

THOSE WHO DARED

Entrepreneurs from Ngee Ann Polytechnic

**THOSE
WHO
DARED**

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FOREWORD



Mr Ong Ye Kung
Acting Minister for
Education (Higher
Education and Skills)

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Index in 2015, Singapore is ranked the 10th most entrepreneurial country—an encouraging achievement for a country with such a small domestic market.

Entrepreneurship is vital to Singapore. Aside from the direct economic gain, it gives wings to research and innovation, while nurturing traits such as diligence, resilience and perseverance, which have been key to our success as a nation over the past five decades.

In the past decade, Singapore has built a vibrant entrepreneurship ecosystem, with an active venture fund industry and a vast range of entrepreneurship education, incubation and acceleration initiatives that continue to grow today. The recent establishment of a

strong entrepreneurial community at the JTC Launchpad located at One-North is one of many efforts to support entrepreneurs.

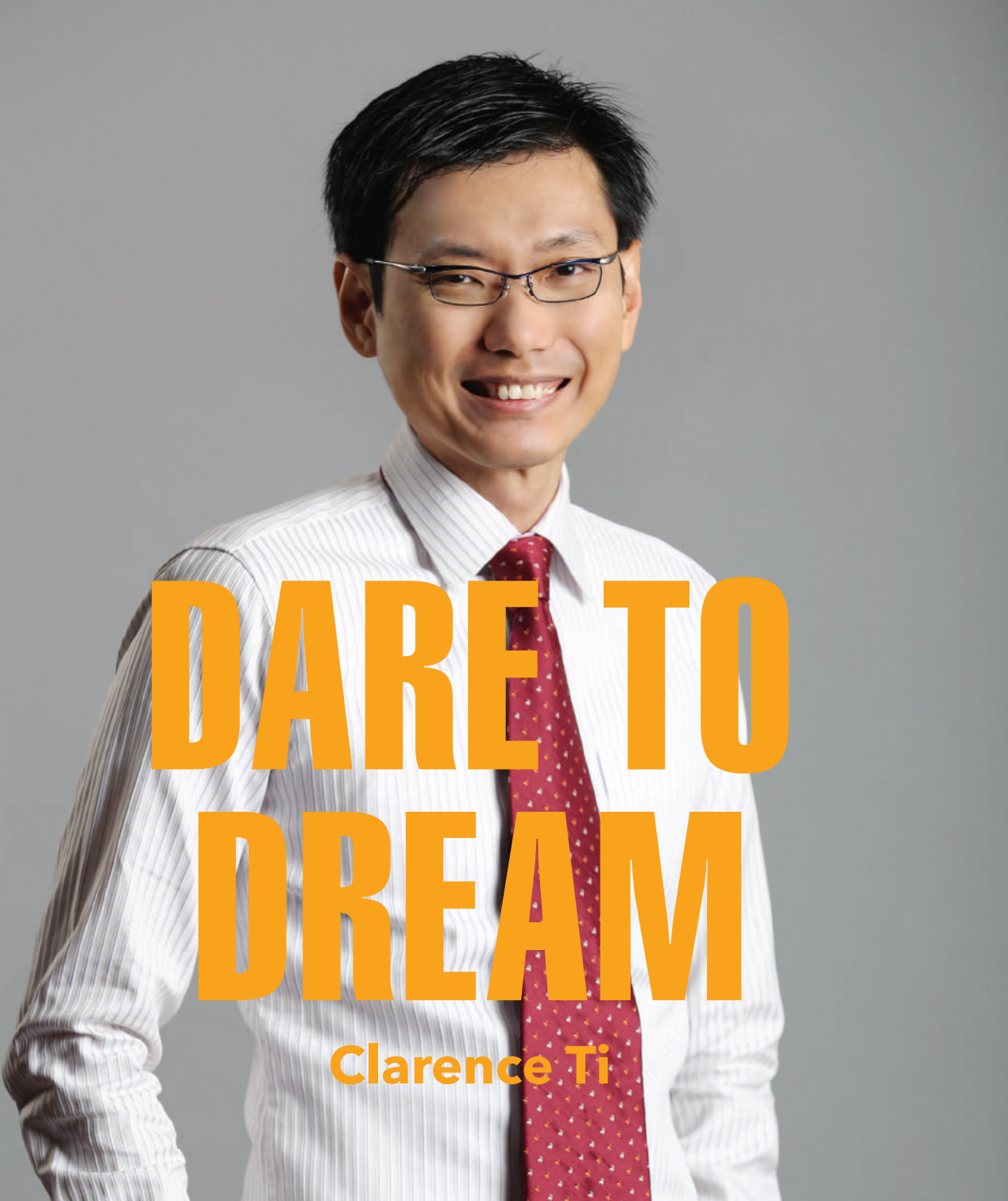
Our education institutions play a critical role in the entrepreneurship ecosystem. I am glad that many of our schools have incorporated entrepreneurship into their curricula. Our universities and polytechnics have also started initiatives that provide students with funding to test ideas and build businesses, internship opportunities at start-ups, incubation facilities and business accelerator camps to rapidly bring products to market.

More importantly, within a school campus, ideas get fermented and business plans are developed. Successful businesses are often not the work of one person, but of a team of

friends, within them an inventor, a planner, an implementer, the guy with the network, etc.

I am glad to see Ngee Ann Polytechnic celebrating its alumni entrepreneurs through this compilation of stories. Some of these alumni have modernised traditional businesses, some have created innovative solutions for unique problems, and others have championed worthy social causes. All have made a difference to others' lives.

I hope that these stories will inform and inspire the next generation of young budding entrepreneurs, and I look forward to the many more stories that are waiting to be told.



DARE TO DREAM

Clarence Ti

Principal's Message

It wasn't long ago that striking out on your own raised eyebrows. Not getting a real job? Self-employed? What do you mean? However, things are changing. There are government initiatives and funding, modules on entrepreneurship and creativity. Entrepreneurship is now highly encouraged.

We at Ngee Ann Polytechnic are embracing this forward spirit by launching our first-ever commemorative book to honour our alumni entrepreneurs who paved the way in this alternate career path. Entrepreneurship is often glamorised—the windfall riches, the global attention, the youthful CEO. The reality is far less glamorous with hard grinding work, mind numbing pressure and brutal rejections. A seasoned serial entrepreneur once told me that “entrepreneurship is suffering in silence, waiting in hope of making a difference”.

I agree.

We salute our alumni turned entrepreneurs. They deserve to be recognized as those who dare to dream, fail, fail again and make things happen.

In the following pages, you will get to know our alumni entrepreneurs. Some you may be familiar with while others are new kids on the block. You will read about their commitment to their craft, the storms they weathered and the difference they have made. You will read about their advice to those of you who will walk the entrepreneurship path after them.

Get inspired and enjoy the read.

ENTRAIL

Entrepreneurs who
embody the spirit of
innovation and out-of-
the-box thinking.

BLAZERS



School of Engineering

Diploma in Electrical &
Electronic Engineering
1975

Creative Technology

Established in 1981
www.creative.com

Sim Wong Hoo

What is Singapore's most precious resource? Its people. No one exemplifies this better than technopreneur Sim Wong Hoo. The 60-year-old was Singapore's first poster boy for tech startups back in the 1980s, and can be credited with paving the way for Singapore's new generation of technopreneurs such as Tan Min-Liang, CEO of famed game-ware specialist Razer, and Lim Qing-Ru, co-founder of live chat website Zopim that was acquired by an American software company for \$37 million in 2014.

Sim founded Creative Technology in 1981, just six years after he graduated with a Diploma in Electrical & Electronic Engineering from Ngee Ann Polytechnic. From the get-go, he wasted little time to prove that homegrown innovations are just as outstanding as those offered by global tech heavyweights.

Being first is a goal that all tech startups must aspire towards. Modern-day gadget geeks may consider the likes of Apple, Samsung or Sony-branded multimedia products as the norm. But one can safely argue that Sim's Creative Technology was among the first to map the blueprint in this category of products.

"Don't give up just because the challenges are great. With inspiration and tenacity, you can create something amazing, even in the face of incredible odds."

Any technology buff worth his salt will remember the Sound Blaster, which shot Creative Technology to fame in 1989. Essentially an all-in-one high-fidelity smart audio card for the computer, it was revolutionary for its time, combining an 11-voice synthesizer, text-to-speech capabilities, digitised voice input and output and a digital interface for musical instruments.

In one fell swoop, Creative Technology set the bar for all modern-day sound cards. It was reported that Creative Technology sold up to 400 million units of Sound Blasters by 2005. Another game-changing invention was the Nomad Jukebox that debuted in 1999—the world's first MP3 player that predated Apple's iPod by two years.

Creative Technology's rapid ascent in the company's early days heightened Sim's profile. In 2000, at the age of 45, he became Singapore's youngest billionaire. Sim also received numerous accolades, including Businessman of the Year awards in 1992 and 1997 and Fortune Magazine's Asia's Businessman of the Year award in 2001. But as with all things in the technological sphere, change is the only constant. Sim needed to be relentlessly at the top of his game to stay ahead.

Sights also had to be set beyond the status quo. In 2011, Sim launched the HanZpad computer tablet. Aimed at the Chinese market, the tablet is anchored by Chinese-language educational content, which included textbooks for mathematics, science and other subjects, as well as Chinese handwriting recognition software.

Not all forms of success can be measured in commercial terms. Sim had a lofty ambition for the HanZpad that looked beyond the bottom line. While some considered HanZpad a shrewd move targeted at a market with immense potential, he cared more than how much money the production could generate. He had hoped that the HanZpad would be a tool that would make education accessible for all Chinese students in the country. A spin-off from this effort is Creative Knowledge, an independent company that is a leader in educational software and content in China.

An entrepreneur's journey is defined as much by setbacks as it is by successes. The same is true for Sim. The product categories Creative Technology once pioneered has matured and is now rife with competition. Elsewhere, some forays, such as those into the 3D graphics card and chip market, achieved less than desirable results. More crucially, today's technological landscape

is vastly different from the one in the 1980s when Creative Technology first established its foothold in the market.

Can Creative Technology march out yet another game-changer? Or even better, spar again with tech bigwigs on the global stage, like how it once did with Apple when both were vying for a share of the MP3 player market? One thing is for sure: Sim is more than equipped with the resolve and imagination to turn stumbling blocks into stepping-stones.

Sim recalled that his tertiary education encouraged him to boldly venture where others fear to tread. In *We Are Awe50me*, Ngee Ann Polytechnic's 50th anniversary commemorative book, he reminisced: "They pushed me to question the norms, to challenge the unknown and to overcome audacious adversities."

In another book, *Chaotic Thoughts from the Old Millennium*, which Sim penned in 1999, the advice he dispensed was strangely prophetic. "To meet the challenge of the new world, to meet the challenge of rising to a knowledge-based economy, we have to innovate like mad," he wrote. "(To) innovate means to create things out of nothing, it means moving into uncharted territories where there are no rules." ■

Marcus Tan

Quek Siu Rui

School of
Business &
Accountancy
Diploma in
Business Studies
2007

Carousell
Established in 2013
www.carousell.com

School of
Business &
Accountancy
Diploma in
Business Studies
2007

**RETAIL
THERAPY**

Marcus Tan: My parents are my biggest inspiration. My father was the family's sole breadwinner when my mother left the workforce to take care of the family full-time. In a way, they sacrificed their retirement plans so that they could spend time nurturing me.

“ *Start simple, start small and don't give up.* ”

M: The first thing I sold was a book. It was –The Joy Luck Club from my secondary school days. I wanted to throw it away but realised students are still using that book for literature class.

M: Our vision is for Carousell to be the world's e-commerce eco-system. We want to enable anyone who wants to sell something to be able to do so easily. We feel gratified when we see people look at their unused stuff and feel inspired to sell them.

M: My greatest fear as an entrepreneur? That we lose sight of creating value for our community and invest in projects that don't solve problems.

Quek Siu Rui: The best part about Carousell is hearing how it makes a difference to people's lives. People really like the wide variety of items presented in a user-friendly grid view, the simplicity of listing items for sale and the ease of browsing items on-the-go.

