence, in TP, I was elected Vice-President of the BIT Interest Club. An opportunity to organise an event soon arose. I conducted a survey and presented a proposal to Mr. Peh, my BIT club teacher-advisor, to launch a BIT LAN gaming competition. The event sowed the seeds for TP to recognise e-sports as an extra-curricular activity. The fact that my idea gave birth to a movement was incredibly gratifying.

My SIP internship experience was extremely valuable, as I learned a lot on the job. Initially, I was tasked to translate an 800-page software manual from German to English. It took patience and perseverance to translate the thick manual by scanning it first, and then editing it after doing optical character recognition. Back then, the task was tedious, but it taught me the importance of perseverance. This task proved to be an important cornerstone for my future career, where I became the only person to understand this software thoroughly in this region.



My lecturers at TP were very inspiring. Mrs. Khairah Brown was one of our business ambassadors and a great mentor and lecturer to me. She guided us on the curriculum rigorously and advised us on how to approach different business ideas and assignments.

Upon graduation in 2006, I realised there was a buzz over Fintech, where technological innovations were used to boost financial sector businesses. At that time, there were special grants and budgets given by the government to grow individuals and companies in the Fintech area.

## A Fast-Changing Landscape

Interestingly, shortly after graduation, I was given the opportunity to form a private consultancy firm because I had translated the 800-page German software manual during my internship. In 2008, Samsung had entered Singapore with a billion-dollar project. It was Singapore's largest project at that time and involved the partnership of Siltronic Silicon Wafer Pte Ltd, a German company, and Samsung. The project needed to use that German software, and I was the only person in the region who knew how to use it because I had translated the manual during my internship. What turned out to be a bane initially presented a huge opportunity in my life!

The project had commissioned various programmers and workers across different countries. Due to my deep knowledge and experience in the software, I became the man that everyone looked to for answers. Unfortunately, in a few years, Singapore was hit by an economic crisis, which affected the progress of the project. Bigger contracts beyond a hundred million became less frequent and impacted business growth, so I decided to leave the country and explore opportunities overseas.

## Connecting more dots...

At 24 years old, I raised a quarter of a million from investors to set up an 8,000 square feet cybercafé with 300 computers. It was Indonesia's first 24-hour internet café. The business idea was inspired during my holiday in Batam where the internet connection was slow. However soon, Apple's groundbreaking iPhones launched shortly bringing casual games to the mass market. Many people no longer required cybercafés for gaming.

I then pivoted to explore virtual mining currency in World of Warcraft, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), where I had some success. At the peak of the trend, almost everyone was talking about it. After some time, I decided it was time to return to Singapore and hence sold off my business in Indonesia.

After that, I asked myself what I should do with 300 computers, so I went online to look for answers – and that was when I discovered Bitcoin in 2009. At that point, Bitcoin was not worth a great deal. I used a cloning system across my computers to do mining, and after close to a week, the combined value of my Bitcoin could not even pay for electricity!



## Triumph in Tribulations

Back in Singapore, I joined a car manufacturing and distribution company as a project leader. The project I was tasked to handle was disastrous: we were six months in the red, and at least two managers were asked to leave or had resigned from their positions! Everyone said it was a lost cause. I drew on my experiences from the Samsung-Siltronic project and persevered. I had a personal talk with the different project stakeholders to align and understand their concerns and needs. I managed to get their buy-in and turned the project around.

After the project's massive success, I was headhunted by Dentsu Global to help with their IT acquisition strategy. A new CEO came on board when I was overseeing the Southeast Asian acquisition, and he was dissatisfied with the distance between him and the far-flung teams in the organisation. Once again, I listened well to his business needs and provided the necessary software proposal to resolve his problem. The rollout was successful, and I was promoted to manage global acquisitions. Due to my efforts, 30,000 staff across 300 offices in 100 countries could interact with one another across one communication platform.

After being a corporate employee for several years, I realised I still believed in the power of blockchain technology behind mining. That was when I quit my job to begin my own hybrid blockchain company, XinFin.

