

JOURNEYS OF GRIT

Celebrating Resilience and Innovation
in Every Entrepreneurial Path





From mudflats to metropolis

“

Over 100 years ago, this was a mudflat... swamp.
Today, this is a modern city.
Ten years from now, this will be a metropolis.
Never fear.

”

Lee Kuan Yew
12 September 1965

Singapore has been blessed with
visionary leadership since its independence.
The spirit of progress continues to thrive in the Lion City,
empowering businesses and entrepreneurs to rise and succeed.

JOURNEYS OF GRIT

Celebrating Resilience and Innovation
in Every Entrepreneurial Path



A nation of opportunity

With robust infrastructure, stable political environment,
and long-standing government support for the
business community that continues to this day,

Singapore is a shining example of a nation that pursues
growth, innovation and future-readiness.



Gratitude for our Singapore

The Spirit of Enterprise extends heartfelt thanks to Singapore for fostering a safe and dynamic environment where entrepreneurs flourish.

Together, we chart the next lap of economic growth and industrial success.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thanks to the following significant contributors in the production of the 2024 SOE Book.

JOURNEYS OF GRIT: Celebrating Resilience and Innovation in Every Entrepreneurial Path

Featured SOE Honourees

Established

Mr Lawrence Seow	–	Aik Chin Hin Pte Ltd
Ms Jocelyn Teo	–	Apex Asia Management Group
Mr Daniel Tan	–	Food Playground Pte Ltd
Mr Terence Sim	–	iClick Media Pte Ltd
Mr Vincent Li	–	Starry Homestead Pte Ltd
Ms Yola Yu	–	
Ms Eunice Yeung	–	EYSY Digital Pte Ltd

Startup

Mr Benjamin Ling	–	Happie SG Pte Ltd
Mr Robin Yoo	–	Agile 8 Advisory Pte Ltd
Ms Sammi Lim	–	Brilliance Capital Pte Ltd
Mr Gene Kwok, PBM	–	Damnzai Pte Ltd

Main Partner

CLA Global TS Holdings Pte Ltd

Growth Partner

Neo Group Limited

Sustainability Partner

Eatz Group Pte Ltd

Strategic Partner

PropNex Realty Pte Ltd

Corporate Social Responsibility Partner

Dian Xiao Er Group

SOE Board of Governors

Student Interviewers

Editorial and Production Team

SOE Honourees 2024

SOE Secretariat

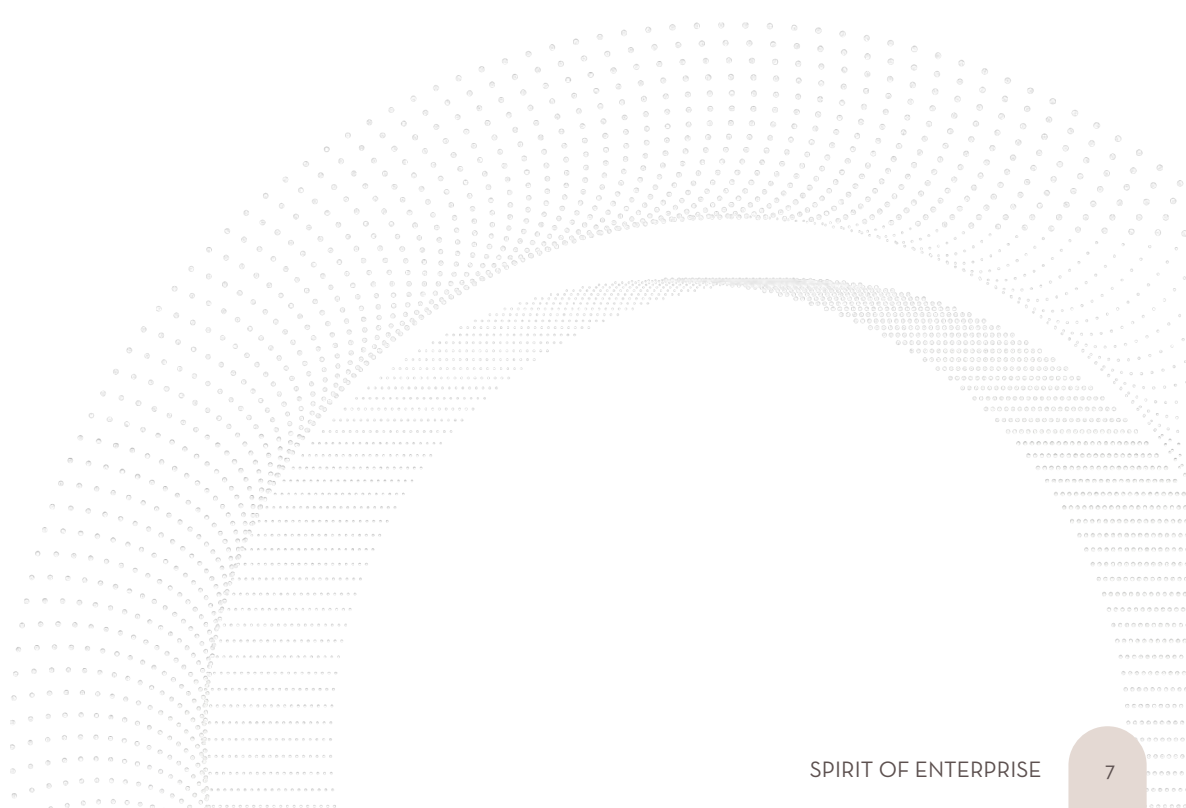


FOREWORD

Entrepreneurship is often defined by challenges unseen by most. At the Spirit of Enterprise (SOE), we honour the perseverance, resilience and determination that shape every entrepreneur’s journey.

This 2024 edition of the SOE book showcases 11 remarkable entrepreneurs from diverse industries whose stories are not just of success, but of overcoming setbacks and staying the course. It has also been revamped and updated to reflect the current times – a digital version is now available, making sharing these inspiring stories with like-minded individuals easier.

These stories serve as powerful reminders that entrepreneurship requires grit and adaptability. As you read about the remarkable experiences of these 11 individuals, may you be inspired to follow your own entrepreneurial path with the courage to face challenges and the persistence to make your vision a reality.



JOURNEYS OF GRIT: Celebrating Resilience and Innovation in Every Entrepreneurial Path

Proprietary:
Spirit of Enterprise
17 Kaki Bukit Industrial Terrace
Singapore 416098

Email: geraldine@soe.org.sg
Web: www.soe.org.sg

Produced and published by:
360 Communications Pte Ltd

Published in 2024

Copyright© 2024 Spirit of Enterprise

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.



ISBN: 978-981-94-1259-4

Printed in Singapore by Times Printers Pte Ltd

Although Spirit of Enterprise and the publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at the time of printing, they do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage or disruption caused by errors or omissions resulting from negligence, accident or any other cause.

CONTENTS

10	President's Message	
12	Chairman's Message - SOE Book	
	Part 1	
16	Executive Committee	
18	Board of Governors	
21	Honorary Presidents	
	Part 2	
24	About Spirit of Enterprise	
29	SOE Awards	
34	SOE Student Interviewer Programme	
36	SOE Student Entrepreneur Programme	
38	SOE 'Built to Grow' Training Series	
40	SOE Book	
42	SOE Fundraising Golf Challenge	
46	SOE Networking Events	
	Part 3	
	SOE Award Honourees' Stories	
50	Lawrence Seow	
	Aik Chin Hin Pte Ltd	
64	Jocelyn Tan	
	Apex Asia Management Group	
78	Daniel Tan	
	Food Playground Pte Ltd	
92	Terence Sim	
	iClick Media Pte Ltd	
106	Vincent Li & Yola Yu	
	Starry Homestead Pte Ltd	
120	Eunice Yeung	
	EYSY Digital Pte Ltd	
	Part 4	
	SOE-Neo Startup Award	
	Honourees' Stories	
136	Benjamin Ling	
	Happie SG Pte Ltd	
150	Robin Yoo	
	Agile 8 Advisory Pte Ltd	
156	Sammi Lim	
	Brilliance Capital Pte Ltd	
162	Gene Kwok, PBM	
	Damnzai Pte Ltd	
	Part 5	
170	SOE 2024 Honourees	
178	Student Interviewers	
180	SOE Partners	

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As President of the Spirit of Enterprise (SOE), I am honoured to lead this organisation as we continue our mission of recognising and empowering homegrown entrepreneurs. This year's theme, 'Driving Growth, Becoming Future-Ready', highlights the resilience, innovation and adaptability of Singapore's community of entrepreneurs.