Q: I crafted business ideas as part of school work. I did Business Studies in Ngee Ann Polytechnic. Starting early led me to more ideas as I read and experienced more. It takes many years to develop an idea that you are so passionate and confident about that you want to embark on it full-time.

“ *Constantly push your boundaries and trust your gut.* ”

Q: I almost gave my parents a heart attack. The toughest part about building a start-up right out of school is telling your parents you're not getting a 'real' job. My parents are now supportive though.

Q: Why not take a chance at succeeding? If you choose not to pursue your dreams, you've already failed.



Laku6.com

Established in 2015
www.laku6.com

**School of Business &
Accountancy**

Diploma in
Business Studies
2006

DESTINY'S CHILD

Alvin Yap

TheMobileGamer started when I was still in the army. It was done as part of a business plan competition in 2008. Two of my friends and I participated in it, and we were fortunate to win the first prize in the youth category. That gave us a bit of capital—it was \$5,000—to start the business. From there, we went through a few rounds of fund raising and we grew the company. In 2013, we sold the company to SingTel and Softbank, which are the biggest telcos in Singapore and Japan respectively.

I now have a new business based in Indonesia called Laku6.com. We sell certified used phones that come with 30-day guarantee. Consumers like it because it's a lot safer than buying off some dude that you don't know. And for the emerging middle class in Indonesia, it's a great way to own an iPhone without paying the full price. E-commerce is in an exciting phase in Indonesia now.

Singapore's business environment can be sterile.

TheMobileGamer has exposed me to doing business in Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines and Japan. In these countries, the people are bolder and that provides more business opportunities.

I've always liked challenges. I like to do things that challenge me mentally and intellectually. From young, business has always been something that I wanted to

pursue because of the freedom it promises—financial freedom that comes when you are successful; the freedom to pick the types of battles that you want to fight.

It's always about cash flow. The danger of running out of cash is very real. We had a few cases of going into a new month without having enough money to meet the payroll for that month. But we had to keep going and believing that things will work out.

Take defeats on the chin and move on. Don't let setbacks discourage you too much. It gets easier with experience. You can get nine things wrong, but if

you get one thing right, that's all it takes.

At the beginning, we survived on a few hundred dollars. Those were tough days. As we moved along, the company gained traction, and we were better compensated. It feels good to receive your first pay cheque.

"Running your own business isn't necessarily easier. But at least, you get to choose your own battles."

But for me, the important thing was always to control your destiny. And being able to write your own pay cheque symbolises that—you're not dependent on somebody for your sustenance.

You don't want to be penny wise but pound foolish. Now, we have raised \$500,000 and have more than enough to spend. But how do we use it wisely without letting it get to our heads?

It's about being authentic. Our investors saw in us, a couple of young guys who had the drive and belief. They felt that with a little bit of support, we could go far. We were not trying to put up an image of what we cannot do. Seasoned people can tell inauthenticity from a mile away.

My first business failed because we expanded too fast. That happened when I was still in school. We had three outlets selling customised mobile phone skins. It was a painful but memorable learning experience.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic lets you try stuff out. During one of my semesters, I practically didn't attend school because I was so busy managing my business. But the lecturers came down to look at the business, saw what we did and graded me based on what I

did—for one of the non-examinable portions, of course.

You cannot pay to learn the hard lessons. Over the course of five to seven years, we have learnt so much. We learned how to judge people; we learned how to deal with stuff that you don't learn anywhere else. How do you deal with a founder relationship that has gone sour? How do you fire your best friend? Money can't buy you these lessons.

There's a slight difference between determination and tenacity. Determination sometimes just means you stick it out till the end but tenacity is simply not stopping until you get the result. Sometimes, you get the result by just sticking around long enough, but sometimes, you got to go for it.

Fluid intelligence is very important. You need to know when to bend, when to be firm and when to be flexible.

There is always somebody who can teach you something. And there are always more things to learn. What is important is to be teachable—to have the attitude that you're learning all the time, and that you've never truly figured things out. ■

A portrait of Wayne Goh, a young man with dark hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, standing with his arms crossed. The background is a solid light grey.

AllDealsAsia.Com
Established in 2010
www.alldealsasia.com

School of Business &
Accountancy
Diploma in Accountancy
2012

THE REAL DEAL

Wayne Goh

Ngee Ann Polytechnic sowed the seeds of my entrepreneurial aspiration.

The school had a one-stop centre that nurtures entrepreneurial spirit amongst students, known as Entrepreneurs-Connect@NP (EC@NP). I took up the EnterpriZe! Scheme under EC@NP, which is an incentive

site. That's how AllDealsAsia.com came about. We wanted to gather all the best deals on one site, and provide a platform for new web businesses offering online deals.

Being an entrepreneur is really not

easy. I was 19 and in my final year of my accountancy course in Ngee Ann Poly when AllDealsAsia.com was taking off. Balancing work and studies was not easy. I would be busy at school during the day and work very late into the night. But this is part and parcel

“
If you keep thinking, planning and worrying, it may never happen. Just do it.
”

funding scheme that co-funds 70 per cent or up to a maximum of \$3,000 for every potential business idea. Funding aside, I am grateful to receive a lot of mentorship and guidance from EC@NP on how to turn my ideas into a successful business.

of being an entrepreneur—you have to be determined and be very motivated.

My business idea came from a love for online shopping. My sister and I are online deal hunters ourselves. In 2010, many websites were offering attractive deals but it was cumbersome to visit each and every

Anyone who wants to walk this path needs to be prepared. It's going to be long, challenging and not glamorous until you make it. People may look at you strangely, doubt you and advise you to give up. So you need to persevere, have faith in your ideas, be your own devil's advocate, discover and understand the reasons why you want to do this.

BRAVE

Andrew Lim

I didn't harbour any childhood dreams as a kid. My siblings and I came from a financially-challenged family. I remember my biggest desire was simply to be financially comfortable.

My family used to live in a gang-infested neighbourhood. We saw fights every day, except for the first day of Chinese New Year. It was entertainment to us. Thankfully, our mother was a strict disciplinarian. She kept us in line and made sure that we didn't fall into bad company.

NEW

WORK

BuzzCity

Established in 1999
www.buzzcity.com

School of Engineering

Diploma in Electrical
Engineering
1993



"Being mad at the unfairness of the business world doesn't get you anywhere. It distorts your perspective and distracts you from your goals."

Education was quite a challenge for me.

I wasn't a very good student and was always cutting classes. In fact, I wasn't fluent in English until I was in Secondary Three. But I passed the English examination, thanks to my English teacher, who looked down on me. I am the sort who hates being looked down upon and I took it as a personal challenge to prove the teacher wrong.

My first lecture in Ngee Ann Polytechnic left a lasting impression.

I was enrolled in Electrical Engineering and the head of department showed us an image of a manager behind a desk. He invited us to guess the guy's profession. After the exercise, he told us that one can be trained as an engineer, and still succeed at a managerial level. But one who is trained in business may be a good manager, but there's no way he can be a good engineer. That inspired me to give the course a shot.

I came from a totally different industry.

I was working in the civil engineering, marine and construction sector, helping out with my family business, before I joined BuzzCity. BuzzCity was actually a spin-off from Kent Ridge Digital Labs (KRDL), a government funded research lab (currently known as A*Star). I was asked to participate when the idea was still in its infancy. Three other founders and myself worked on BuzzCity right from the start, and we are all still on-board today.

This is probably the sixth iteration of our business plan.

BuzzCity today is in the business of operating a mobile internet display advertising network. We are a middleman of sorts. We bring together clients who wish to advertise to end users on mobile devices, and companies that wish to monetise the mobile internet traffic of their websites or apps. Our company now has offices in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, South Africa, India and London.

Back then, I didn't even know how to switch on a computer. But my lack of understanding about the computer industry was probably what I brought most to the table. I didn't have the baggage of being someone who was too involved in the industry and was able to take on a broader perspective.

Businesses must always be built on key fundamentals.

Companies must have a good grasp of profit and loss; a good understanding of managing business relationships; and see the need for good corporate governance. Reputation and integrity are paramount when looking at sustainability of the business.

One doesn't need to dive headlong into entrepreneurship. It is okay to work for other people for a couple of years to learn the ropes. In fact, I see it as companies paying and preparing you to be an entrepreneur. What is important is to learn from how problems are handled and to learn to always ask the right questions.

The co-founders established important rules about business relations right from the start. For one, we never bring personal agendas into our business discussions. Another thing we made clear was that we all understood our designations, job scopes

and responsibilities. Some might take on a more 'glamorous' role, such as being the face of the company, but it should never be something that we fight about. I guess the rules also worked because we all had the right level of maturity to accept them.

Tough times will always be there. One of the biggest challenges we faced as a company was in 2003, when our local partner in China saw how profitable the business was and decided to manoeuvre us out of the business. At that time, our business there contributed to a huge chunk of our turnover and losing it would have a huge impact. It was a difficult decision, but we eventually agreed to a pay-out. We used the proceeds to develop other markets and bought another entity to help us continue the business in China.

What I've learnt from the setback is to always have a backup plan. A business cannot be too reliant on a single market. If a company sets out to conquer just the Singapore market, I would say 'good luck' to them. Diversification is key for any business—it could be footprint, product line, or even skill sets and ways of thinking within a company. Situations and plans can be changed, but it is one's attitude and perseverance that will see things through. ■

“If you are not fulfilling your dreams, you’re helping others fulfill theirs.”

Alex’s company’s services run the gamut from e-commerce to web design, and his clients span from fashion retailers to government agencies. Yet he measures success not by quantity, but by the quality of his work, which strives to “blur the lines between work and play”.

Hoovix Consulting
Established in 2009
www.hoovix.com

School of Engineering
Diploma in Electrical
Engineering
2005

SPINNING THE WEB

Alex Chew

“Learn not just from the successes of others, but also their failures.”

It isn’t enough to roll out a winning product. To truly succeed, one needs to first understand the needs of his clients and adapt his products accordingly, says James, whose company develops customised apps to help enhance database management of other businesses.

Centre for Computer Studies
(now known as School of
InfoComm Technology)
Diploma in Information
Technology
1986

HAOTY
Technology
Established in
2014

INNER SPACE

James Ho

A portrait of Darran Nathan, a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a light pink short-sleeved button-down shirt. He is smiling and has his arms crossed. The background is a solid teal color with large, white, stylized letters spelling out 'IMPACT' diagonally across the page.

Progeniq

Established from
2005 - 2012

School of Engineering

Diploma in Electronic &
Computer Engineering
2000

Darran Nathan

My company Progeniq started as a school project. It was a part of a research project of the Digital Signal Processing Centre at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, which was also related to my final year project. After graduating, I continued to go back to school to work on the project during National Service. It was with the objective of spinning it off as a company.

The creation of our product was marked by constant evolution. The team had to constantly iterate the product before we arrived at the final creation. The product was a PCI card that helps speed up computer processing. The card benefits companies that rely

on huge computing power from racks of servers, such as a visual effects production company. With our card, it can speed up the process by up to 10 times. Instead of 100 servers, the company would just need 10.

I am on to my next thing now. Progeniq ran from 2005 to 2012. It had since been merged with another large technology company, which built the original creation into a bigger product line. I am currently working on something that relates to graphics technology but is more consumer-oriented.

The bigger goal is to have an impact. The corporation we founded was just an entity to facilitate this objective. I think ultimately, the aim for all entrepreneurs is to build something that has a positive impact on the society at large.

Entrepreneurs are unlikely to agree with the educational system here. In Singapore, meritocracy is often pursued as a single state of mind. A lot of times, true creativity operates in pockets outside of this mindset.

That said, I was very academically focused. I was a top student in my secondary school and in Ngee Ann Polytechnic. But after I started the company, I realised that gold medals and book prizes don't really have an

impact on society. These things don't make a difference to whether you are successful in life or not.

A lot of people discouraged me at the start. Doubters came from everywhere: friends who didn't believe in me; investors who felt that the product wouldn't work; and even lecturers from school. They felt that I was 'wasting' my achievements from school, and that I should go to university and get a cushy job.