In 2016, I represented Singapore at the Singapore Startup Fintech Bootcamp in Mumbai, India, where companies pitched their ideas to banks and the Tata Group. That was where I met my co-founders. XinFin is the only hybrid blockchain company in the world that is both open source and white label. We built our own smart contract (with proof-of-stake algorithm) and provided the best fit for enterprise use by offering full control and flexibility for them. Recently we announced our collaboration with R3, a bank blockchain consultancy group.

## Beware of Instant Gratification

If there is one language that everyone speaks now, it is technology. The current generation quantifies relationships based on likes and shares. While keeping up with technology is vital, it is also essential not to let it dictate our lives. As a parent, I feel a substantial personal obligation to educate the next generation on the proper role of technology.

For aspiring entrepreneurs in TP, my advice is always to be patient with success and focus on building your character and knowledge. When engaging in grunt work, we tend to question whether what we are doing is truly worthwhile. As humans, we tend to seek instant gratification and expect to see immediate results. For example, when I had to interpret the German software manual during my internship, little did I expect it to be useful for me at a later point. Today I am glad I was patient and did the hard work. My experience has taught me that our knowledge and skills can prove to be the most valuable in the most unexpected of times. So, always stay enthusiastic and keep learning.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT



- **Do not fall for instant gratification. Work hard at every task, no matter how small or big, for the experience might come in handy one day.**
- **Do not underestimate the power of listening. The best way to address your customer's needs is to listen to what they really need.**



# A GAME PLAN IN TECH

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*By Lui Chuian Feng*

*Based in Singapore, Halcyon Media is a full-service web development and photography company launched in 2001. Avior Pictures, a B2C company, was started in 2008 to provide wedding photography services. Founded in 2016, Dining Butler offers an award-winning F&B system that helps streamline and enhance the dining experience of users.*

## A Gamer's Greatest Love

When I was a child, I never dreamt that I would be a businessman. As an avid gamer, I would spend days on end playing video games with my friends. It was a time before the dot-com boom, where video and computer technologies were still in their infancy. At that time, I was extremely fascinated by the incredible sound and graphics rendering capabilities in video games and computers.

Upon the advice of my Pastor, I applied for the Diploma in Internet Computing at Temasek Polytechnic (TP) as it was a new and upcoming course at that time. As I gained more knowledge and competencies, I began taking on freelance web development projects while studying. It was a fun experience since the hours were flexible. These projects gave me my first taste of working in the digital industry.

## Transforming Passion into Business

Near the end of my army days more than 20 years ago, I was approached to join an online eyewear company as a business partner. Its website featured a virtual try-on function where customers could import photographs of their faces to the site and try on the spectacles virtually. We were vastly proud of this avant-garde technology as it was ahead of its time when we first introduced it to the marketplace. My then-partner and I also sold this digital software to other optical companies.

Later, I found myself venturing into my two current businesses. The first would be Halcyon Media, that offers both IT and photography services. Halcyon was inspired by my love for photography. It was an avenue for me to keep my creative juices flowing through delivering professional photography and web solutions for my clients. The expertise that I had in digital technology made product and software development easier.

Over time, the B2B work I did with Halcyon Media became rather mechanical as I had to concentrate more on crunching numbers rather than connect with my customers



meaningfully. As a consequence, I had a sore lack of social interaction and engagement, as I love communicating with people on a more personal and emotional level. Hence, to reignite my people-oriented passion and meet more people, I started Avior Pictures. We provide wedding photography services. Weddings are wonderful expressions of tearful joys, bliss, and togetherness. They bring out countless happy emotions in people, and I wanted to be at the heart of these moments, capturing and making them eternal.

My next business, Dining Butler, has an app where diners in restaurants can put in orders via their mobile phones instead of waiting for the waiters. This business idea was sparked off by a bad dining experience I had in a restaurant six years ago. I remember being ravenous while waiting for the excruciatingly slow and tardy service. It was a long time before a waiter finally took my orders! I was compelled to find a solution to the problem, and that is how and why the app was created – to boost service efficiency in F&B businesses. We have progressed well, and Dining Butler is now present in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.

## Betrayed and Alone

The online eyewear company that I eventually became a partner in did not progress well, and we ran into financial troubles. If that was not bad news enough, my partner whom I trusted and relied on, disappeared and left me in the lurch. I found myself alone, desperate, and saddled with a mountain of debts.