In order to truly achieve this vision, I believe it must begin within our own organisation. Before we can lead others towards this goal, it is essential that we ourselves are aligned with this view. One of my most critical responsibilities has been to officiate and update our core values for the guidance of all Board Members and future stewards of SOE. These values are the foundation on which we operate, and every office holder must internalise and align themselves with the message. Together, we will execute our duties with clarity and purpose, guided by three key values:

Inclusiveness and respect: We honour the grit of all local entrepreneurs, from micro-businesses to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), valuing their growth and fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Integrity and fairness: We uphold the highest standards of integrity, ensuring unbiased and transparent actions, guided by fairness and ethics.

Empowerment and education: We empower aspiring entrepreneurs through learning, mentorship and fostering connections between seasoned and future leaders.

These values form the cornerstone of our work, ensuring that SOE remains a fair, inclusive and forward-thinking organisation for all entrepreneurs in Singapore.

Celebrating achievements and building for the future

In addition to upholding these values, we continue to recognise and celebrate the accomplishments of established and startup businesses. SOE remains committed to supporting the journey of entrepreneurs through platforms that allow them to share their stories, successes and challenges.

We will soon be expanding our recognition to micro-businesses. This better reflects the inclusivity that SOE's Founder and First President, Russell Miller, had envisioned when our organisation was founded in 2002. His vision continues to guide us today as we aim to honour the dedication and resilience of all entrepreneurs, regardless of their business size.

Last year, we launched the 'Built to Grow' Training Series to help entrepreneurs enhance their leadership and business capabilities. This programme has been met with enthusiastic participation, with many business leaders recognising the value of strengthening their core foundations – aligning their workforce, refining their vision, mission and core values, and building a solid structure for growth. To date, over a hundred SME leaders have benefited from this programme, demonstrating the importance of continued learning and self-improvement in today's business landscape.

Supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs

We are equally dedicated to nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs. Focusing on education and fostering connections between students and business leaders ensure that young entrepreneurs have the tools, mentorship and support they need to succeed. Through our programmes, we provide opportunities for knowledge-sharing and collaboration, helping to strengthen the bonds within Singapore's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

A future built on values

As we look ahead, let us remain committed to the principles that have brought us this far. These values – inclusiveness and respect, integrity and fairness, empowerment and education – will continue to guide us as we shape the future of entrepreneurship in Singapore. Whether you are an established entrepreneur, a startup founder, or a student with dreams of innovation, we invite you to join us on this journey. Together, we will drive growth, embrace innovation, and create a future-ready community of entrepreneurs.

I appreciate your dedication and for being part of the Spirit of Enterprise.

Yours sincerely,
Ismail Gafoor
President,
Spirit of Enterprise



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE – SOE BOOK

Pioneering entrepreneurship in Singapore's thriving ecosystem

Singapore is experiencing a vibrant phase of entrepreneurial growth. With strong government support and a nurturing environment for innovation, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are well positioned to innovate, scale and tap into emerging possibilities.

The Spirit of Enterprise (SOE) celebrates and promotes entrepreneurship in Singapore. Whether you are launching a startup or leading an established business, SOE's mission remains clear – to recognise the resilience, passion and dedication that drive entrepreneurs.

Now in its 21st-year edition, the Spirit of Enterprise book continues to inspire future generations with real-life stories of entrepreneurial triumph. These stories reflect the grit of Singapore's entrepreneurs, and serve as a source of motivation for students and aspiring professionals charting their own paths.

Inspiring future generations through entrepreneurial stories

At the core of SOE's work is the goal of inspiring young minds. By partnering with tertiary institutions, we provide students the opportunity to engage directly with successful entrepreneurs. These interactions help students uncover key traits essential to entrepreneurial success – resilience, perseverance and the courage to face challenges head-on. We aim to instil these values in today's youth, equipping them to become tomorrow's innovators.

The stories in this book go beyond success. They focus on overcoming challenges, learning from setbacks, and passionately pursuing dreams. This edition features honourees from diverse industries who candidly share their journeys, from early struggles to breakthrough moments that defined their businesses. Their experiences offer lessons in adaptability, innovation and persistence in a rapidly evolving business landscape.

Overcoming challenges and thriving in Singapore's competitive market

As these entrepreneurs demonstrate, starting and scaling a business in Singapore brings both rewards and challenges. With access to extensive resources, networks and various government grants, entrepreneurs are uniquely positioned to overcome obstacles and grow their ventures. Their stories provide valuable insights for anyone seeking to navigate Singapore's competitive market and beyond.

The future of entrepreneurship in Singapore

Looking ahead, Singapore's entrepreneurial landscape is brighter than ever. With ongoing government initiatives and a robust educational system, the next generation of entrepreneurs is well prepared to tackle future challenges. As more business leaders recognise the vast potential within Singapore and abroad, we anticipate a surge in ventures that will shape both local and global economies.

The Spirit of Enterprise is proud to honour these remarkable individuals, whose journeys are not only about business success, but also about community impact and inspiring others. Their stories remind us that entrepreneurship is about more than profit – it is about creating lasting change.

In closing, I encourage everyone who reads this book to embrace the entrepreneurial spirit. Whether you are just starting or already leading a business, remember that success comes from perseverance, passion and a commitment to your vision.

Keep striving, stay focused on your dreams, and never give up.

Yours sincerely,
Frederick Seah
Chairman,
SOE Book 2024



Board of Governors



Executive Committee

Board of Governors

Honorary Presidents

Part

1

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



ISMAIL GAFOOR
President, and
SOE Training & Mentorship Chairman

CEO,
PropNex Realty



NOVIE DJAYAYANTI TJOA
Vice President, and
SOE Awards & Events Chairperson

Managing Director,
Eatz Group Pte Ltd



SIVANEESAN S/O KITNASAMY

Vice President, and
SOE PR & Media Outreach Chairman

Director and Shareholder,
Griffin Protection Integrated Security Pte Ltd



SAMUEL LIM

Treasurer

Director, Assurance Deputy Country Leader,
Thailand & Vietnam,
CLA Global TS Holdings Pte Ltd

BOARD OF GOVERNORS



IZZAT ISMAIL

Board Member,
SOE Student Entrepreneur Programme
(SEP) Chairman, and
SOE Awards & Events Co-chairman

Managing Director,
EDN Learning Discoveries Pte Ltd



VANESSA ONG

Board Member, and
SOE Networking & Partnerships
Chairperson

Managing Director,
Gernise Global Pte Ltd



ROBIN GOH

Board Member, and
SOE PR & Media Outreach
Co-chairman

Managing Director,
JNR Entertainment Pte Ltd



TEDDY SUN

Board Member, and
SOE Fundraising Golf Challenge
Chairman

CEO and Founder,
ID Integrated Pte Ltd



DR CHRISTOPHER CHONG
Board Member, and
SOE Fundraising Golf Challenge
Co-chairman

Medical Director,
Chris Chong Women &
Urogynaecology Centre



CYNTHIA TANG
Board Member, and
SOE Student Interviewer
Programme (SIP) Chairperson