The people who encouraged me were existing entrepreneurs. So I had a chance to look at both sides of the equation. I took the 'advice' of doubters with a pinch of salt and said "thanks". I knew right from the beginning that I was going to go my own way.

It's important to work with the right investors. That's my advice for first time entrepreneurs. Everyone with money will look like an angel, but after you really get into it, you'll realise that some are actually devils in disguise. Funding from the right kind of investors—those who know how to support your entrepreneurial dreams—will have a very big impact on how the company progresses.

Having a business perspective is vital right from the start. Even though my core

team and I are engineers by training, we were aware that we needed to incorporate business strategies into the company from the very beginning. Entrepreneurs may come from different backgrounds, but the first and foremost goal is to create a product and build a business.

My greatest fear is that my company will end up a 'walking dead'. A lot of startups end up in a state where they are not really dead, but just surviving. They are not growing but simply servicing the same few clients. In this case, I feel that the entrepreneur has lost sight of the big picture, as he probably would have been tied up by the day to day concerns of running the company, feeding his staff and so on. It is important to ask yourself every day if this is something that you really want to do. If not, is it time to put a stop to it?

I see financial rewards as something that you use to fund your next idea. Some entrepreneurs are motivated by having a lot of money to finance the lifestyle that they want. Others dream of building something bigger. It is important to ask 'why' when you make that decision.

I don't think I'll ever fit in with a 'normal' company. I have a number of peers who work with big corporations and I can see that their mode of thinking is very different. Like other entrepreneurs, I am driven by the need to have things done. I would be very frustrated with reporting structure, obstacles and red tape, which prevents me from getting the job done. ■

"Real entrepreneurs are outliers. It is outside of the mainstream that you find people who are genuinely creative."

AGAINST THE ODDS

Douglas Gan

I started my first business when I was 14. That was in 1997. I was on the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and was chatting with some people who wanted to have their profile online all the time and receive messages, so I developed that for them. Later on, I created a hosting company and a forum—all extensions of what I started from chatting online. I sold these companies by 2006.

Understand and respect boundaries. That is the most important thing I learnt during my time in Ngee Ann Polytechnic. We need to do so, in order to address the concerns of people who set up these boundaries. This way, you can better let them understand what you are

School of InfoComm
Technology

Diploma in Information
Technology
2003

Vanity Trove

Established in 2012
www.vanitytrove.com



doing. For example, I was working while in school and I was honest about it with my lecturers. That's why they supported me even though I wasn't always in school. This is also a principle that I apply to business.

There were a lot of detractors during the dot com crash. I was knocking door to door for business for my web development company in 2001. All the people that I met all told me not to go into it. An uncle even gave me \$10 and told me to take a taxi home.

I once turned a \$120 job into a \$20,000 project. At a meeting with a potential client, he told me that he didn't need my services but would pay me \$120 if I could just connect his printer to his computer during his lunch break. I did that in 15 minutes and spent the rest of the hour figuring out what else I could do. I noticed a guy at a fax machine, sending hundreds of pages of technical drawings. When the client came back, I suggested to help set up a scanner, so that he can easily send documents through email. It turned out that he had wanted to do so, but didn't

know how to go about it. He was impressed and subsequently enlisted me to help him purchase computers, train his staff, and set up a wireless network for his office.

My mum is my inspiration and anchor.

She started out as an insurance agent to Indonesian clients and would go the extra mile for them. She helped them buy their air tickets to Singapore, arranged for their check-ups and even their private charter. As her relationship with them developed, she would go on to become a property agent for them and even manage their estates.

My mum is always looking for ways to value-add for her clients. Similarly, in all my businesses, I look for opportunities to value-add for my clients.

By 2007, I had quite a bit of money from the sale of my companies, but went bust by 2008. I played the stock market and over-leveraged with three brokerage houses—over \$10 million with each—to increase my limits. I built myself a credit bubble and raked up a debt of half a million dollars within a year.

It took 10 days to start Vanity Trove. It is a beauty product subscription box business. My competitors took an average of six months. The difference is that they went

an edge over my competitors. There are always market demands and challenges. The key for me is to find ways to offer a better product or solution than them.

“Having been able to enjoy my passion and make a living out of it, I now want to enable others to do the same.”

around asking brands for samples, while I rounded friends and family to visit beauty counters three to four times a day to collect samples. Within the first month we had 200 subscribers—only because we had enough samples only to send out 200 boxes. With that, we went to speak to all the brands. Within 18 months we got to seven markets and right now we have 60,000 members from around South East Asia.

I don't care if I am the first on the market—or the middle or last, for that matter. When I start a business, I just know that I must have

You need the right team to succeed. In the tech industry, speed is critical. When I created the app ShowNearby, it was built within two weeks. Having the right team gives me the velocity I need and allows me to do all these things I have done. My biggest achievement is bringing these good people together!

I can't imagine myself retiring. I feel that I have been very lucky since I was 14. I wake up every day, go to work and make a living from doing what I am most passionate about. ■

“If you think too much, you will forever be at the starting point.”

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Alvin Teo

Cxrus Solutions
Established in 2003
www.cxrus.com

One cannot be complacent in the tech world. The scope is always evolving for Alvin's company, Cxrus Solutions, whose primary business is building websites. Ever-changing client demands mean that his company needs to look beyond basic services to incorporate cutting-edge consumer-centric solutions.

School of Engineering
Diploma in Electrical Engineering
1994

LIVE & LEARN

Rakesh Kumar Gupta

“Success is having a vision and achieving it.”

Rakesh has Ngee Ann to thank for igniting his passion in software programming. His company MQ Spectrum aims to deliver cutting edge learning technology in the form of customised software development. The company is also the winner of 2014/2015's Top SME Achiever Award.

MQ Spectrum
Established in 2012
www.mqspectrum.com

School of InfoComm Technology
Diploma in Computer Studies
1997

Jim Li

JSB Tech

Established in 2002
www.jsbtech.com

School of Engineering

Diploma in Electronic &
Computer Engineering
1986

Many people have asked me why I decided be a businessman.

That was in the 1980s and even years later after I attained a PhD from Cambridge University. People thought that I was crazy to embark in doing business of my own, instead I should have sought a stable career to work for a multinational company. In hindsight, it was understandable for them to think this way as Singapore was a modest developing nation then.

My father and my brother were businessmen. Although I wouldn't say that entrepreneurship is in my blood, I was definitely influenced by them. As a child,

RELENTLESS ACHIEVER

"We must have the world's top three products to compete globally. Otherwise, I am not interested."

I saw a lot of people seeking advice or business assistance from my father. I would stand beside him and observed all that was going on.

I am a fast worker. Back when I was still working for another company, Texas Instruments, I would finish my work ahead of time. There were a few of us in a team and we needed everyone to complete their work in order to integrate the product as a whole. When I wanted to help, they would accept my assistance for a while and then refuse. That frustrated me, as I am the sort who cannot stand obstructions to progress.

I believe in flexibility. For example, I am not someone who clocks in and out on time. In fact, when I was an employee, I was often late! That was because I didn't want to deal with peak hour traffic. But I worked till late too, of course. There was once, the general manager of the company I worked for decided to be

sarcastic with staff who were late. He stood at the lobby in the morning and personally 'greeted' latecomers at the start of the day. But I didn't see him because I arrived even later! That's why for my own staff, I don't fancy this sort of regimental timing.

People define work as trading time for money. If that were so, people can just arrive in office timely, do the least for the day and simply clock in the hours for salary. I believe in measuring employees' performance by how well they contribute to the company.

Your best staff may not necessarily be the most equipped. About 12 years ago, we decided to start a factory in China. We sent two of our best managers from Singapore and even offered them company's shares. The business was profitable for a while before running into problems. I eventually found that the people I sent were not ready for an overseas assignment. When my managers

saw that money was coming in, they took things easy and soon business deteriorated quickly. Thus, not all people possess entrepreneurial spirit.

Always differentiate between personal and company wealth. Besides the usual leadership capabilities, competencies and business acumen, entrepreneurs must have in them, the value system of separating personal and business monies. I still draw a salary after all these years. That is my own money and is distinct from the company's revenue.

Always be on the cutting-edge. In the field of precision levelling instruments that one of my business units specialises in, we develop leading-edge knowledge and patented technology to prevail over competitors, whether in emerging or matured markets. I strongly believe that we are ranked at least number two in this market segment globally.

'Disruptive innovation' is important to what I do. This term was coined by a Harvard professor years ago. It stems from another term called 'creative destruction' which originated from well-known economist, Joseph Schumpeter. I was amazed by these concepts and further developed new innovation frameworks and business models to guide our company's innovation and new

product development roadmaps.

It is rare for a Singapore company to have done what we did. The products that we developed have been used by the likes of NASA, the US Navy and Lockheed Martin.

But I don't think of this as an extraordinary achievement. In fact, I am more proud of my team—top people whom I handpicked, trained and stayed with us. I have a competitive nature since my school days, and have brought this spirit to the company to compete on a global scale.

Knowledge helps us to see beyond the obvious. It is like how medical professional don't look at appearances of a patient, but tries to determine what goes on inside a person, or how engineers see beyond a machine's exterior but tries to understand how it actually operates.

Some people ask me, "Why not grow the business to be even bigger?" Darwin's theory of evolution argues that it's not the strongest, nor the largest, but the one that is the most adaptive will survive and thrive. What is more important for my business is to constantly adapt to changing global environment as well as having the foresights to identify and acquire emerging technologies that prevail before others do. ■

“ *Intelligence is understanding the rules and choosing when and how to break them. Stupidity is being ignorant of the rules and breaking them.* ”

An Uber-type app that connects beauty services and clients, Vanitee seems like a fail-safe idea. While Peng Kong is under no illusion that start-ups often run the risk of failure, he remains fearless. “Failure is just another obstacle on the path to success,” he says.

Vanitee
Established in 2015
www.vanitee.com

BEYOND
BEAUTY

Choy Peng Kong

School of InfoComm
Technology
Diploma in Multimedia
Computing
2004

Handling the digital marketing strategies of renowned hospitality companies has opened Rey's eyes to the importance of finding a business niche while competing on a global scale. At the same time, his sights are set beyond monetary rewards. True satisfaction, he says, comes from helping his clients improve their businesses.

“ *There is a risk of losing focus with more opportunities. We need to balance this by focusing on delivering value to our clients.* ”

Hype Digital
Established in 2012
www.hypedigital.com.sg

TRUE
FOCUS

Rey Ong

School of
InfoComm
Technology
Diploma in
Information
Technology
2003

E V O L U

Kelly Choo

T I O N A R Y

Our company deals with media analytics, specifically in social media. In 2011, we got acquired by another company that was doing the same thing but with traditional media. That's why there are two parts to the company name: Isentia is the 'new' entity, and 'Brandtology' was our original name that we kept for branding purpose.

We started with about five people. After three years, it grew to about 230 staff before we got acquired. The fast growth was not expected at all. Our original ambition was simply to dominate the field of social media analytics.

I N S T I N C T

School of InfoComm
Technology

Diploma in Information
Technology (eCommerce)
2001

Isentia Brandtology

Established in 2008
www.brandtology.com

Enrolling in Ngee Ann Polytechnic wasn't a conventional decision. I studied in Raffles Institution (RI) and the expected education pathway was to go into a junior college. But I knew that I wanted to learn computer studies and I was determined to get into the industry full-time. My parents were shocked at first but they came round to it. That year, two other friends and I broke an RI record when three of us enrolled in a polytechnic.

A visit to Silicon Valley changed my life. It was organised by Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 2001. We visited companies like Macromedia (eventually acquired by

"Life is a journey. I wish more people would realise that. And in doing so, go ahead and pursue their dreams."

Adobe) and Apple. During the trip, I had a conversation with a Singaporean venture capitalist based there. He told me about a 'relatively new' company called Google that was creating search engines. He recommended that I look into this area of computing. After that, I went back to school, developed my own search engine and started my first company.

I was very naïve as an aspiring entrepreneur in school. I thought that with great technology, everything else would fall in place. But there were a whole lot of other things that I didn't know about such as business planning. And I wasn't 'administratively ready' because I still had to serve National Service!