Though I struggled for months, I managed to pull through the tormenting experience, with the support and encouragement from my family, especially my parents. Till today, his act of betrayal left me more skeptical of others. Still, it taught me a precious lesson on whom to trust in business.

## Happiness on Two Wheels

After toiling for years, I eventually managed to clear the debts and found my footing again. I earned enough to buy my father a motorcycle, which he rode to work every day, helping him to save on commuting time. It really warms my heart to watch my father riding that motorcycle, even until today. He refuses to get a new one though it has been years since I bought it for him. I assume it has sentimental value for him because he is proud that it was my celebratory present for him after pulling through the ordeal. Every time I think of this, it puts a smile on my face.

The main driving force for me to work hard every day is to support my loved ones and repay them for what they have done for me. The best reward is to see them enjoy the fruits of my labour.

*Chuan Feng pictured (seated second from right) at a team dinner.*





## Good Things Come to Those Who Sweat

As an entrepreneur, you are always running on a tight schedule, spending several hours in the day seated behind a computer. It is a sedentary lifestyle, which is why I always remind myself about the significance of exercising. Regular exercise helps me “sweat away” all the stress at work, allowing me to feel lighter and be better prepared for a new day of challenges. So, I visit a CrossFit gym thrice a week after work and head for jogs near my home on other days.

If I had any advice for young entrepreneurs out there, I would say feed your imagination and adopt a creative interest or hobby. The ability to ideate is a huge mental boost. Creative thinking helps you solve problems at work and in your everyday life.

We have all heard the saying, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." It is essential to work hard, but also to develop a hobby that can help keep your mind off work. If you ever catch yourself in a rut or feel that you are stagnating in life, take a breather and do something you enjoy. You will begin to see the world from unique perspectives and even bring new experiences to your entrepreneurial journey!



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Turn your setbacks into driving forces, and don't give up on your entrepreneurial journey.
- Exercise is important in keeping a balance to your work schedule as it helps to keep the stress at bay!
- Engage in meaningful hobbies to fuel your creativity and mind.



# THE DIGITAL FAST TRACK

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*By Eugene Chen*

*The family-owned business was founded in the 1980s as Unicom Advertising, and it later evolved to become Unicom Interactive and Unicom Marketing Consultancy. Unicom offers complete, one-stop digital marketing solutions for brands, services, and products.*



## Strike While the Iron Is Hot!

I am a firm believer in seizing the moment. My first business encounter started at eight when I decided to become a "wholesale pencil distributor". My mother was an Art teacher, and there were always boxes of pencils lying around in my house. Inspired, I created my own business opportunity, where I would buy pencils in bulk and sell them to my friends for a modest margin of five cents per pencil. However, my pencil business did not prove to be lucrative. Often, my friends would "purchase" the pencils first and ask if they could pay me afterwards. I never received their payments! Hence, my small "business" was short-lived, but I had fun running it. Most appreciably, it seeded the entrepreneurial passion in me that I would carry throughout my adulthood.

My business ambitions continued in secondary school. Back then, my friends and I spent much time playing basketball and football. I observed how the balls would be worn out after some time, so I offered a solution by bringing extra balls for my friends to purchase. Later, while studying in Temasek Polytechnic (TP), I sold used textbooks at a large mark-up to my juniors.

As I honed my entrepreneurial skills in little ways, there came a time when I had to think about my career pathway. Through the Diploma in Information Technology at TP, I had a better idea of what it meant to be a software developer. I learned that the eco-system of Information Technology (IT) was more than just learning how to operate computers, and how different types of IT projects require different management methodologies. It is important to have technical skills like IT expertise, but we also need soft skills such as communication and adaptability to thrive in the industry.

## Adapting to the Changing Environment

After completing my studies at TP, I had to serve National Service. In the span of two years, while I was in the army, the IT industry landscape saw notable changes. That is the double-edged sword of being in technology, as we must constantly keep up with the ever-shifting tides. Thankfully, TP gave me a great foundation, so it was easy for me to keep up with the dynamic trends and stay relevant.