Joint Managing Partner,
Tang Thomas LLP



NELSON LEE
Board Member, and
SOE PR & Media Outreach
Co-chairman

Co-owner,
Asia Pacific Ballet Association



FREDERICK SEAH
Board Member, and
SOE Book Chairman

Managing Director,
360 Communications Pte Ltd

BOARD OF GOVERNORS



HILLARY TJIOE

Board Member, and
SOE Networking & Partnerships
Co-chairperson

Managing Director,
MM Galleri Pte Ltd



ANGELA LOH

Board Member, and
SOE Networking & Partnerships
Co-chairperson

Chief Executive Officer,
The Advocators & Co. Pte Ltd

HONORARY PRESIDENTS



RUSSELL MILLER
Founding Chairman
of SOE



GOH KAI KUI
Goh Joo Hin
Pte Ltd



RICHARD EU
Eu Yan Sang
International Ltd



DR STEVEN FANG
Invitrocue Limited



HENRY TAN
CLA Global TS
Holdings Pte Ltd



MICHAEL MA
IndoChine Group



LEE SOO CHYE
Oaks Legal LLC



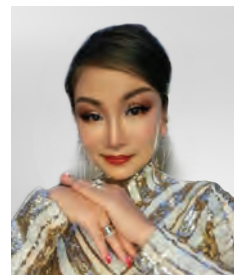
THOMAS FERNANDEZ
PestBusters
Pte Ltd



GRACE CHONG-TAN
Smile Inc.
Dental Surgeons



SA'AT ISMAIL
PIXERF Pte Ltd



RACHEL WONG
Marunda Pte Ltd

About Spirit of Enterprise



Part

2

About SOE

SOE Awards

**SOE Student Interviewer
Programme**

**SOE Student Entrepreneur
Programme**

**SOE 'Built to Grow'
Training Series**

SOE Book

**SOE Fundraising
Golf Challenge**

SOE Networking Events



About **Spirit of Enterprise (SOE)**

Founded in 2003, the Spirit of Enterprise (SOE) celebrates its 21st year as a non-profit organisation dedicated to cultivating a thriving entrepreneurial culture in Singapore. Over the past two decades, SOE has consistently honoured the resilience, innovation and determination of local entrepreneurs, particularly those operating small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These businesses are the backbone of the economy, introducing fresh ideas, creating employment, and fuelling economic growth.

At the heart of SOE is a deep respect for entrepreneurship in all its forms. The organisation recognises that entrepreneurs are key pillars of society, contributing not only through innovative products and services, but also by generating new streams of income and employment opportunities. SOE's mission extends beyond celebrating successes – it fosters an environment where future entrepreneurs can flourish.



Vision

At SOE, we envision a thriving, self-reliant community of Singaporean homegrown entrepreneurs – from micro-businesses to SMEs – who continuously grow, innovate and empower future generations.

Mission

Our mission at SOE is to honour and inspire entrepreneurship in all forms. We aim to promote the spirit of enterprise among Singaporeans – particularly the young – through education, sharing and fostering meaningful interactions between students and the business community.

Core values

SOE's work is guided by three fundamental core values that all board members, entrepreneurs and aspiring leaders should align with:



Inclusiveness and respect

We celebrate the grit and tenacity of local entrepreneurs, from micro-businesses to SMEs, by fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem where every business, regardless of size, is valued and honoured.

Integrity and fairness

We uphold the highest standards of integrity, ensuring that all actions are transparent, unbiased and guided by fairness and ethical principles.



Empowerment and education

We believe in empowering the next generation of entrepreneurs through education, mentorship and fostering connections between experienced leaders and aspiring business minds.

These core values serve as a compass for SOE's Board of Governors, respectable entrepreneurs, and corporate professional leaders. It is their duty to ensure that the organisation stays true to these values, inspiring all entrepreneurial community members to emulate them in their business practices.

SOE's efforts to support and inspire entrepreneurs

In its commitment to nurturing entrepreneurship, SOE runs several impactful programmes:



SOE Awards

An annual presentation to honour outstanding entrepreneurs from established companies and startups, recognising their contributions to Singapore's economy.



SOE Fundraising Golf Challenge

This initiative allows business leaders to come together in a fun way to raise funds for charitable causes, demonstrating the importance of giving back to the community.



SOE Networking Events

These events offer opportunities for entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and past honourees to collaborate, share insights, and support SOE's ongoing efforts to promote entrepreneurship.



SOE 'Built to Grow' Training Series

This programme, focused on helping business leaders scale and grow, equips entrepreneurs with the tools and knowledge necessary for sustainable business success.



SOE Book

An annual publication showcasing entrepreneurs' journeys, celebrating their struggles and triumphs. Each edition is a cherished collection of stories that seeks to inspire future generations of entrepreneurs.

SOE Student Entrepreneur Programme & SOE Student Interviewer Programme



These initiatives expose students to the business world. They include workshops that introduce them to the fundamentals of entrepreneurship, and talks and visits that allow them to interact directly with entrepreneurs, and learn first-hand the challenges and rewards of running a business. The students contribute by writing transcripts for nominees.



A community driven by visionary leadership

SOE is an approved Institution of a Public Character (IPC), and is also funded by the private sector. Its Board of Governors comprises highly respected entrepreneurs and senior corporate leaders committed to cultivating the next generation of business innovators. By staying aligned with the organisation's core values, these leaders aim to inspire and bring out the best in entrepreneurship in Singapore.

Through its diverse initiatives and unwavering dedication, SOE continues to make a lasting impact on Singapore's entrepreneurial landscape, nurturing, recognising and inspiring entrepreneurs today and into the future.





SOE Awards

The Spirit of Enterprise (SOE) Awards is the premier annual event dedicated to honouring the remarkable achievements of Singapore's homegrown entrepreneurs. Each year, the SOE Awards recognise individuals who have made economic progress and become exemplary role models for the entrepreneurial community. These honourees, selected from a pool of nominees interviewed by our student interviewers, represent the finest in entrepreneurship, showcasing the spirit of resilience, innovation and ethical leadership.

The SOE Awards are a powerful platform for celebrating entrepreneurial excellence and encouraging innovation, fair practices, and sustainable business growth. Over the years, the Awards have supported and recognised more than 550 entrepreneurs, many of whom have gone on to build iconic, successful businesses that have made significant contributions to Singapore's economy and community.

A legacy of recognising the best

For over 21 years, the SOE Awards have honoured entrepreneurs from diverse industries, including both established companies and promising startups. Notable past honourees have included some of Singapore's most recognisable brand names, such as Charles & Keith, Dian Xiao Er Group, HungryGoWhere.com, Neo Group Limited, Ong & Ong Pte Ltd, PropNex Realty, Scanteak, and Ya Kun Kaya Toast. These businesses began as local ventures and have become household names, representing the entrepreneurial spirit that SOE stands for.



Highlighting Excellence: 2024 SOE Awards Sponsors and Categories

The 2024 SOE Awards is sponsored by several esteemed organisations, each contributing to specific award categories designed to celebrate different facets of entrepreneurial achievement:

SOE-CLA Global TS Entrepreneurship Award

Presented annually to a past SOE honouree who has taken their enterprise to extraordinary new heights, this prestigious award, nominated by the Judging Panel, is revealed only during the presentation ceremony. It recognises a trailblazer who continues to lead with vision and innovation.



SOE Award and SOE-Neo Startup Award

These two award categories recognise entrepreneurs from both established companies (operating for more than five years) and promising startups (operating for less than five years). The honourees are selected for embodying exceptional leadership, resilience and entrepreneurial excellence.





CLA Global TS
The Growth Strategist For Asia



MAXSTEEL



STRATEGIC PARTNER

PropNex.com

SUPPORTING PARTNERS

GROWTH PARTNER



INSTITUTION PARTNERS



OFFICIAL MEDIA PARTNER

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PARTNER



SOE-PropNex Top Honouree of the Year Award

Reserved for the top honouree of the year, selected by the Judging Panel from among all the year's honourees from established companies. This prestigious award celebrates the best of the best, recognising one individual who has made an extraordinary impact in their field.



SOE Top Startup Honouree of the Year Award



Awarded to the top startup entrepreneur who stands out with exemplary entrepreneurial spirit, and whose business displays rising potential, with an emphasis on innovation.



SOE-Dian Xiao Er Social Contributions Award

Introduced in 2019, this award honours one honoree who has made a lasting and sustainable impact on the community. It highlights the importance of social responsibility, and celebrates entrepreneurs who give back and uplift society.