Brandtology is actually my fourth business. My first company was founded in 2001 and I have learnt a few important lessons since. The first was not considering obvious obstacles like National Service. The second was not setting expectations early. I had to leave my second start-up because the founder needed people to be involved full-time with the company and I was still a student then.

I asked myself then, "Why am I constantly failing?" I realised that my lack of

experience was key. I told myself that I would devote my time to learning from another established entrepreneur. It was through this realisation that I met Eddie Chau, who had already successfully sold his own start-up before starting Brandtology with me.

Speed is paramount to what we do. That was a key mantra of Brandtology and one of the best advice I got from Eddie. You may be small but you don't have to be afraid of the big boys. You just need to get to the table before they do and have their lunch.

Once, we almost ran out of money. That was one of our biggest setbacks during the early days. We had raised some money from angel investors and other founders, but it wasn't enough to see us through an entire year because we were expanding really quickly. We were on the verge of dipping into personal savings to pay the staff. Thankfully a venture capitalist believed in us and funded us in the nick of time.

We always believed in long-term compensation. As founders, we didn't pay ourselves market rates, but we paid our staff that. It was always important to hire good talent to join the company.

I didn't really splurge when we cashed out. I got married around the time we sold the company, so the money was helpful. I bought my wife a diamond ring, of course. And a piano. My lifestyle hasn't changed.

Complacency is my biggest fear. And there were many times when I thought that I understood it all. But the industry moves so fast, especially in social media. So it's very dangerous for an entrepreneur to stop learning.

Control is a great motivator. As entrepreneurs, we want to be in control of our own destiny and the ability to rate our own success and failure. I also appreciate the freedom to structure our own time and resources.

Bill Gates is a big inspiration. Not just for what he did in business, but his philanthropic side. He knows that the toughest questions in life aren't those that relate to technology, but those that relate to social causes.

To aspiring entrepreneurs, find a mentor quickly. That would be an advice that I would've given myself if I could travel back in time. This way, you'd be able to learn and fail more efficiently in a shorter span of time. ■

REG GAME CHANGERS

Entrepreneurs who
modernise traditional
businesses for
today's markets.

INTO THE FIRE

Alfred Chua

I started The Wok People in 2009. It is a one-stop solution for employee cafeteria management. We now have over 50 clients and aim to serve palatable meals with personalised service in a customised dining platform.

Never take advantage of others. My mum taught me and my sister that. I employ over 500 people. Most of them are aged 50 and above, and I take very good care of them. I think this is why I have seen many of my staff from the first company I started in 1999, come back to join me when I started The Wok People officially in 2010.

School of Engineering

Diploma in
Mechatronic Engineering
1996

The Wok People

Established in 2009
www.thewokpeople.com

My family was not well to do. I studied hard to get a diploma so I could get a better job and help make ends meet. My mother worked three jobs to put me through polytechnic.

I worked in many jobs after graduation. I peddled sun glasses to optical shops and knocked on doors asking people if they wanted to change their kitchen countertops. One of the sales positions I took required me to have a car. So I bought a 12 year-old Toyota Corolla with a faulty air-conditioner on a \$400 monthly instalment. My monthly pay then was \$2,000. That was when I saw the reality of working life (as an employee) and decided that I need to find a way to make it on my own.

A lesson I learnt from starting my first company is that, it is not only important for a company to keep growing; you must first build a strong foundation. At The Wok People, we get all our processes certified and our staff trained professionally.

It took eight years to build my first business. Subsequently, it took me four to build an even bigger company. I stayed for three years in the MNC that bought over my first company. I learned a lot during that period of time and expanded my horizons through travelling—which I wasn't able to do while

running my own business. However, the speed of our progress is owed partly to the people who came back to join me.

My sister is a source of inspiration to me. I run the company with her and I may be a bit aggressive at times. She would talk me through things in a level headed way, and she believes in treating people well even more strongly than me.

We were badly hit when SARS broke out in 2003. The occupancy rates of the hotels in which we ran staff cafeterias dropped. They had to cut staff working hours, which meant that our business also decreased. However, instead of pulling out, we dropped our margins in order to continue running the staff cafeterias. 90 per cent of my clients appreciated what we did for them, especially as it was a demoralising time for their staff. It meant something to them to still be able to have a good meal. We turned the challenge into opportunity.

Lots of people avoid labour-intensive businesses. But coming from a company with over 500 employees serving 56 staff canteens, I can tell you that with good human resource practices and a series of retention programmes, you can handle the labour crunch problem.

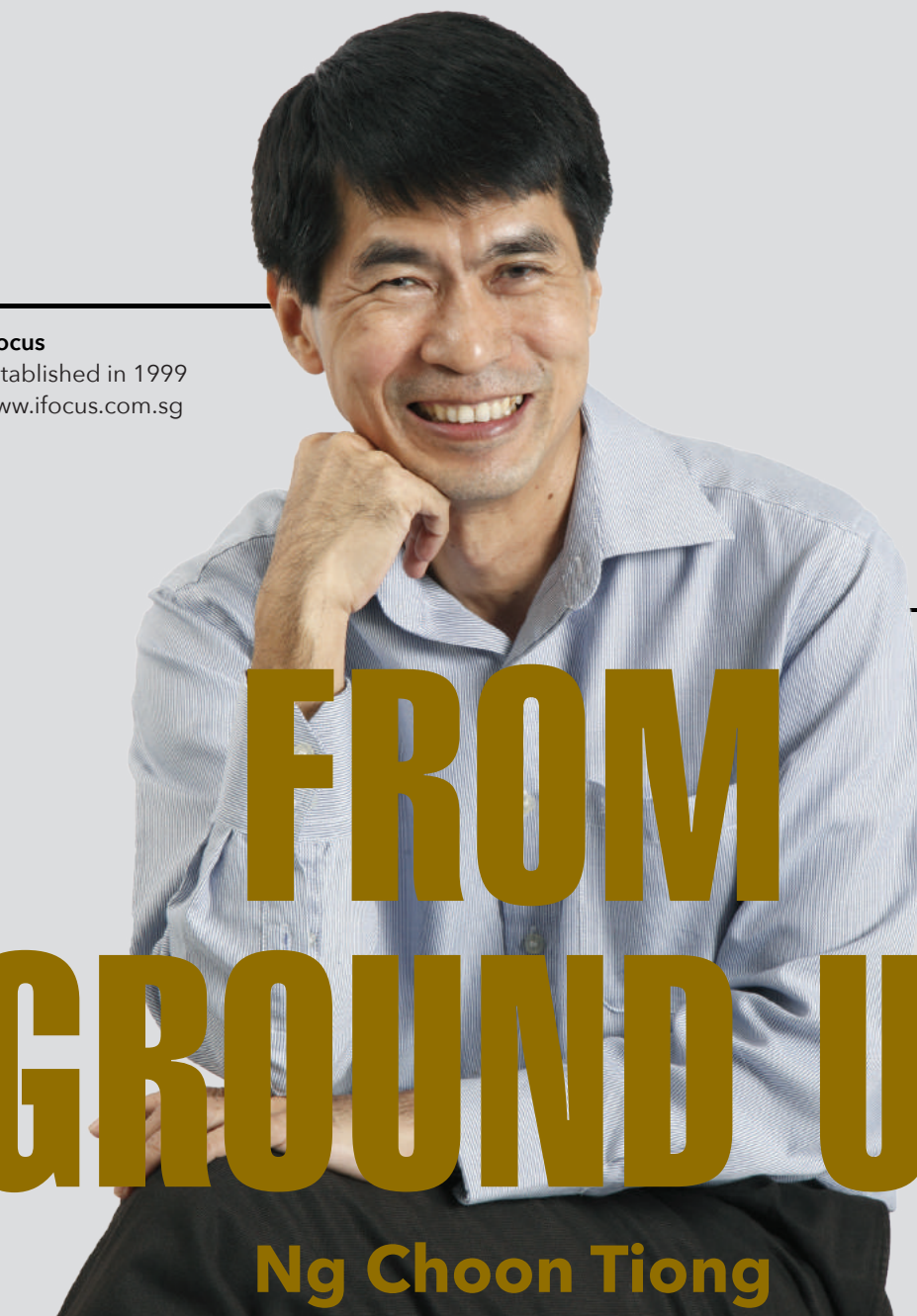
I have a passion for cars and watches. When I first entered the workforce, I saved for a long time in order to buy a \$3,000 second-hand watch, and I felt so good about it. I work really hard to let my family enjoy the fruits of my labour.

A turning point in my life? Winning the 2014 Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year for food and beverage award. My business is very low profile, but through the award, we got a lot of exposure and met people of different calibre. That changed the way I thought about my business and helped me set my sights higher. Through the award, I also realised that even though we are a SME, we are able to handle medium to large volume of business. We are now thinking of growing the business with a partner or to offer an IPO for our company.

All entrepreneurs must be hard working. Also, they must follow their heart. If I feel that something should be done, I would go ahead and do it.

I can't just quit. I have been doing this for the last 16 years. When I sold the first company, I took a break and felt very uneasy. There were no calls to pick up and no emails to answer. I only felt in my element when I got back to work. ■

"The fear of failure is there, but I always try not to think about it and just go for it."

A portrait of Ng Choon Tiong, a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. He is smiling and resting his chin on his right hand.

iFocus
Established in 1999
www.ifocus.com.sg

**School of
Engineering**
Diploma in
Electrical
Engineering
1981

FROM GROUND UP

Ng Choon Tiong

When I started my business, I had no worries at all. I didn't think too much about what would happen if I failed. The moment you start thinking about what would happen to your family if you failed, that's very horrible. When the time is right, start your business.

I have never thought that I should be a boss. When I started my business, I just wanted to do what I wanted and control more aspects of it. Having accumulated the experience and knowledge, if you do not go one step further, you will find that life becomes boring.

If you start at a point where everything is bad, things can't get worse. I started my business in 1999 when there was a financial crisis. But I was very lucky, I didn't make any major mistakes. It also boils down to who's your partner.

My company started as a small engineering house. Now we provide full product development and engineering services. Our flagship product is the Digital Video Recorder, which is very popular in the security market.

The way to overcome challenges is to not give up. Always try to adapt and change, and if you feel happy about what you're

“
If you measure in terms of financial success, then I'm not there yet; in terms of happiness and satisfaction, I consider myself lucky and successful, I'm still doing the things that I like.
”

doing, that's more than sufficient. And cross one hurdle at a time. If you start a business worrying about having to be a multi-millionaire by a certain age, you will find yourself crippled by many fears.

You have to be prepared to go hands-on in every aspect of the business, including retaining talent, getting funding, administration and even sweeping the floor of your office. If your character is suited for this, if you enjoy all these, then go ahead. Otherwise, it's just too hard.

From marching out customised cakes to elaborate dessert tables, ex-business studies students Ernest and Samantha turned their passion into a viable business when they started Cupplets. Their two-year-old enterprise has had its share of setbacks, for which the co-owners are grateful as both view the challenges as invaluable business lessons.

“ *Success is the moment when you feel satisfied about your accomplishments, which can come in big and small ways.* ”

Ernest Tan

Samantha Quek

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in Business Studies
2010

SWEET AMBITION

Cupplets
Established in 2013
www.cupplets.com

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in Business Studies
2010

Chen Jun fell in love with entrepreneurship at 11, when he sold toys at weekend flea markets to help ease his family's financial burdens. Today, he has moved on to a far larger playing field. His company, Hong Supply, is a leading supplier of marine and industrial hardware.

“ *An entrepreneur's journey is similar to that of a rollercoaster ride. There will always be ups and downs, and headwinds.* ”

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Chen Jun

Hong Supply
Established in 2004

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in Business Information Technology
2005

GREEN

Desmond Bernavey Lee

I come from a very traditional background. My dad was running a business, so from young, my upbringing was all about developing business acumen. From primary school, I already knew I wanted to have my own business. I started with trading stickers, erasers and renting out pocket game consoles. As I got older, I made money by buying and selling roses during Valentine's Day and from washing cars.