I pursued a degree in Computing, Communications and Media at the National University of Singapore (NUS) before becoming an entrepreneur. I knew that having a full-time job would give me stability, but I decided to take a risk and follow my passion. Being an entrepreneur allows me to have more control over what I can accomplish. With a little push from my family, I took over the helm of our family business, Unicom Interactive, in 2010.

## **Strength in Numbers**

When I was awarded my first job as an entrepreneur, I was thrilled. Still, I knew I could not keep running business operations alone over the long run. With the advice of family and friends, I started looking for manpower. I believe the hard work of the employees in a company determines the success of every business. I am incredibly fortunate to have formed a team that sees potential in our business. As the boss, I actively listen to the needs of my team to boost our productivity at work and to grow as a company.

## **In Tough Times, Do What You Can, Use What You Have**

During the first three years of the business, we met with a crisis. One of the advertising agencies that we partnered with was in bad financial shape, and it adversely affected my company. We had no choice but to cut costs and move out of our office premises.

For an entire year, we were nomads. We worked at coffeeshops, our homes, community centres, and fast-food restaurants using our mobile hotspots. To say this was a tough period would be an understatement. Since we did not have a finance team, we faced problems when it came to payment and invoice collections. We had to juggle everything ourselves. As the business grew, we eventually learned to manage our finances well.



Most people would take these trying times as a negative experience, but I deeply cherish these moments. It showed me the resilience and determination of my team, who rallied around me, and we bonded because of our shared experience. In business, nothing is impossible if you have a strong team effort. I passionately believe in the value of having the right people on-board the business. Other than my family, I seek advice from my teammates because I appreciate and respect their opinions. They were the ones spurring me on during troubled times. These are people who sacrificed their corporate careers to join me, and I know that I cannot let them down.

## Sacrifices Are Necessary for Greatness

Entrepreneurship is a long journey that will truly test your willpower. It is unique for each individual – you set the rules, the directives, and the path you want to take. It is challenging to establish work-life balance as an entrepreneur because your business will always be at the forefront of your mind. Before you embark on your entrepreneurial journey, be prepared to sacrifice personal time, and learn to deal with stress without having friends who can understand what you are going through. It can be lonely, but these sacrifices will help you achieve greatness.

My journey as an entrepreneur is truly a rite of passage. I discovered the grit in me that I may never have as a corporate employee.

I think that for one to be a serious entrepreneur, we must first be kind to ourselves and take charge of our emotional and physical well being. Only when we are in optimal form can we give our best to our clients. A flustered boss cannot lead his team to success! It is crucial for entrepreneurs to have clear thoughts so that they can execute with precision.

My advice is to be prepared for imminent failure while expecting speed bumps as you enter entrepreneurship. While confidence is an excellent ingredient to have in business, arrogance and ignorance will derail your journey. There are no secrets to success – be curious, bold, unafraid to fail, and learn from your mistakes. Over time, you will win a host of clients supporting your quality work, and your employees will feel motivated and appreciated. Eventually, the fruits of your labour will bring your organisation to greater heights.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- **Success is a team effort. Work towards building a team that believes in your vision, and together be courageous and resilient towards achieving your dreams.**
- **Look at setbacks as opportunities for growth. Take heart from the experience, learn from the mistakes made, and never repeat them.**

# THE END OF THE BEGINNING



Entrepreneurship is akin to winemaking. Good grapes are crushed, squeezed, and compressed to extract the juice and essence. Add in yeast, and let the wine ferment for months to years. In the end, you get an aromatic, flavourful, and sweet wine that delights the palate.