SOE-Eatz Sustainability Award

Launched in 2022, this award acknowledges one honoree each year who has embraced sustainability in their business practices. It reminds businesses of their responsibility towards the environment and encourages all entrepreneurs to contribute to a greener future.





A beacon of inspiration

The SOE Awards are more than just accolades; they inspire aspiring entrepreneurs, students, SMEs, and potential investors. By honouring the stories of struggle, innovation and triumph, the SOE Awards instil a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial journey – one that is often challenging, but always rewarding.

Every year, this celebration serves as a rallying point for Singapore’s entrepreneurial community, showcasing the resilience and adaptability that define successful businesses.

Every year, the SOE Awards become essential to Singapore’s entrepreneurial legacy, encouraging future generations to pursue their dreams, scale their businesses, and contribute to Singapore’s vibrant economy.

For more information on how to participate, nominate, or attend, visit <https://soe.org.sg/soe-awards/>



SOE Student Interviewer Programme

Inspiring future leaders through real stories

Since its inception in 2003, the SOE Student Interviewer Programme (SIP) has partnered with local tertiary institutions to provide students with the unique opportunity to engage with outstanding local entrepreneurs. This initiative allows students to conduct interviews, gaining first-hand insights into the success stories of those who have demonstrated resilience and perseverance – essential qualities for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Through the SIP, student interviewers get to hear powerful narratives from

entrepreneurs that will hopefully inspire them to take steps toward their entrepreneurial journeys. These stories serve not only to educate, but also to empower students to become agents of change within their communities.

Over 1,500 students have benefited from the SIP, with educational institutions actively supporting the initiative by incorporating it into their courses or encouraging voluntary participation in experiential learning.



Recognising excellence: Awards and accolades

Each year, the SIP culminates in the prestigious SOE Awards Ceremony, where outstanding student interviewers are honoured. These honourees are selected from a pool of nominees who have been interviewed as part of the programme and following a rigorous judging process by the SOE Board of Governors. The SOE Best Student Interviewer Award and the SOE Student Achievement Award celebrate the top-performing students, recognising their contributions and commitment to the programme.

Empowering the next generation

The SOE's SIP is a vital component of the organisation's mission to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit among youth. By connecting students with real-world experiences, SIP enhances their understanding of business and instils the values of resilience and innovation necessary for future success. As they listen to the stories of seasoned entrepreneurs, these students are inspired to forge their own paths and contribute positively to society.

SOE Student Entrepreneur Programme

Nurturing the next generation of innovators



Launched in 2005, the SOE Student Entrepreneur Programme (SEP) aims to equip students with the foundational skills and knowledge necessary to embark on their entrepreneurial journeys. This initiative provides primary and secondary school students practical operational and financial management training while offering hands-on experiences and valuable networking opportunities with local entrepreneurs and professionals.

The SEP introduces students to the essentials of entrepreneurship through engaging, life-oriented lessons, and simulated business activities. By adopting a hands-on approach, the programme brings entrepreneurship to life, enabling students to apply concepts learned in the classroom to real-world scenarios. More than just an academic exercise, SEP fosters a passion for innovation, resilience and true leadership among the younger generation.





A 100%-funded model for accessible learning

SOE offers a fully funded model for the SEP in a commitment to make entrepreneurship education accessible. Schools must undertake all six programme modules (or a minimum of four modules for primary school-level students), with SOE covering 100% of the fees for eligible Singaporean and PR students, up to a cap of \$7,500 per school each year. For students of a foreign nationality, funding will be capped at a maximum of 20% of the total number of student participants. This ensures that financial constraints do not hinder students' opportunities to learn about entrepreneurship. Appointed training providers are reimbursed by SOE, eliminating the need for upfront payments from schools.

Empowering future leaders

Through the SOE's SEP, we are cultivating an understanding of business fundamentals and inspiring a resilient and innovative spirit in our youth. As we prepare them to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship, we believe that the skills and experiences gained through SEP will empower these young individuals to become the leaders and innovators of tomorrow. By fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial culture, SOE is committed to nurturing the next generation, ensuring that the spirit of enterprise continues to thrive in Singapore.

SOE ‘Built to Grow’ Training Series

The ‘Built to Grow’ Training Series is an innovative initiative for small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) business owners and C-suite executives that aims to equip them with the knowledge and tools to elevate their companies into the next generation of Singaporean business icons.

This programme is led by Mr Ismail Gafoor, and reflects his extraordinary

entrepreneurial journey. Besides being President of the Spirit of Enterprise (SOE), he is also CEO of PropNex Limited – which has grown from a hole-in-the-wall office to a real estate company that has been listed on the Singapore Exchange (SGX) since 2018, with over 12,700 salespersons. Ismail’s insights, cultivated through years of experience, will help participants navigate today’s competitive landscape and redefine their role as effective leaders.

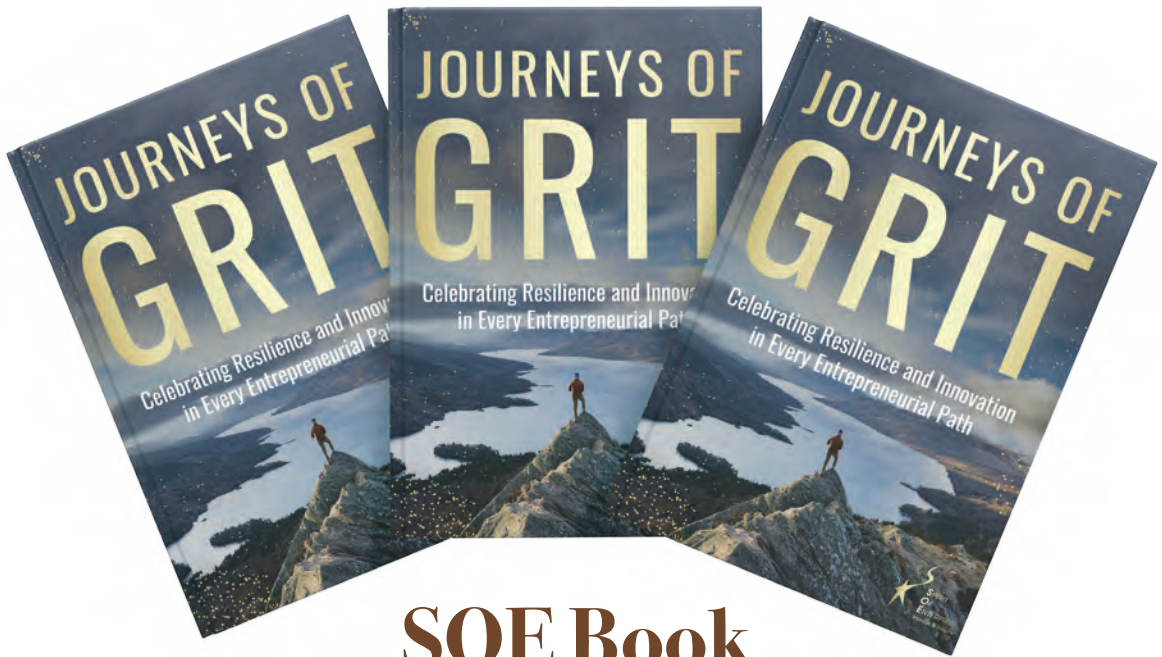




The series emphasises the importance of strengthening foundations, and covers essential areas such as aligning workforce strategies, refining vision and mission statements, and instilling robust core values that resonate throughout organisations. Participants also learn to build a solid structure for growth, preparing their businesses to tackle future challenges, and seize new opportunities. In addition to enhancing individual leadership capabilities, this initiative fosters a vibrant community of like-minded entrepreneurs that is

committed to continuous learning and self-improvement, providing a valuable network for sharing experiences and insights.

The success of the ‘Built to Grow’ Training Series – as seen from the well-attended and usually oversubscribed sessions, as well as positive feedback received – is a testament of SOE’s dedication to nurturing an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Singapore, inspiring participants to transform their aspirations into actionable results.