It was a mix of the dot.com fever and our love for food. My business started from there. A food business seemed like a fun idea, so we started our business delivering high-end fresh fruits and vegetables directly to

FRESHdirect

Established in 1999
www.freshdirect.com.sg

**School of Business
& Accountancy**

Diploma in Business Studies
1993

GIANT



consumers. Nobody was doing what we did at that time, not even the local supermarket chains. Asian Wall Street Journal did a story on us, followed by the Straits Times and Apple Daily. For a while, we were famous, but made no money!

We had to evolve our business from the original idea. Originally we supplied premium fruits like cherries, but our clients asked us: why not vegetables as well? As such, we expanded our offerings. However we only became profitable when we transitioned to supplying F&B businesses, including hotels. To enhance our exposure, we also supplied food for high profile events like Formula 1 and MasterChef TV programmes.

I was once offered a piece of land for \$1.4 million. But because of \$100,000, the deal didn't go through. It was a mistake I made earlier in my career. At that point, this amount of money was a lot to us. We were very conservative and didn't have the confidence to commit. In two years, the price of that piece of land rose to \$5.4 million! That taught me a lesson. When you do business, you can be prudent and careful. However opportunity doesn't come by twice, there are times when you have to follow your instinct, your gut feel.

Putting all our profits into Kitchenomics four years ago, everyone thought we were crazy. Chefs and purchasers told me processed vegetables were too expensive. However years later, with the increasing need for productivity and longer shelf life, they now needed my products. Being early movers in the industry has allowed us to build the know-how to handle clients in the airline, supermarket and fast food industries. I've had a three year headstart in terms of investment and know-how and I can handle bigger clients.

People say the recession is coming. This also means that this is the best time to invest, recruit and train people, and be ready when the next upswing comes. For me, I have recently branched into the bakery and pastries business to extend our product offerings.

My life philosophy is all about working hard and taking nothing for granted. It is because of this that I am able to survive in this cut-throat business. There is no holiday in the food and beverage sector. Your holiday is my busy day. When you're celebrating say Christmas, the restaurants are busy, and I'm busy!

It is very, very important to be honest. Especially since we deal with food. We have a responsibility to ensure that the food is safe for consumption. There is no shortcut to this.

I'm a slave driver. People have said that I am a perfectionist. That's because I always try to exceed my customer's expectations. I've been in business for 15 years, looking at those staff who have stayed with me for 10 years or more, they share the same values of hard work and high standards as me. It is my responsibility to ensure that their efforts are not wasted or go unrewarded. I consider my business to be a success when my employees are well taken care of.

If you love to eat, you'll love my business. We travel to Europe to do farm audits: see how and what they grow, their standards and practices, and we share this knowledge with farmers in the region. It is still preferable to get our food sources from nearer countries, and with climate changes, food traditionally grown in other regions can now be grown in the region as well.

Our education system places too much emphasis on success. Budding entrepreneurs should learn from those who failed, in order to avoid the same pitfalls. However, we still have to prepare for failure, and it is only through failure that we learn to be stronger.

I met my wife and business partner at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. The school also gave me

"In business, you must have vision and instinct, and the guts to follow through. This is called acumen."

good friends who remain very close-knit. Our learning environment at that time was very gung-ho, very practical and it gave me a lot of exposure through various industry internships.

Entrepreneurs always have to maintain flexibility. You cannot be too stubborn and insist your way even though the market data tells you otherwise. Sometime you just have to change course. For example, when we were selling to the individual consumer—it was fun, but we did not make any money. It was a very expensive experience. I realised that in order to bring cost down, I needed volume. That's when I decided to supply to restaurants. Today, out of 10 top-end restaurants, we are supplying to eight! ■

“ *Self-discipline, resilience and guts are the three most important traits entrepreneurs should possess.* ”

The desire to take charge of his own destiny motivated Terence to start his own web development agency. After spending years working for other people, he realised that nothing gave him greater joy than being able to choose the people he wants to work with and being responsible for making his own decisions.

DIGITAL FRONTLINE

Terence Wu

Silent Frontier
Established in 2011
www.silentfrontier.com

School of Engineering
Diploma in Electrical
Engineering
1994

Seeing how her parents grew the family business from a single hawker stall to a renowned food manufacturing and distribution establishment, has taught Wei Ting a thing or two about never resting on one's laurels. Besides managing the family business, she has started a subsidiary called Together Café two years back alongside with two partners and has recently launched Souperstar, a new quick service concept in Simei serving Popiahs and soups.

“ *My greatest fear is complacency. That would be fatal to my entrepreneurial journey.* ”

MOVABLE FEAST

Hong Wei Ting

Fortune Food
Established in 2004
www.fortunefood.sg

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in
Business Studies
2012

A man with a beard and a black hat, wearing a purple blazer over a black shirt, is sitting on two stacked brown leather suitcases. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a solid light purple color.

Ethan K

Established in 2011
www.ethan-k.com

HANDS ON DECK

**School of Business
& Accountancy**

Diploma in Business Studies
2006

Ethan Koh

My childhood dream was to become a teacher. Later, a paper artist, as I love origami and craftsmanship.

The love of my life is Singapore. Although London is my second home, Singapore occupies a big part of my heart. In fact, so many of my creations are inspired by Singaporean spices and fruits, such as the exotic and sweet durian and mangosteen.

Believe in your talents. It is also important to follow your gut, and do what you feel passionate about and are good at.

Be patient and connect the dots.

"I like to wake up in the morning knowing I am doing what I love."

All of my life experiences have led me to where I am today. I learnt a lot from them. I wouldn't change a single thing because without them I don't think I would be who I am or where I am today.

We all make mistakes. But I always try to learn from mine. Making mistakes is vital to an entrepreneur; you cannot grow as a person otherwise.

I've learnt to recognise opportunities. This is something I picked up with experience but was not always good at when I was younger.

I wish I could go back in time. I would like to roll back the decades to when luxury and couture were a rarity. I feel that luxury has become too mass market. That is why I created Ethan K: to bring back the true meaning of bespoke, where clients visit a designer's salon and are treated to the most incredible experience and leave with a one-of-a-kind piece.

The last time I was inspired was by my collaboration with Bentley. I was inspired

by its sleek and luxurious cars and created a unique and exclusive collection that brings together the essence of Ethan K and Bentley. In that recent collaboration, the bags were made in my signature hand-finished crocodile skin and featured a double-quilted lining like that of the interior of a Bentley car.

Last year, I went on a day trip to Paris to meet a friend. As I was walking out of the Ritz, a Qatari Princess stopped me and asked about my crocodile jacket. Then, I noticed her Bedouin necklace and that led to the creation of the Doha bag, which is exclusive to Harrods. The beads on her necklace inspired me to create the "frozen handle" of the bag.

I love the romance of travel. In fact, I dedicated an entire collection to it called the Voyage Collection. Once on my travels, I met the fashion director of Harrods Helen David, whom I designed a bag for. Consequently, this allowed me to open my boutique in Harrods a few years later.

The first bag I ever created was a one-off. It was designed for my mother. She has always been an inspirational woman for me; growing up, I always saw her carrying luxurious and stylish bags. Her bags were always brightly coloured and matched the candy hues of her dresses, so I wanted to create a statement piece for her that she would treasure. One of my happiest memories was seeing her unwrap the bag I created just for her and witnessing the joy on her face.

I think entrepreneurship has always been in my blood. I was exposed to the family tannery business and I am a fourth-generation artisan of the tannery. Also, my grandparents from my mother's side had a business that specialised in spices and Asian fruits, which I grew up with near my childhood home in Singapore. This is where the inspiration for the vibrant colours in my creations come from.

My life's turning point was probably when I took my family business in a whole new direction. Little did I know what opportunities this would present and how my life would change.

I am very passionate about what I do. My job is so close to my heart and my biggest

fear is to become like a typical executive going through standard motions. It is not in my interest to blindly appeal to the masses.

When I first started Ethan K there were a lot of people from big companies who had major questions. They felt that the luxury market was overcrowded and asked how I was going to fit in. I wanted to prove them wrong and show them that there was space for my unique vision in the world of fashion.

It helps to be a tad irrational like me. I think if I were always rational I probably would have quit at some point.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic truly had a huge impact on me and shaped me to the person I am today. All my lecturers were very supportive and helpful in every aspect of the students' lives. The innovative approach to teaching was very nurturing for someone like myself.

I was a very curious teenager. I wasn't the most academic child, however, art and creative subjects were my favourite.

If you do not develop and shape young talent then it is a huge missed opportunity for the world. ■

A portrait of Sabrina Tan, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white short-sleeved top and white pants. She is standing against a light gray background.

Skin Inc
Established in 2007
www.iloveskininc.com

**School of Business &
Accountancy**
Diploma in Business
Studies
1994

FACE VALUE

Sabrina Tan

Skin Inc was born out of frustration.

For the longest time, the beauty industry could not give my skin what it truly needed. I believe this resonated with many urban women and led to the birth of Skin Inc. Identifying a white space in the beauty industry, Skin Inc disrupted the way it has been doing things.

I was in the IT industry for many years.

Given my experience, Skin Inc became a digitally savvy brand. We offer customised, fuss-free and effective products while empowering women with knowledge about what they are actually using.

My mother is my biggest source of inspiration. She always made me believe that I can achieve great things. Despite being raised in a traditional Chinese family with three older brothers, I was never made to feel inferior, and my voice was always held in equal importance. From my mother, I learnt determination, tenacity, boldness and toughness. Thanks to her, I possess similar traits.

Did I ever feel like quitting? Yes, 10,000 times over. But I always think about why I started Skin Inc, and that has kept me going till today.

There will always be naysayers. But I will ignore them, for the fact that they are not in this journey that I am in.

Vision is important. Young entrepreneurs should start their business with the end in mind. Also, when you are faced with challenges and disappointments, you just have to persevere and overcome them.

“

Always seek an alternative to 'no', be grateful, and always give back to society.

”

I wasn't the most diligent student.

However I am a firm believer in learning. That said, I believe that education can take place both within and beyond the classroom. I've always worked part-time while schooling. It made sense to experience the many aspects of learning, and it was certainly very enriching.

Photo Courtesy of Singapore Tatler (Aug 2015)/Soon Tong, Calibre Pictures & Ideas

Jieming and Henson met in church; finding a match in their goals and skillsets, the two friends started Gold Crest Capital which services other businesses, in areas of SME financing, corporate secretarial services, accounting and taxation.

School of Life Sciences & Chemical Technology
Diploma in Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering
2005

Gold Crest Capital
Established in 2015
www.goldcrestcapital.com.sg

“Build your business with your best friends. You’ll be less calculative in terms of work scope; companies cannot grow if everyone doesn’t have a common goal.”

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in Business Studies
2010

BUSINESS CHAMPION

Siaw Jieming

Henson Tay

Being the life of a party is hard work. Just ask Mano, who helms Creative Insurgence, a nightlife-focused creative agency. While he understands the merits of perseverance in his industry, he is also unafraid of parting ways with clients if they are deemed too unreasonable.

“I fear failure. I fear making decisions that will undo all the years of hard work my team and I have put in.”

PARTY STARTER

Mano Kunasegaran

Creative Insurgence
Established in 2008
www.creativeinsurgence.sg

School of Film & Media Studies
Diploma in Film, Sound & Video
2009



Achieve Group

Established in 1990
www.achievegroup.asia

School of Engineering

Diploma in
Mechanical Engineering
1983

RISING UP

Joshua Yim

My first job was at a small local engineering company. At that time as I went through my income tax returns, I thought to myself: Had I ran my own company, the numbers would probably be very different.

I never dreamt that I would become a businessperson. It was quite a far fetch thought. I did mechanical engineering in Ngee Ann yet I am now in the human resource business. It is quite astonishing as I look back. I would have probably become a teacher or an actor if I didn't become an entrepreneur.

I don't see things as overly complex. Many things to me are common sense. In business, one needs to find a market and produce the goods that meets the demand of that market. With a product that is reasonably priced and systematically produced, you can replicate the process and grow the business.

Before the Achieve Group, I had two other ventures. The first was a flower shop, and the second was a non-profit before and after school-care centre. The flower shop's business model probably wasn't right and furthermore, I was not working on it full-time. We broke even after two over years before I divested my investment.

I'm a slow learner. It was only in my third venture (Achieve) that I picked up important lessons on leadership alignment and management. It was only eight to 10 years after I started the company that I felt I had a better grasp of these essentials.