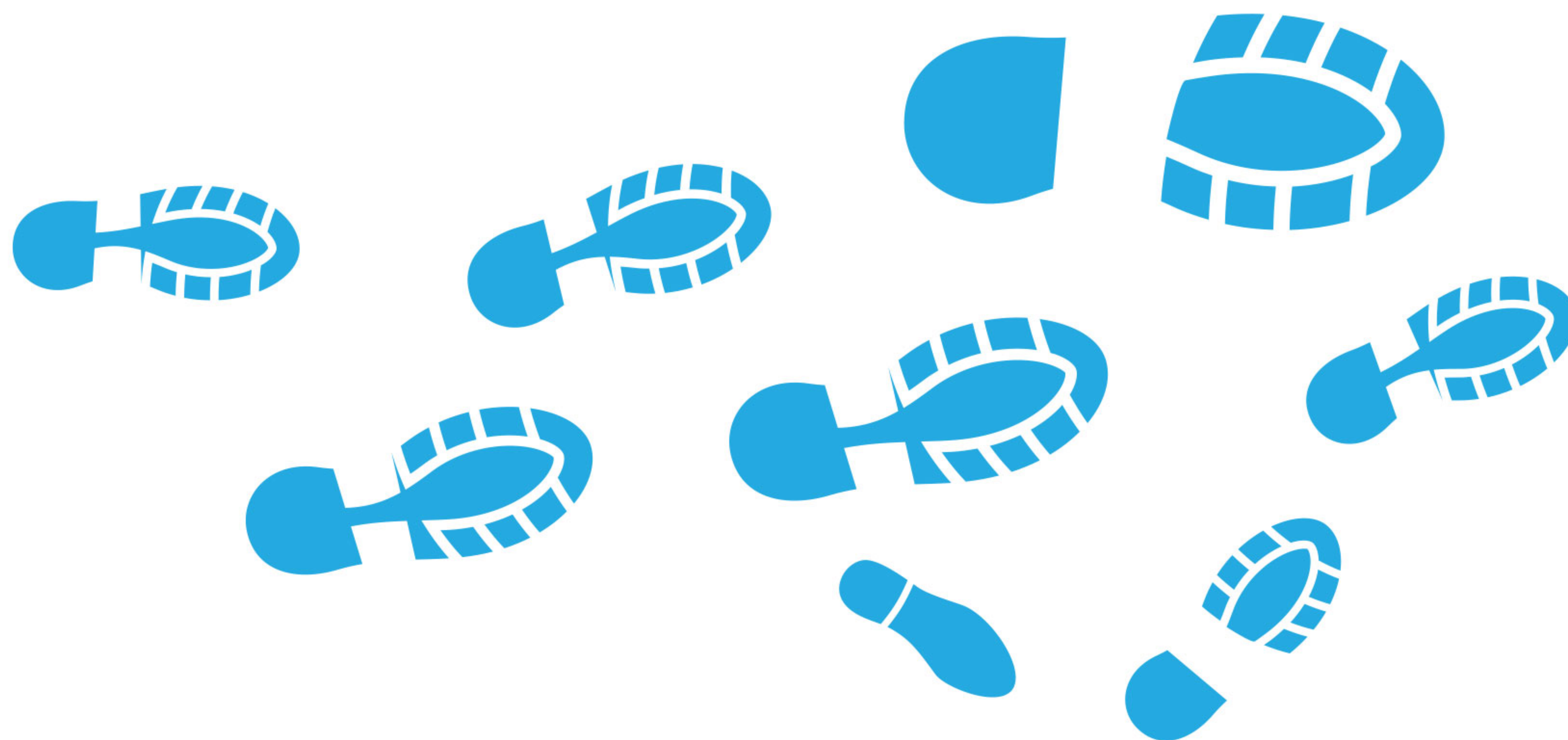
The entrepreneurship hero comes home a victor after going through multiple ordeals, where he was crushed and beaten down to his knees. It was a long journey of self-discovery, where he grew stronger and wiser, found great treasures, and accumulated true friends. With accolades from onlookers, he knew that all of it was necessary to make him what he is today.

Teddy Roosevelt said, "It is not the critic who counts... The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly... who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

The book cover shows that the path of an entrepreneur is never a straight line. It spirals, gaps, and stagnates before moving on with greater force and drive towards success. Like the beneficial yeast in winemaking, Temasek Poly and Temasek Launchpad are eager to walk beside you, mentor and help you with the necessary resources. At any time when you are ready to take up the calling of entrepreneurship, google 'Temasek Launchpad' to contact us or email 'i&e@tp.edu.sg' for the mentor to appear.

And remember, it all starts with being **BOLD**.

- Gabriel Chu,  
Bold Too Project Leader



This book is produced by the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Department of Temasek Polytechnic.

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