SOE Book

A legacy of entrepreneurial excellence

The SOE Book is the annual flagship publication of the Spirit of Enterprise, showcasing the remarkable journeys of local entrepreneurs and inspiring future business leaders across Singapore. Each edition highlights SOE Award honourees, providing valuable insights into the challenges they have overcome and the strategies that led to their success.

Beyond celebrating achievements, the SOE Book is a rich resource filled with practical advice and case studies, making it a must-have for students, budding entrepreneurs, and business leaders. It reflects the diversity of Singapore's industries, capturing how entrepreneurs have built successful companies and made lasting contributions to the economy.

Participation & Benefits

Participation in the SOE Book is on a first-come, first-served basis, with a nominal fee that is far more affordable than producing similar individual publications.

For honourees, the benefits include:



Increased visibility across schools, businesses and key stakeholders.



Strengthened market positioning as an industry leader.



Enhanced credibility through SOE's trusted platform.



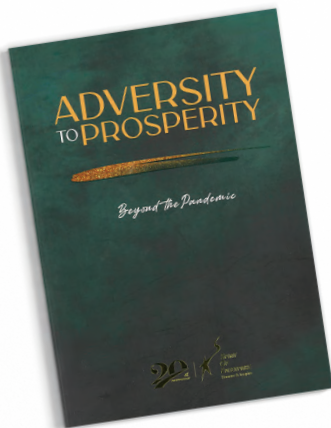
Potential business growth from exposure to a broad audience.



A must-have resource

Distributed to schools, public libraries and SOE events, the SOE Book is a collectible series that inspires future entrepreneurs. Each edition leaves a legacy of entrepreneurial wisdom, with fresh stories and insights that make it a valuable tool for anyone passionate about business success.

By participating, honourees join a prestigious community, contributing to a publication that motivates the next generation to innovate, grow and succeed.



SOE Fundraising Golf Challenge

The SOE Fundraising Golf Challenge presents a unique opportunity for well-heeled CEOs, business leaders, and successful companies to make a meaningful impact while enjoying a day of golfing, networking and fun. As a non-profit charity organisation, SOE relies on patrons' generosity to support its community outreach programmes, particularly those focused on inspiring and assisting youths in achieving their entrepreneurial dreams.

Since 2010, the Golf Challenge has been a pivotal event in SOE's fundraising efforts. It provides a relaxed yet engaging environment for entrepreneurs, professionals and business leaders to forge connections. It offers the ideal setting for strengthening business relationships while enjoying the camaraderie of peers over a game of golf.





Participants can also take pride in knowing that their contributions directly support SOE's mission to empower the next generation of leaders. As SOE is an approved Institution of a Public Character (IPC), all donations are tax-deductible, providing further incentive to be part of this prestigious event. The challenge culminates in an exclusive dinner and auction, where high-value items are put up for bidding. All proceeds are channelled towards SOE's initiatives, creating opportunities for young people to engage with entrepreneurship and unlock their potential.





We invite CEOs, business leaders, and companies with a passion for philanthropy and a love for golf to join us in this impactful event. By sponsoring or participating in the SOE Fundraising Golf Challenge, you can play a direct role in nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit in Singapore while enjoying a day of elite networking and fun.



SOE Networking Events

Empowering entrepreneurs through collaboration and insight

Spirit of Enterprise (SOE) Networking Events bring together entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and honourees to collaborate, share insights, and support SOE's mission of promoting entrepreneurship. These sessions provide valuable takeaways for all attendees and cover a broad spectrum of hot topics like investment, legal matters, financial management, marketing, HR, and digital innovation, to name a few. Attendees gain actionable knowledge that will empower them to make informed decisions and drive their businesses forward.

Beyond knowledge sharing, the events foster meaningful relationships and mutual respect among participants. SOE's Networking Events are a powerful platform for creating opportunities that drive growth, innovation, and lasting success.





SOE Award Honourees' Stories



Part

3

SOE Award Honourees

Lawrence Seow

Aik Chin Hin Pte Ltd

Jocelyn Tan

Apex Asia Management Group

Daniel Tan

Food Playground Pte Ltd

Terence Sim

iClick Media Pte Ltd

Vincent Li & Yola Yu

Starry Homestead Pte Ltd

Eunice Yeung

EYSY Digital Pte Ltd

Lawrence Seow

Honouree of
SOE Award 2024

Director

Aik Chin Hin Pte Ltd

Industry

Manufacturing

www.aikchinhin.sg



Forging a path *to success through* grit and courage

~

When Lawrence Seow Hock Cheng first ventured into his family's hardware business in 1984, it was a relatively small outfit managed by his two elder siblings. Lawrence's dad was the one who had made the foray into the industry 10 years earlier. At that time, the company, Yik Hin Machinery, operated mostly as a hardware and second-hand store that refurbished and resold old equipment.

Over the last 30 years, under the supervision of Lawrence and his wife, the business has blossomed from a standalone store to a chain with multiple branches in Singapore. It has also diversified into machinery production and customisation, tailoring them to clients' preferences.

"I started in the company when it was generating less than \$100,000 in revenue. Over the span of 30 years, my wife and I have worked tirelessly together, and our business has since grown into a highly profitable venture," said Lawrence, 60. "Our uniqueness lies in being more

than just a hardware shop; we're also a machinery shop. While many businesses in Singapore focus solely on buying and selling, we stand out by offering customisation and modification services for machinery based on our customers' needs."

The turning point was when Lawrence joined his father's company fresh out of National Service. Before this, he had only gotten his feet wet for six months helping out his older brothers in the business. Lawrence felt that the business had to move with the times. "I felt strongly about modernising things and had to convince my dad to let go of the old tools and bring in new products," said Lawrence, the youngest of 13 siblings.

Lawrence made the bold move to invest \$40,000 to become a dealer for Makita, one of Japan's top manufacturers of portable power tools. "\$40,000 was a very large sum for us at the time, and we had a strict one-month deadline to make the payment," he recalled. Fortunately, the gamble paid off. They were not only able

“

While many businesses in Singapore focus solely on buying and selling, we stand out by offering customisation and modification services for machinery based on our customers’ needs.

”

to recoup the initial investment, but also generated a significant profit. This marked the beginning of their resource expansion.

His dad, his inspiration

Lawrence had always been single-minded about his choice of career.

He remembered how, as a young boy, he was always eager to follow his dad to work. As a result, Lawrence earned the nickname ‘30-mile boy’, in reference to his dogged persistence in following his father everywhere the older gentleman went. “My father has been the biggest inspiration behind my ideas. From a very young age, I vividly remember watching him work with his old tools. At just 10 years old, I started working alongside him, observing his every move, even getting inside the cement mixer to assist him. Despite ending each day covered in dust, I was filled with joy,” he mused, and laughingly recalled a memory of the two

of them having lunch together with dusty faces and dirty hands.

While Lawrence’s elder brothers were initially involved in the business when it was still at its old location at Jalan Besar, they decided to bow out after the land was slated for redevelopment and their shop had to be demolished. That was when Lawrence took another risk and put down \$33,000 to secure a space in Ang Mo Kio Industrial Park 2. That space, Aik Chin Hin, which started operations in 1991, is now the company’s flagship store. Lawrence described how “there was a lot of fear” surrounding the move, which led to his brothers leaving the business. “Perhaps they didn’t have the confidence that the business could sustain itself after the move to Ang Mo Kio.”

It is clear that Lawrence still has much affection for his brothers even though they are no longer business partners. He



admitted that he was emotional when he had to officially strike off their names as directors at the Registrar of Companies. “At the point when we about to cancel their names, my tears just fell – because we’d been through so much together, and I love them as well. I wished that we could work together, but since they wanted to pull out, I had no choice,” he said. “For one or two weeks, I felt very bad and sad about it.”