One of my regrets is not having a mentor. Had I one to guide me earlier, giving me strategic advice and coaching me on the areas that I should focus on; my company will probably be double its current size. The first 10 years from 1990 to 2000 was filled with multiple sessions of 'hard-knocks' learning.

Strategic mindset, perception of situation, people motivation and engagement. All these are important elements of running an organisation. I only learnt and realised their importance much later.

Why a human resource consultancy business? At that time, this venture looked to be able to provide reasonable returns on my investments. Entry barriers also didn't seem that high. However, I found out later that this was not true; we neglected costs such as the deposit we had to put down for the business licence regulated by the Government and the salary we had to pay our temporary staff.

For Achieve, my initial investment, together with two other partners, was about S\$80,000. Singapore was growing in the 1980s and 90s thanks to industrialisation. There was quite a huge HR need in many industries like manufacturing, healthcare and banking. Those were the good years.

The company was rocked by three financial crises. We did not go through unscathed. The Asian Financial Crisis between 1997 and 1998 was the first. We lost some money, but thank God, we survived. Then came the September 11 attack in 2001. That was the start of a bigger crisis lasting the next three years with

SARS hitting Singapore in 2003. Business was really bad with losses nearly every month, or at best breaking even. It was not only the toughest part of my career but also of my life. I was very close to bankruptcy.

Besides the financial crises, my company also faced internal issues. When times are good, these issues are not so significant. But when coupled with bad times, it was a deadly combination. The company lost nearly one million dollars over three years.

Many of my friends lost their jobs during the hard times. Some even suffered losses over investments and shares. With no income myself, I was stuck with the monthly expenses of the company. I had to ensure that my employees could feed their families. When I turned 40, my personal assets were really close to zero including my CPF monies!

'Never say die', that was the attitude I had, fighting the adverse conditions over the three years up to 2004. 'God will surely make a way when there seems to be no way!' Indeed, my perseverance paid off when the business turned around at the second quarter of 2004.

Winning the 'Entrepreneur of the Year' award in 2009 and 'Enterprise 50' award in 2011 were really two of the highest points

of my life, especially after all the struggles. From near bankruptcy to eventually being awarded with these prestigious accolades, I am very grateful and extremely humbled.

"I think I've got the entrepreneur spirit—to create something out of nothing, and steer the ship of my destiny."

Knowing my calling as a businessperson some years ago, I decided that a good businessman is one with integrity and honour. Over the 25 years of running my company, I felt very blessed, and I wish to share these blessings with the people around me and contribute to the society.

One of the most memorable incidents in Ngee Ann was once in Physics class. I did not know how to solve the problem, and I remembered my tutor, scolding me: "Why are you staring at the question? Staring at it will not give you the solution, you know?" ■

“ *Entrepreneurs must be determined and strong enough to face failure.* ”

Customer satisfaction takes on a whole new meaning at Jerald and Kenneth's company. As a business consultancy firm that offers accounting services, failure is not an option for both men, who justifiably cite trust from their clients as a measure of success.

Photo Courtesy of DigitalNegative

Total Accounting Solutions Knowledge
Established in 2014
www.task.com.sg

School of InfoComm Technology
Diploma in Information Technology
(Mobile Computing)
2005

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in Accountancy
2005

PASSIONATE ABOUT NUMBERS

Kenneth Ho

Jerald Lee

Human resources expert Karen Hee is a proponent of the power of positive thinking. Her belief in harnessing the true potential of individuals and companies through meaningful engagements is what gives her company, PP (Positive Performance) Consulting Asia, an inspired edge over its competitors.

“ *I view every mistake or misstep as a valuable learning experience.* ”

POSITIVE IMPACT

Karen Hee

PP Consulting Asia
Established in 2011

School of Engineering
Diploma in Electronic Engineering
1990

When I was young I wanted to be a dancer or choreographer. I've always enjoyed dancing since young, and when I saw the backup dancers on TV, I thought it'd be a fun job.

We should always say what we mean and mean what we say. I believe in living a life of integrity. I want to live a life that is positive, purposeful, progressive and with compassion. By purposeful, I mean with good intent; progressive, is to always move forward, regardless, even in baby steps.

Fusion Cosmetics

Established in 2003
www.fusioncosmetics.com.sg

School of Film & Media Studies

Diploma in Mass
Communication
1999

Lynn Tan

LEAD & LEARNING



"I don't think anything can come close to entrepreneurship in allowing me to learn so much, so fast."

Everything is temporary, be it success or disappointments. So be happy with what you have, because it won't last either. Don't gloat in good times. As for bad decisions, don't regret them, they are just experiences in life, and the best decision you could have made given the circumstances.

What would I change about this world?

I think it would be the people, how people think about the choices they make in their

lives, how they behave. I would like people to make choices based less on self-interest and to make the world better not just for themselves, but for others as well.

The person who inspires me most is my maternal grandmother. She was uneducated, she married a rich man and had five kids. She left him with nothing and brought them up all by herself. That's tenacity, to stand up for what you believe in and still live a very fulfilling life.

I was in advertising for a few years after I graduated. At my last job, I was servicing a major account for several months, taking over from a senior manager who had been fired, while the company looked around for a replacement. So I asked my boss, why not pay me and another staff additional \$1,000 each, instead of hiring another manager for six times that salary. And he told me, "Young girl, what do you need so much money for?" It was then I realised ageism exists and that I would only be paid how much my boss thought I deserved. It got me thinking that maybe I should be doing my own thing.

I started my business during the SARS period. People thought I was crazy but

the rentals were very cheap. I was still very young then, 23, with no commitments like children. So I told myself, if I fail, I fail; if I make it, I reap the rewards. I could rejoin the workforce if this didn't work out.

We started with one brand, Phyto. Today that brand is still my bread and butter. When we started, Phyto had already been distributed in Singapore for around 10 years, but no one knew what it was. Retail was limited, it was generally sold through hair salons. The brand principals didn't know me, I was a nobody; but I loved the product, and my passion and drive for the brand impressed them, and they awarded me the distribution rights. Today, it's one of the top brands in Singapore, and the business is all-local. My business philosophy is teamwork; the will to win—do everything well or don't do it at all; growth—small or big steps, we must always improve; being trustworthy in our words and action, and community. From the very beginning, I've always believed in giving back to the community.

The best way to motivate staff is to lead by example. I've always been a very direct person, I have no qualms about saying things that need saying. But it comes from

the heart, and those who appreciate it stay, those who don't, don't. And that's fine. Those who do stay, learn a lot from me, because the more you do, the more you learn.

Trusting the wrong people? It happens all the time. But that doesn't mean you stop trusting people. But have a good lawyer.

Entrepreneurs must have tenacity. But at the same time, you must know when to give up and let go. They must also have passion, because you need a lot of energy, and love what you do, otherwise you cannot see it through. As an entrepreneur, you're going to lead and set an example for your staff, so if you're lacklustre, it's going to be very hard to drive the business to success.

I enrolled in Mass Communication thinking it was cool. But it was my time in Ngee Ann that let me discover my passion and knack for advertising and marketing that I never knew before. The broad curriculum, the many projects and presentations that we had to do, allowed me to see what my forte was, and the teachers had industry experience. I picked up a lot of important skills that helped me later on. ■

“ *Entrepreneurship is living a few years of your life like most people won't, so that you can spend the rest of your life like most people can't.* ”

Joewin found her calling in events management during her stint as an intern, prior to graduating from Business Studies in Ngee Ann. Her three-year-old company has since enjoyed a meteoric ascent, with big-name corporate clients and a number of business awards under its belt.

Linear Dots Production
Established in 2012
www.lineardots.com

School of Business &
Accountancy
Diploma in Business
Studies
2007

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Joewin Tan

Being in the business consultancy field has taught Roch something about the pursuit of financial rewards. He reckons the strongest pillar of a successful organisation is in its people, and advises companies to always be “mindful of engaging their staff meaningfully”.

“ *I'm driven by aspirations. Without it, I wouldn't have had the passion and drive to start my own business.* ”

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

Roch Tay

Clover Corporate
Advisory
Established in 2015
www.clovercorporateadvisory.com

School of
Business &
Accountancy
Diploma in
Accountancy
1995



School of Business & Accountancy

Diploma in Accountancy
1995

Vector Scorecard Group

Established in 2006
www.vsc.com.sg

M. Nazri Muhd

My childhood dream was to be a musician. I studied classical piano when I was young and thought that it would be great if I could live simply by performing and selling my music. And then, I fell in love with entrepreneurship. While I decided to pursue my passion and become an entrepreneur, music has always played an active role. Performing music at home with family and friends not only acts as an outlet for me to unwind, it also aids in my creative thought process in dealing with challenges at work. In a way, I get to follow my passion and live my dream at the same time.

My company started as a four-person team. After two to three years, the demands for VSC's services grew and we had to expand the team's operations. Since then, we have grown our workforce—through joint ventures and licensing

BANKING ON FORESIGHT

"Always relate to people, whether shareholders or staff. Emotional intelligence comes before artificial intelligence."

agreements—with more than 30 offshore personnel and 15 locally. We are now accrediting at least 10 business advisors/coaches per year to support and front our analytics solutions.

It's about being relatable. We had a very good product, which was artificial intelligence-based analytics. While the companies that we presented to in the initial years were impressed, they didn't immediately buy into the idea. So we tweaked our branding and positioning, and focused instead on impact measurement as

our strength, which is also where our clients observed the greatest results.

Our business today is almost 80 per cent different from what it was originally. It has evolved into something bigger and wider than what we had expected. When we started in 2006, our focus was on providing analytics or scorecards for the finance sector. Now our competencies have extended to include other industries from healthcare to energy to education sectors. Initially, we worked with local and government linked companies (GLCs), but we soon caught the attention of regional private companies and overseas governments.

I was very active in school. In my time with Ngee Ann Polytechnic—I graduated with a Diploma in Accountancy—I must have participated in over 100 projects and activities, from being involved in sports to performing arts.

I am driven by a need to broaden my knowledge. Whether pursuing my Diploma or my Masters degree, I always sought to enhance my accountancy foundation with modules in finance and economics. Accountancy by itself can be very dry, and it was important for me to apply it to the day-to-day dynamics of the business world.

It is important to learn from the best. I worked in a few big finance establishments before I started my company. There, I had the chance to interact with some really top minds, including ex-NASA quantum physicists who helped create financial models, as well as top CEOs and CFOs. I don't profess myself to be as good as they are, but the exposure compelled me to figure out how they think and operate. That actually laid the foundation for me to create the artificial intelligence-based services on my end.

There is no need to dive headlong into entrepreneurship. I believe in building one's capabilities, resilience, experience and finances first. It's not about attending a two-day seminar on entrepreneurship and feeling empowered to do something next.

Always learn to adapt. Know how to turn a negative situation into a positive, competitive edge. Personally, as someone from a minority race, I felt that I had to work ten times harder, smarter and faster than my peers. This was inculcated within me from a very young age.

The entrepreneurial world is an attractive proposition. I like the fact that you can create something out of nothing—that's

something that very few jobs can offer. Secondly, I like it that we can make our own decisions and be responsible for them.

We always have a Plan B. Given what we do, we actually predicted the 2009-2010 financial crisis three years before it happened. That gave us, a head start on tightening our resources and fund-raising. Taking prudent actions with calculated risks, we were still able to secure growth for VSC while riding out the waves of the crisis.

I'm still keen on creating. Demands become different as the business grows, and my work requires me to manage the business set-up, partnerships, market formations and so on. But I still love the R&D and inventing aspect of my work that defined the company's early days. I believe that this is one of the strengths of the company culture that we will continue to uphold at VSC.

You see the best and worst in people. It happens in business. My company services a wide range of clients from governments to non-profit organisations, so we do witness a lot of things. It has taught me to be more observant, careful, diplomatic and respectful of others. ■

A portrait of Louis Wong, a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is smiling and has his arms crossed. The text "UP TO MARK" is overlaid in large, bold, red capital letters.

UP TO MARK

Louis Wong

E2C Consulting
Established in 2010
www.e2cconsulting.com.sg

School of Building & Environment
Diploma in Environmental Engineering
1993

My life philosophy is to live a life without regrets. I seek to always understand the true nature of things and to conduct myself in ways that are compassionate, honest and virtuous.

My time in Ngee Ann Polytechnic helped hone my leadership skills. There, I served as the vice-president of the 17th Council of The Adventures Seekers (TAS) club. The school's broad-based education also instilled in me a passion for education and was instrumental in preparing me for the global marketplace.

The last time I felt truly inspired was when I attended a religious talk. The topic was on the impermanence of things and being grateful. Some activities away from work that made me extremely happy and proud was when I ran a full marathon in 2013 and took part in the Hair For Hope cancer awareness initiative this year.

My professional ambition is for E2C Consulting to be the leading Asian

enterprise for management and consultancy services. To achieve this, we must achieve two simple goals—100 per cent customer satisfaction and meeting deadlines 100 per cent of the time.

“
An entrepreneur must always continue learning, never give up and have a generous heart.
”

The best part of my job is seeing customers happy and appreciating our work.

I remember my first customer was a Japanese logistic and engineering company. I was

grateful for their trust in my company then as a new business, and they remained a customer for many years.

I felt like quitting once. That was when our software business failed. I believe it was due to the lack of proper focus and commitment to the business.

My family is my greatest source of strength and challenge. They really appreciate me running my own company. Yet, this comes at a cost. They do complain about the lack of time I spend with them due to my work.

THE TRANS-

Entrepreneurs who
champion social
causes and empower
their peers.

FORMERS

Martin Tan

I started Halogen Foundation Singapore in 2003. I got to know Matt Martin, the founder of Halogen Foundation in Australia through my co-founder Jeffrey Yip, and attended one of their events (National Young Leaders Day) in Auckland. What I saw impressed me: it was a large-scale, professionally run conference for youths, staged almost like a rock concert featuring prominent leaders that young people only saw on TV. These leaders, like the Prime Minister of New Zealand were there speaking to the youths who could in turn ask questions. It was the type of opportunity and inspiration I felt our youth in Singapore needed.

**Halogen Foundation
Singapore**

Established in 2003
www.halogen.sg

GENERATION

NEXT

**School of Film
& Media Studies**

Diploma in Film,
Sound & Video
1997

Our first event drew over 1,000 youths.

It wasn't easy to get that number of young people for one event, let alone our first event. Together with our partners RiverLife Community Services and North East CDC, we believed we were on to something.

My life took on a very different path after school.

I graduated with a Diploma in Film, Sound and Video from Ngee Ann Polytechnic. After National Service, I felt a calling to work for my church and decided to go into it full-time. It started my journey of working with youths on a professional basis, which led me to start Halogen Foundation Singapore.

At the start, I told my wife, "Give me six months." That was the time when I decided to leave full-time church ministry to concentrate on Halogen Foundation Singapore. I told myself that if I couldn't bring in enough funding for Halogen to pay myself a salary in six months, I would then get a job. It was a good thing that we got our first funding in the first month.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's first National Day Rally speech gave us the boost we needed. He took over as Prime Minister in 2004 around the time that Halogen Foundation Singapore was starting

and in that inaugural speech, he said that succession planning was his top priority and he wanted to train leaders from young. We were the only organisation conducting dedicated and structured student leaders development programmes back then, and we started getting more calls.

There were so many struggles. There was a time when I put my monthly pay back into the organisation to ease cashflow issues. We have been through recessions and the SARS crisis, H1N1 crisis, and during those times, our revenue dropped by almost 30 per cent.

Of course, I felt like quitting and many times too! I got married when Halogen Foundation started. And throughout the journey of its ups and downs, my personal life was marked by the loss of our son, and subsequently the birth of my daughters, Maegan and Meredith. We went through times when we couldn't raise enough money and times when the community recognised our efforts with some of the awards we got. I asked myself if it was worth it. And then we would conduct leadership events and the kids responded positively. We would receive cards telling us how much they were impacted by the event and some of the speakers. That gave me enough fuel in the tank to last another day.

It doesn't matter if it is for a commercial or social enterprise. Business fundamentals must always be present. You need a good business model. You need to establish your revenue streams, cost and benefit evaluations, funding mechanisms and more.

No charity in their right frame of mind would reject money. But I was adamant about not accepting funding from alcohol or tobacco companies. I wanted to hold on to the belief that if I was doing something that benefited youths, I didn't want to have the logos of certain brands at our events that may influence our youths towards a particular lifestyle.

It helps when your vendors are supportive. In difficult times, our credit terms were extended to 180 days! I've worked with them since Day One and so many have become friends. They understood what we were about and they trusted our word.

Cash flow is king. That is the biggest lesson that I learnt in business. You can have the best intentions but if you don't have the money, it counts for nothing.

I don't get as easily daunted these days. Not after what I've experienced for the last 10 to 12 years. There are several logical steps

"The ability to manage a business well doesn't necessarily mean that one can also run a successful social enterprise."

to take in order to start and run a business. You have something to sell, there is a willing buyer, and you make a transaction. A social enterprise is much more complex. There are more stakeholders involved: politicians, government agencies, volunteers, clients, beneficiaries and so on.

I stepped down as executive director after 10 years. I told the board that it was a youth-focused platform and young people should be the face of the organisation. I was 36 then. I now run the Institute for Societal Leadership at Singapore Management University. ■



HEART AT WORK

Envisage Education
Established in 2011
www.envisageeducation.com.sg

Stanley Chia

School of
Business &
Accountancy
Diploma in
Accountancy
2007

We are still not making profits. But we are working on that! Although we are a social enterprise—we work with schools to raise awareness on empathy and volunteering, and teach social entrepreneurship—the ideal is to achieve both and to have a revenue model to support our social causes.

driven company, which offers coaching to students applying to top UK and US universities.

I don't think I will ever work full time for an organisation. If that happens, it would mean that I have exited my current companies and found new opportunities that are

aligned with my calling in life. If so, I won't be working for the income.

“
If you find a niche—whether through creating something new or disrupting the market—you can always find a way in.
”

It's business suicide to have too many co-founders. Envisage started with five.

Ownership is not

I was already involved in social entrepreneurship back in Ngee Ann.

I was part of the student entrepreneurship club called Enactus (Previously known as SIFE- Students in Free Enterprise), and have always been passionate about using business skills to help community groups.

as strong if it is spread among too many people. I think a good number of business co-owners would be three. And it's ok if it's just one person running the show.

My companies were started when I was still in school. I took an eight-month sabbatical in university to start and run Envisage full-time. During my third year in university, I started my other company, Cialfo, a profit-

It is important to have an appetite for risks as an entrepreneur. The ex-co-founders of Envisage all had full-time jobs. I had wanted them to come in full-time, but nobody wanted to leave their secure jobs for that. It was a risk that they refused to take. I understood that.

“A successful entrepreneur must have tenacity, courage and commitment to go the distance.”

GIVING A VOICE

Melissa Gunadesa

Colourful Hearts
Established in 2007
www.colourfulhearts.com

Melissa started Colourful Hearts to provide linguistic training for less well-off children with special needs. While her motivation is underscored by altruism, the business took off and Colourful Hearts now comprises three centers with a fourth in the pipeline.

School of Film & Media Studies
Diploma in Mass Communication
2001

“I never wanted my job to be ‘just for the money’. It has always been about making a positive difference to individuals.”

Janet Amrit

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS

While working in a similar line, Janet found herself wondering what she would do differently if it were up to her. So she decided to do what she loved but on her own terms and started her own company providing Voice and Speech Coaching.

School of Film & Media Studies
Diploma in Mass Communication
2012

The Gift Of Gab
Established in 2014
www.thegift-ofgab.com



Uncle William's

Established in 1998
www.unclewilliam.biz

School of Engineering

Diploma in
Electronic Engineering
1988

PRIDE & PERSEVERANCE

William Ho

When children envision chickens, they see them as they would in the supermarket—without heads, feet and feathers. We've seen children draw chickens with six legs because they see drumsticks sold in half-dozen packs, and when you show them a real chicken, they think it's a Pokémon!

That's why I am running educational farm tours. I use my farm knowledge, fuse it with science and use the farm to teach about animals, husbandry, and life cycles, to reinforce what kids learn in the classroom. I started giving tours to student groups of 15; today, we manage groups of up to 1,200.

"Success is when your clients recognise your business, appreciate it, and recommend new business for you. This type of success is built through time."

Entrepreneurship in Singapore is very tough. This is especially true when the big boys can just come in with their huge capital, and monopolise the sector. As a small business, where can you stand? To survive, you have to be very niched, to go where no one else wants to go and be the first to bash a path through. You have to choose your path well and never follow the crowd.

You only excel when you enjoy what you do. If you just do it for money, it might be good in the beginning, but after a while, you burn out. I've been running my business for 16 years and every day I still look forward to it.

My business training started when I was in Secondary One. My father is the oldest farmer in Singapore, and he felt I was wasting too much energy running around in the farm and that I should be channelling my energy into something more meaningful—like earning money! At that age, what was money? I told my father, "You have money, you can always give them to me." His answer to that was, "What if I don't?" That got me worried. I told him he had my full attention, I would learn whatever he wanted to teach me.

The first assignment my father gave me was to dig up animal dung. I was stumped! I thought to myself, I'm your son, you can give

me your house, money, car... instead, you ask me to dig animal dung! But I obeyed, and learned a lot in the process. From looking at the dung, we can tell if the animal is sick, malnourished or frightened. So I reported my findings to my father, who was very pleased, and he said, "As a reward, you can keep all the dung that you dug up!"

Dung as first inheritance? What was my father thinking? But before long, an old uncle came along and asked me how much I wanted for each sack of dung. I gestured "five" with my hand, thinking 50 cents... he mistook and gladly accepted the offer for five dollars per bag. My eyes lit up! But it wasn't just about money, I learned that even so-called waste can be sold, or used to develop other products, nothing is wasted.

I was promoted from farm hand to delivery boy, to technician by Secondary Three. We were the local agent for certain farm machinery, and that was when my father sent me to Europe to master the machinery from the principals. What a good time I had, I learned to drink wine and tried to look older by growing a moustache.

I had originally wanted to be a doctor; but the family business needed an engineer, so after my 'O' levels, I gave up a place

at National Junior College and enrolled at Ngee Ann instead. There, I took the maximum five years allowed to graduate with a diploma because I got too distracted running a business on campus.

I have a very bad habit that nearly ended me. I love playing the jackpot! From this I learned to be more careful. After you hit rock bottom, you must learn how to resist, and pick yourself up.

Entrepreneurs need to be ever-ready and have a never-die spirit. When an opportunity comes, be ready to grab it. And if you fail, don't say "die", get going. You need to cultivate a skillset where you don't always go straight when it comes to solving problems; you have to be flexible. Finally, be ethical. Even though I am creative at solving problems, in that I don't always go by the rules, one must never do harm.

In Chinese, business is "shen yi", which literally means "alive and meaningful". You must have a crazy idea, a gut feeling and willing to take a leap of faith—that's entrepreneurship. If you take the easy path or follow a crowd, big boys with greater capital can just come in and monopolise the market. And you'll end up nowhere. ■



VOICE OF REASON

Eric Lim

My Gym

Established in 2004
www.mygym.com.sg

School of Engineering

Diploma in Electrical &
Electronic Engineering
1988

“*Success for me is not about how much money you have. It is being able to do what you love with the right team. Your inner circle.*”

My greatest fear is not spending enough time with my children as they grow up and not being able to build a close relationship with them. I spend a lot of time on work, however I think it is essential to achieve a balance between work and family.

From when I was young, my father had drummed into me a Chinese saying, which translates into, “You can never make the most of yourself working for others.” I started my first business at 25; but it’s only when I was 38 that I consider myself established as a businessman.

Within one and a half years we lost \$200,000. It was a venture we started before My Gym and we decided to cut it off. We learned a lot from this experience. It is not about seeing other people’s success but rather knowing how other people fail and not to step into the same situation.