With the hefty investment in the new store and mortgage of \$2,000 a month – more than double the rent for their old place – Lawrence felt the need to work exponentially harder. Facing a manpower crunch, Lawrence asked his wife, Wendy Lim, who was working in a bank at the time, to quit her job so that she could help him out in the new outlet. It was a lean two-person outfit in the early days.

Speaking of Wendy, Lawrence’s voice softened as he gave her credit for the

success of Aik Chin Hin, and for sharing in the hardships without complaint. They had formed a tag team, with Lawrence in charge of store operations from 7am to 7pm, and Wendy handling the finances and other back-end aspects of the business that often stretched till midnight. “She plays a very important role in the company as she handles all the accounting,” said Lawrence, who added with a laugh: “But when she first came in, she couldn’t even differentiate a hammer from other tools. From having zero knowledge of the tools, she now knows everything in the store and can even handle sales.”

Recounted Wendy: “It was quite difficult, as it was just the two of us at the beginning in Ang Mo Kio. There were no days off and no time for relaxation. But with the support of family and friends who chipped in either to help or bring us food, we somehow found the energy to overcome the hardship.” Lawrence chimed in with some measure of pride that



both of them simply knuckled down to work with a single-minded focus to, as the saying goes, make it work. “There was no grumbling from either of us. We were still in our 20s at the time, so I guess we were young and didn’t feel tired,” he said.

Aik Chin Hin’s success, Lawrence surmised, was due to a set of three principles, the core of which is a pricing strategy that prioritised sales volume over profit per unit. Although margins were thin, there was a method to the madness. “We price our products affordably so customers will recommend others to us,” he shared. Secondly, Lawrence marketed the business as a “one-stop shop”, making sure that they were able to meet customers’ needs and solve their problems, even if it meant helping them source for a product that he did not carry. Providing good after-sales service, even after office hours, was the third pillar. “Even at midnight, if customers needed something, we’d open our doors to them,” said Lawrence.

“
**Even at midnight,
if customers needed
something, we’d
open our doors
to them.**
”

As an example of the third principle, Lawrence described how he once made his way to Batam, Indonesia, to personally solve an issue for a client who had bought an air compressor system. “We pride ourselves on our personal touch,” he added.

These approaches proved to be a winning formula as, before long, Aik Chin Hin’s customer base grew purely from word of mouth.

During the 1990s, the company was “very lucky”, as Wendy put it, that they had the opportunity to capitalise on their export business to Brunei, Thailand and Vietnam. “With sales at that time being cash-based while monies owed to suppliers was on credit, we had the benefit of cash flow,” she shared.

Being situated within an industrial estate, where there were many other competing hardware store, did not hamper their business. In fact, Wendy felt that their neighbours “were very kind” in pointing out what they should stock up on to increase sales. From there, their range of products increased.

As business boomed, the company expanded. From a two-person show, the company gradually grew to its current strength of over 130 employees. Aik Chin Hin celebrated its 50th anniversary in February 2024.

Workaholic

Lawrence acknowledged that he is a workaholic who is not afraid of rolling up his sleeves, and considers getting covered in oil and dust as a badge of honour. “When I get myself all oily and dirty, then I know that I’m working,” said Lawrence,

昭昭聖道貴德
悠悠渡





昊昊皇天極點點明師



“

**Whenever I'm faced
with challenges
beyond my expertise,
I never hesitate
to seek help from
professionals.
I learned the
importance of
asking questions and
seeking solutions
without fear.**

”

who has lost count of the number of sleepless nights because he was working on fixing and repairing machinery. “Everything that I cannot do, I will find ways to solve” is his motto.

But work is definitely something that brings Lawrence fulfilment and a whole lot of joy. In fact, even during his downtime these days, he enjoys tinkering with another type of machinery – cars. His passion for machine repair as a youngster entailed putting his ego and fear aside to approach others with more expertise, often risking criticism and harsh reprimands. “People don’t usually want to reveal their trade secrets, but I persisted even when they scolded me or sometimes hit my head out of frustration, and I managed to learn the skills,” he said. He credits this persistence for his ability to fix almost anything that is placed in front of him.

Lawrence shared a particularly daunting encounter with an expert known for his short temper: “Despite feeling apprehensive, I mustered the courage to approach him, fostering a friendship over coffee and gained beneficial insights into machinery repair.” Through this experience, he learned an invaluable lesson. “Whenever I’m faced with challenges beyond my expertise, I never hesitate to seek help from professionals. I learned the importance of asking questions and seeking solutions without fear,” he stated.

Just as there have been many successes on his entrepreneurship journey, Lawrence has faced his fair share of challenges. One of them was when he imported a batch of new power tools from China, hoping to hit another home run as he did

with the Makita products. To his dismay, the tools that arrived were all defective. The innate problem-solver in him immediately took over, with him modifying the tools to enhance their quality and functionality. He even advised the factory owners from whom he had made the purchase on how they could improve their products. “For me, giving up is never an option. I am deeply passionate about my work and find joy in every repair job. Even in moments of rest, my mind remains focused on finding solutions, and it’s that sense of fulfilment that drives me,” he said.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted businesses across the board, was another challenge that Aik Chin Hin overcame. One silver lining during that dark period was that the company remained open as they were classified as an essential service. However, processes had to be revised as staff were placed on rotation due to social distancing restrictions. Although it was a “tough period” for the company, Lawrence shared that they were able to rely on the financial reserves Aik Chin Hin had accumulated over the years to tide them through. With additional subsidies from the government, as well as other initiatives that allowed them to continue running the business rent-free, they were able to not just cover labour costs but also generate a profit. “Incredibly, we were still able to issue bonuses to staff that year,” he revealed, adding that this practice has not faltered once in the past three decades.

Chips off the old block

Like Lawrence, his two sons are each a chip off the old block, with the spirit of

entrepreneurship running in their veins. Older son Terrence decided to skip his undergraduate education to get a head start in the business world, or “the school of life”, as Lawrence put it. He is now one of the directors of Aik Chin Hin, and manages the operations part of the business. Younger son Darren has also expressed interest to join the family business after his stint in National Service.

Just as his father was encouraging towards him and his brothers to join the family business, Lawrence and his wife have no issue with their sons working in the shop at a young age. But have there been conflicts arising from mixing work with family? The answer is a resounding “no” from

both spouses. Wendy elaborated: “The important thing is that we have to trust each other, and we must have the heart to help each other. The love for each other is very important. Then everything should be okay.” It is clear that family means everything to the couple. “Witnessing the rapid growth of our business fills me with a sense of honour and pride. But achieving this success while maintaining a happy and harmonious family life is truly the most fulfilling,” emphasised Lawrence.

The road ahead

Lawrence shared: “Looking ahead, my personal plan for the next five years involves retirement. I plan to pass our business to my sons, whom



“

Witnessing the rapid growth of our business fills me with a sense of honour and pride. But achieving this success while maintaining a happy and harmonious family life is truly the most fulfilling.

”

I'll train rigorously to take over my responsibilities.” He also has thoughts on expanding the business regionally.

But first, Terrence shared that digitalisation of Aik Chin Hin's operational processes is his main priority for the near future due to how swiftly the company has grown. “Because of the size of the company now, we need a way to properly track performance and also optimise our manpower,” he reported. “There are also plans to provide upskilling and

career enhancement opportunities for our staff, such as training them on new technologies and robotics.”

While agreeing that it is important to keep up with the times and technological trends, Lawrence insisted that some traditions and values must remain. Both he and his wife acknowledged the important role their employees play in the company's success, and revealed that they express their gratitude regularly – not just through offering bonuses, but also in treating them like family. “Every year, during our company's Dinner & Dance, we provide red packets to employees whose parents are above 60 years old, a gesture that is greatly appreciated and reinforces the sense of family within our company and our personal value of respecting our elders,” shared Lawrence.

Honouring elders is also a feature of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility policy – commendable for a relatively small company. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff would conduct visits to old folks' homes every year and provide them with meals. And when a deadly tsunami struck Indonesia in 2004, Aik Chin Hin donated a day's worth of cash sales to support relief efforts, Lawrence recounted. “Volunteering is ingrained in our company culture, with all employees coming together to lend a helping hand whenever needed. We believe that, by working together as a team, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others,” he said. “While our primary focus is on running our business, we believe in the importance of contributing to society. Making money isn't just about profits for

us; it's about having the means to give back to those in need."