An entrepreneur must have good sense to feel the markets. To see what people can’t see. Next is patience: businesses do not succeed in a day; entrepreneurs must be able to ride through the ups and downs. A lot of businesses fail because entrepreneurs don’t have this patience or resilience. And finally, an entrepreneur must be willing to share and to work with others. Today’s market is not only about how good we are, it is about who we partner with to do business.

The key to starting a business is timing. Of course, you would also require a good team and a good idea! It is very normal that we think our ideas are the best. Hence, we are afraid to share with others because we worry that our ideas may be copied. An idea is cheap, unless you make it work. So, go and share it with people who you trust. Then comes the business model. When you have all these things, money to fund your business will come very naturally.

The future is now, believes Michelle. To nurture tomorrow's leaders, she took a leap of faith after graduating from Ngee Ann, and established a series of companies specialising in training and developing the youth in becoming future leaders for their community. These programmes—workshops & camps—marry outdoor fun with character development activities, creating a holistic approach to learning and growing.

“ To be successful is to be happy and appreciative of the present. ”

ELECTRIC YOUTH

Chrysalists
Established in 2014
www.chrysalists.asia

Michelle Ow

School of Film & Media Studies
Diploma in Mass Communication
2001

“ People will remember us not by what we've gained, but how we have contributed. ”

Buy a pair of flip-flops and help a less fortunate child? Soule Enterprise commits a portion of its sales proceeds to charity initiatives for under-privileged children, and the programme has since benefited over 1,800 kids. Although they hailed from different courses, Justine, John and Jing Ying shared a strong belief in making a positive difference to the world.

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in Business Studies
2010

John Tay

School of Humanities & Social Sciences
Diploma in Business & Social Enterprise
2011

Justine Lee

STEP BY STEP

Soule Enterprise
Established in 2008
www.soule.com.sg

Lim Jing Ying

School of Film & Media Studies
Diploma in Mass Communication
2011

Zaihirat Banu Codelli

We are story-tellers. Oak3 is a media company. We conceptualise and produce content for television, digital platforms, corporate clients and films. I co-founded the company with two other friends – Jason Lai and Lim Suat Yen. Jason was, in fact, my classmate from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

We were very gung-ho and ambitious. We were the pioneer batch from the Film, Sound and Video course. When we left the school, we wanted to produce our own feature film. Then we came out and realised that there was no proper infrastructure and funding in place for what we wanted to do at that time in Singapore.

Oak3 Films

Established in 1996
www.oak3films.com

School of Film & Media Studies

Diploma in Film,
Sound & Video
1996

THE REEL LIFE



When you say, “I’m a filmmaker,” in 1996, people will ask: “Excuse me, what does that mean?” We got that a lot, being the first batch of film students. In the beginning, it wasn’t easy. I come from a conservative family. I was on my way to do psychology in university, but decided to go for a diploma instead—at that time, the concept of a diploma is different from what it is today—so it took a bit of convincing.

The company was founded because we wanted to make a film. It was film first, then the company. When producing the film, we had to liaise with various parties and we realised that we needed some sort of an organisation as a front, to be credible. So we discussed and decided that we ought to start a media company.

The real difficulty was to create awareness. We needed people to know that there was a group of film graduates out there. And that there were a few independent companies producing for MediaCorp, or what we call Singapore Television 12 back then.

The learning curve was really steep. It was very much on-the-job training and we learnt along the way. But we were very lucky. We had friends and people around us who

were business savvy. They came along and offered their help.

Figuring out the accounts was never our priority. It took us a while to learn that. We were film students!

Giving out a first pay cheque comes with a feeling of responsibility. You’re no longer making a film for yourself but you have to make a film that takes care of your staff and their families.

On hindsight, producing The Road Less Travelled in 1996 made us mature quickly as entrepreneurs. It was all part of the learning process.

The first turning point for us was when we got our first television commission. It was a drama series, Kerja Overtime, for Prime12 or what’s known as Suria now. Our experience in producing feature films was unique, and there were not many like us. For that year, at Pesta Perdana—a local TV award ceremony, it got a few nominations and won the “Best Drama” award. It was a milestone for us.

It wasn’t so much about the recognition. We just wanted to do a really good show that people could connect with. So when

“You become what you think you will be. If you think you’re going to fail even before starting, then you are likely to fail.”

the award came, it was really a bonus. Of course, it feels good when your efforts are recognised at the industry level.

Trust and reliability are very important for me as well as a company. Trust in everything—gaining trust from friends, family, partners and business associates—gives longevity to the business.

They always say, “If you can’t find a door to knock, go build one.” And I hold true to that. Opportunities don’t just come. You really have to look for them, and that’s important even for today.

It’s only natural to have high and low points in life. It’s more so in business, where it could be cyclical. As entrepreneurs, an important trait is optimism. So instead

of focusing on the negativity, I’ll find the learning points, focus on the positives and move on.

I have had the same partners since I started. This is a real blessing. It’s rare to have three people sticking around for 20 years. We literally watch each other’s kids grow up. It was important that we establish an unwritten rule over time: We can go into a room, have a heated argument because of our different opinions—otherwise if everyone on your team is a “Yes, Ma’am!” person, then you’ll never progress. But as soon as we leave the meeting room, we’re friends. We’ll have coffee thereafter.

Never give up, and grow a thick skin. You’d need that in business. ■

A portrait of Chen Yangyang, a woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a white button-down shirt with a black patterned vest and blue jeans with a brown belt. She is smiling and has her hands in her pockets.

International W&Y
Established in 2005
www.yangmusic.com.sg
Youtube: Yangmusic Singapore

School of Building & Environment
Diploma in Civil
& Environmental
Engineering
2004

INSPIRING THROUGH MUSIC

Chen Yangyang

I did not graduate from a music college.

I studied engineering. Even my family and close friends were not supportive when I chose to pursue music as a career. I needed real action, greater spirit and hard work to win them over, to make them believe in me.

I didn't start out thinking that I want to be an entrepreneur.

Or even to carve my niche in music. It was while coaching my juniors at the violin that I realised I have a deep understanding and ability in music coaching. My juniors not only improved rapidly, it also fired their desire to further their music studies. This gave me an immense sense of accomplishment and motivated me to start a music school to inspire more people to appreciate and learn music.

Direction, perseverance and determination.

An entrepreneur must have these qualities.

Music education is not very lucrative.

Indeed, it's even hard to survive. So besides music education, I have to get into the business of selling musical instruments to get additional revenue support and continue my dream. That's where passion

and perseverance comes in. That said, I'm deeply appreciative of my career choice, there's nothing else I'd rather do.

“

Success means the ability to fulfil my dream. It also means inspiring people to be happier through music and music education.

”

Young people need to have dreams. Don't be afraid to be the first to try; don't be afraid of failure and setbacks. Failure is a precious harvest in our wonderful life journey. Success is often built on the basis of failure!

It is important to test our limits. That's a challenge we need to accept in order to pursue our dreams. Convert the stress into passion and press on!

HighSpark, a training and consultancy service that helps companies elevate their presentations and pitches, might be a young startup, but its equally youthful co-founders are no wide-eyed entrepreneurs. Eugene and Kai Xin, while unabashedly ambitious, express business maturity. They cite hard work, humility, adaptability and foresight as vital traits of successful businessmen.

“ When faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles, it pays to be flexible and to keep calm. ”

HighSpark
Established in 2013
www.highspark.co

MAKING AN IMPRESSION

Eugene Cheng & Koh Kai Xin

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in Business Studies
2013

School of Business & Accountancy
Diploma in Business Studies
2013

“ Success is a journey, not a destination: seeing your clients smile and happy with your service is a success, every day. ”

KEEP MOVING FORWARD

Wilson Wong

VIBEZ Dance & Fitness Studio
Established in 2011
www.vibez.sg

Wilson actually discovered he wanted to be an entrepreneur while studying at Ngee Ann, where he juggled coursework with the demands of six CCAs—organising events, meeting lots of people, contributing—and relishing every minute of it. His company, VIBEZ Studio offers dance classes that stresses on the fun factor more than technique.

School of InfoComm Technology
Diploma in Information Technology
2003

COMMUNITY OF NP ENTREPRENEURS

Alson Toh

Business Information Technology, 2012
PrivateDrivingInstructors.com

Bay Hwee Eng

Business Information Technology, 2008
Foodbox.SG- by 1 Percent

Benjamin Kwa

Aerospace Technology, 2011
Scholars Academy

Boo Kok Chuon

Banking & Financial Services, 2006
The Commissioned

Caleb Seah

Business Studies, 2012
Vantage Delivery

Chan Jia Jun

Business Information Technology, 2009

Goh Bao Wen

Aerospace Technology 2010
Legacy Dance Company

Chew Teow Kim

Electronic & Computer Engineering, 2010
Business Matters

Chong Lee Ling

Computer Studies, 1994
3playground

Chow Wing Hong Mikey

Electronic Engineering, 1986
Gogo App

Debra Lam

Business Studies, 2013
Society Staples

Denise Koh

Accountancy, 2011
Victory Knights Management and Consultancy Services

Desiree Yang

Psychology & Community Services, 2014
Saltsteps

Eileen Ang

Business Studies, 2012
Kafve Coffee

Ellery Png

Business Studies, 2010
Spatula & Whisk

Faith Teo

Digital Visual Effects, 2015

Ho Chang Jun

Business Studies, 2014
Gram

Felix Tan

Molecular Biotechnology, 2011
Sidekick

Foo Yong Long

Business Studies, 2015

Muhammad Zulkifie

Product Design & Innovation, 2015
The 2 Monkeys

Gary Lim

International Business, 2012

Huang Bo Can

Electronic & Computer Engineering 2013
Daibid

Heah Beng Keat

Business Studies, 2013

Jason Lim

Business Studies, 2012
Smartkyds

Ian Isaiah Ding

Information Technology, 2009
Terebinth Mastery Resources

Lee Yeow Nam

Electronic & Computer Engineering, 2008

Jacinta Kwee

Business Studies, 2011
Nam F&B

Jaeden Ng

Information Technology (Computer Studies), 2003
DeReminisce Photography

Jeremy Goh

Information Technology, 2014
FingerRun

John Su Weiwen

Biotechnology. 2005
John Andre's

Jolene Zhou

Logistics Management, 2010
Ohvola

Josh Ching

Information Technology, 2013
Colhero

Karen Wai

Film, Sound & Video, 2004
Books Actually

Kelvin Koh

Business Studies, 2009
Delta Duck Studios

Kenneth Li Jun Hui

Biotechnology, 2006
Scube Gift

Lee McKing

Child Psychology & Early Education, 2012
Simple Works Coaching

Li Li Pan

Business Studies, 2012
Pan Pixels

Lisa Tan

International Business, 2014
Trevellers.com

Michael Cheng

Molecular Biotechnology, 2011

Zephyr Eng

Molecular Biotechnology, 2010
Alpha Drive

Muhammad Danish

Information Technology, 2015
DANamic.ORG

Ng Wee Liat

Internetworking & Communications, 2005
HackerTrail

Nick Thng

Accountancy, 2011
Dooxle

Raven Tan

Business Information Technology, 2010
Trendink

Sean Tan Joon Hou

Business Studies, 2013
App-solutely

Sebastian Teow

Business Studies, 2010
The Flame Tree Group

Seow Puo Yen

International Business, 2015
SPY's cafe

Tan Ee Rui Telvin

Mechanical Engineering, 2009
CODE FIT

Tan Jun Hao

Accountancy, 2008

Tan Jun Wei

Business Information Technology, 2008
HaoHaoFruit

Tham Weng Mun

Mechatronic Engineering, 2008
23 Technologies

Toh Li Jun

Business Studies, 2010

Valencia Wong

Business Studies, 2010
Fat rice

Tommy Chiang

Business Information Technology, 2010
Tommillusions Entertainment

The logo for 'sandbox' is displayed in a stylized font. The word 'sand' is in a dark brown color, and 'box' is in a bright yellow color. The letters are lowercase and have a modern, sans-serif feel.

The Sandbox is the Innovation & Entrepreneurship office of Ngee Ann Polytechnic which grooms budding student innovators and entrepreneurs to kick-start their ideas. This book was initiated and conceptualised by The Sandbox.

www.np.edu.sg/thesandbox



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