On the character traits of a successful entrepreneur, Lawrence shared that he values humility, being ethical, and having a good attitude. "You must be humble and grateful for every opportunity given. With these traits and a good attitude, you will earn the support of customers and your business will grow," he stated. He also expounded on the importance of

conducting one's business ethically and "not biting the hand that feeds you".

So what is success in Lawrence's eyes? To him, having an upstanding reputation is of utmost importance, rather than the amount of money in one's bank account. "Success is when you have earned the respect and acknowledgement of others, and people express positive sentiments when they hear of your name or your brand."



About Aik Chin Hin Pte Ltd



Founded by Lawrence Seow, Aik Chin Hin officially had its start in 1991 as a hardware and machinery store in Ang Mo Kio.

But its foundation was laid 50 years earlier, when Lawrence's father set up a hardware shop. A subsequent entity, Aik Chin Hin Machinery Co, was then created for Lawrence and his brothers to manage. Since taking over the reins from his brothers in 1991, Lawrence has been credited with transforming the traditional hardware business into the modern success it is today. In 2016, he incorporated the company under Aik Chin Hin Pte Ltd.

From a single store selling mainly refurbished equipment at the start, the company now boasts 10 stores carrying an array of hardware and machinery, including some of its own trademarked products. It has also continued to specialise in machine repair and customisation. In addition, Aik Chin Hin now operates several large warehouses in Singapore, each boasting a total of 100,000 square feet of floor space.

Starting with just Lawrence and his wife, the company is now staffed by close to 140 employees, with regional expansion in its sights.

On what makes his company stand out against the competition, Lawrence reflected: "Selling hardware tools is straightforward, but providing tailored recommendations and customising machinery requires expertise. In Singapore, there are few businesses like ours; while there are machinery shops, they typically don't offer the range of products and services that we do. Our shop serves as a one-stop destination for both hardware and machinery needs, providing added convenience and value to our customers."



Jocelyn Tan

Honouree of
SOE Award 2024

Group CEO

Apex Asia
Management Group

Industry

Real Estate

www.asipty.com

www.apexasia.com.sg



From poly drop-out to CEO *with a PhD*



Jocelyn Tan had never envisioned herself as an entrepreneur. This is despite the fact that her parents ran a minimart while she was growing up. This is also despite the fact that, by the time she was a polytechnic student, she was already earning a good income as a swimming instructor. But starting her own business had never crossed her mind.

Being financially independent from an early age, however, gave Jocelyn the impression that she may not need to take the expected education route to succeed. She recalled: “When I was in polytechnic, I was about 45 minutes late to a class and my lecturer scolded me. He said to me: ‘Only if you’re earning more than \$2,500 a month, then do you not need to come to class.’” After a quick mental calculation, she took him at his word and “literally walked out of the lecture hall”. Jocelyn soon dropped out of polytechnic, unbeknownst to her family. It was a decision she would quickly regret.

After giving up being a swimming instructor due to health reasons, Jocelyn, at the age of 19, got a job as

an administrative assistant in a property management company, drawing a salary of \$1,200 a month. “I was very thick-skinned and asked my manager at the time for a promotion,” she revealed. His reply made her realise how disadvantaged she was by not having paper qualifications. “He told me: ‘You’re only an O-level holder; how to promote you?’”

Instead of wallowing in self-pity, the go-getter in Jocelyn emerged. “I realised that I needed to do something about it,” she stated. The need to do something was motivated not just by the self-confidence that she could achieve the necessary qualifications, but also that she could “do better” than any of her colleagues.

Her academic track record reflects this. It took Jocelyn just eight months to complete her part-time diploma – about half the time typically needed. She followed that up with a degree done on a part-time basis. She then pursued and obtained a Master in Business Administration (MBA), as well as a doctorate (PhD) in Business and Management. Not too shabby for a poly drop-out.

While gaining her educational qualifications, Jocelyn was rising through the ranks in her career, eventually heading the property management arm at CapitaLand. But in 2018, while stationed overseas, she made a life-changing decision to leave the company. “At that point in my life, my kids and my husband were in Singapore, and I was travelling overseas a lot – for more than a year,” she shared. “I decided my kids needed me – my younger child was just three years old then. It was time to go home.”

So Jocelyn resigned without another job lined up, but was strangely calm and collected. She had given herself three to six months to sit back and mull her next move, which included being a ride-hailing driver in the interim “just to cover the cost of petrol and the car”. But she never got the chance to monetise her driving licence.

Barely two days after Jocelyn returned to Singapore on 28 July 2018, she received an offer from a prospective investor to set up her own property management business. “When I met him, he had a cheque worth \$100,000 already prepared. There was another partner in the wings who wanted in as well,” she remembered. After taking a week to deliberate, she decided to accept the offer to be the company’s chief executive, along with a salary that was 50% lower than her last drawn pay.

With that, Asia Properties & Assets Consultancy Pte Ltd was born. The company is now part of Apex Asia Management Group.

No fear of failure

Despite the steep pay cut, the decision to join the new company was almost a no-brainer, as the industry was one in which Jocelyn has 20 years of experience under her belt. “It’s a field I am deeply passionate about,” she asserted. “In Singapore, we aim to redefine property management standards, as many people perceive property managers as merely a complaints department rather than a value-adding service provider. By leveraging strategic partnerships, investing in new technologies and AI, as well as streamlining our processes, we strive to

“
In my previous company, I’d started it from ground zero. Before I left, we had acquired 20 to 30 projects. So I knew that I’d been there, done that, and I could do it again if I wanted to.
”



deliver exceptional services to our clients while optimising costs.”

There was little thought of failure. “What’s the worst that could happen? I was already out of a job, so there was nothing to fear,” Jocelyn said. It was clear that the job was something she was confident of doing, and doing well. “In my previous company, I’d started it from ground zero. Before I left, we had acquired 20 to 30 projects. So I knew that I’d been there, done that, and I could do it again if I wanted to.”

The company’s staff strength currently stands at 250, and the company has expanded to Malaysia, the Philippines,

Thailand and China. Looking back after six years with the company, Jocelyn admits that it was a challenge well worth taking up. She disclosed that when her old clients heard that she was re-entering the industry, they began approaching her to tender for their projects. “Some of our longest-standing clients have been supporting us for the past five years. We’ve supported them throughout their journey in property maintenance and management. One of my asset management clients has been with me for 17 years, following me from my previous company to Asia Properties. Over time, we’ve developed a strong friendship based on trust and professionalism,” she said with a sense of pride.



“

We believe that our commitment to providing quality services and building trust and credibility with clients is what drives us forward in this highly competitive market.

”

One of Jocelyn’s proudest achievements is acquiring the management rights of over 80 residential developments in Singapore within just five and a half years.

Initial setbacks

But Jocelyn’s journey was not without setbacks, especially in the initial stages.

One of these was gaining the trust and support of clients. “We were fortunate to have new clients who believed in our sincerity and gave us the opportunity to serve them. We believe that our commitment to providing quality services and building trust and credibility with clients is what drives us forward in this highly competitive market,” said Jocelyn.

The COVID-19 pandemic was another challenging time that severely impacted the property management business, categorised as an essential service. Said Jocelyn: “We had to prioritise the safety of our staff while continuing to serve

our clients. Obtaining masks and hand sanitisers was a challenge, and I personally experienced a loss of \$7,000 when trying to purchase masks from overseas. We had to bear the cost of providing these essential items to our staff and clients as some clients were initially reluctant to pay for them. Despite these challenges, we adapted by implementing remote access and control systems for estates, enhancing our digital platforms, and moving towards man-less operations.”

Incredibly, the years during and following the pandemic was also when the company registered its largest growth, doubling year-on-year from 2020-2022. Jocelyn credits her team’s gung-ho spirit for maintaining close to full employee strength during an uncertain time, when many essential services were cutting back on staff, intentionally or unwittingly so.

Jocelyn’s integrity as a businesswoman also shone through, especially when one of Singapore’s first COVID-19 cases emerged at a condominium that her



About Apex A

Your Partner in Transforming Urban Land

[Read More](#)

Urban Living

Asia

escapes



company was managing. There had been a heated discussion on whether to make the discovery public. Some within the residents' council resisted, fearing that the price of their development would drop, but she stood firm that the right thing had to be done. "I told them that this is COVID-19 – you need to be truthful," she said. To Jocelyn, integrity is of utmost importance in this line of business, "because temptations are everywhere".

Tough competition and motivated staff

One of the toughest challenges in business has to survive intense market competition.

"Trying to strike a balance between providing quality services and managing costs put significant pressure on our company's income and profitability," shared Jocelyn. To mitigate this, she and her team changed tack and targeted new market segments while leveraging on their network and tapping into potential business growth opportunities. "We also didn't forget to celebrate small wins, and maintained staff morale in order to push forward."

Indeed, Jocelyn is grateful to her staff – whom she treats as friends – for collectively being a pillar of strength and an asset of the company. She said that



she finally accepted that the company was heading in the right direction and would likely last for the long term when she suddenly realised the happiness and teamwork among her employees. “When everyone is working together harmoniously and supporting each other, despite the occasional hiccups that every company faces, it becomes evident that the business is on the right track. Communication and teamwork are essential for success in this market,” she insisted.

To show her commitment to her staff, they are fully supported when it comes to pursuing higher education. “I think everybody deserves a chance to study,” Jocelyn asserted. “Maybe because I knew first-hand how tough it was to have to support myself through my diploma on a \$1,200 salary. But because I had decided to drop out of school, I had

“
But really, treating everybody – from staff to clients – as a friend has helped in my entrepreneurship journey.
”

to reap what I sowed and pay for my studies myself.” Like a proud parent, Jocelyn shared that three employees have received their MBA, and four have received their degrees as a result of the company’s sponsorship, which comes with a bond.

As another sign of her commitment to her staff, Jocelyn is open to discussing any matter with them, and is heartened that many have come to view her as family. “They’ll ask for my opinion on their relationship issues, and I always quip: ‘Do I look like a love doctor to you?’” said Jocelyn with a laugh. “But really, treating everybody – from staff to clients – as a friend has helped in my entrepreneurship journey.”

‘Adaptability’ is a word that comes up often when Jocelyn shares about what it takes to thrive as an entrepreneur. “We need to change and adapt with the times. Leadership is no longer unilateral and top-down. You need to be your employees’ friend and be in the trenches with them to gain their respect, then they’d be willing to fight alongside you.”

It is an approach that is not for everyone, and untenable perhaps in larger corporate outfits, but it is a leadership style that gels with Jocelyn’s personable nature, and has earned the straight-shooter the respect of her peers and employees.

A typical example of Jocelyn’s working style is the time when she instructed a director in the company to air their frustration with her in the privacy of

her office. “I gave them the freedom to scream and shout at me,” she recounted. “Because I knew that, if I didn’t do that, they would leave. After that, we became very good friends.”

Jocelyn is very proud of the fact that, despite being a fairly young company, the company has 14 long-service staff who have toughed out five out of the six years that the company has been around.

Impossible = I’m possible

‘Impossible’ is a personal motto that Jocelyn holds close to her heart, especially when faced with setbacks. If you are wondering why she chose such a negative word as her personal mantra, she explained: “‘Impossible’ can be spelt ‘i-m-possible’, which reads ‘I am possible’.”

“This is something that I always tell myself in order to stay positive and carry on, even on days when you want to burn yourself to ashes. We’re only human, after all, right? There are days when we’ll be disappointed by outcomes beyond our control. It’s okay to allow

yourself one or two days to feel sad before you get back into the fight,” she encouraged.

One of those times was when the company lost a government land sales tender bid “by just \$10”.

Advice for budding entrepreneurs

Jocelyn’s biggest cheerleaders are her immediate family – her husband, in particular, and her three children, the youngest of whom is currently four. “My kids provide me with my daily dose of laughter, which is the best medicine,” she quipped. She also cherishes the “luxury to laze at home”, something that she can indulge in because her husband likes taking over the kitchen.

For budding entrepreneurs who are thinking whether or not to take that pivotal step to set up their own business, Jocelyn has some words of advice: “Start by conducting thorough research and start small, just as I did when I founded Asia Properties – with just my managing director, Weijie, and

“

There are days when we’ll be disappointed by outcomes beyond our control. It’s okay to allow yourself one or two days to feel sad before you get back into the fight.

”



“
**Sometimes you
need to shut out
the noise, bite the
bullet, and keep
moving forward.**
”

myself.” She added that, when they first started, their salaries were modest and success did not come immediately.

She continued: “The first step is always the most difficult, because you’ll be faced with a lot of noise from others as well as your own self doubt. Embrace continuous learning and improvement, stay focused on your goals and your customers, and don’t be discouraged by naysayers. Sometimes you need to shut out the noise, bite the bullet, and keep moving forward. Believe in your vision, put in the hard work, and be prepared to make sacrifices in the short term for long-term success.”



About Apex Asia Management Group



Headquartered in Singapore, Apex Asia is a dynamic real estate developer, with a primary focus on transforming urban environments through innovative, sustainable projects. Highly adaptable and keen to learn as it grows, the group is dedicated to the Singapore market, and is committed to reshape the cityscape, as evident in its creation of diverse real estate assets that enhance communities and contribute to positive urban development. With a vision for the future, it remains steadfast in its mission to make a lasting impact on the real estate landscape.

Specialising in the development of residential, office, hotel, serviced apartment, and mixed developments, the group has adeptly overseen the execution of development projects in Singapore.

Through its subsidiary, Asia Properties & Assets Consultancy Pte Ltd, the group is also involved in property management. “As one of the top property management firms in Singapore based on the number of projects under our care, we are considered a leading player in the industry. Our focus is primarily on residential, commercial, and industrial properties managed under MCST strata management framework and various asset management from local and overseas clients,” said Group CEO, Jocelyn Tan.

She added that, without the collective contributions and full-hearted engagement of the staff, reaching this level of achievement would not have been possible. “Their hard work and dedication continue to be the cornerstone of our growth and success. All credit to the staff in the organisation for the success of Apex Asia.”



Daniel Tan

Honouree of
SOE Award 2024

Founder & CEO
Food Playground Pte Ltd

Industry
Training Courses /
Cooking School

www.foodplayground.com.sg



Swapping a suit *for an apron to* redefine success



Seeing Daniel Tan's upbeat and jovial nature, one could never have imagined that he has suffered a near-death experience.

In 2011, Daniel was travelling to the Galápagos Islands aboard a small cruise ship when it ran aground – the boat ended up at a 45-degree angle! – on an uninhabited island in the middle of the night. Daniel and about 20 other passengers had to make an impossible choice: Do they rough it out on the island, or do they take their chances on a life raft in the pitch-black ocean?

Deciding on the latter, the group scrambled onto the raft and drifted for five painfully long hours before they were rescued by a passing cargo ship. It was during those five hours that many dark thoughts crossed Daniel's mind. That experience nudged him to pivot from being an employee to an entrepreneur.

At 35, Daniel had just embarked on a year-long solo trip after suffering from burn-out in his career. A corporate high flyer, Daniel was a Marketing Director at an international five-star hotel chain at the time. Prior to

that, he was stationed in Shanghai, China, as Head of Marketing for a serviced apartment chain, and Bangkok, Thailand, as Country Manager for a budget airline – he was only 28. He returned to Singapore after his mum passed away and decided to stay put to be closer to his dad.

Still, his ambition got the better of him.

In 2009, Daniel decided to pursue a part-time Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) degree with the University of Chicago while navigating a stressful career transition. "My life was very intense for those two years because I'd just gotten the Head of Marketing role at the hotel group and I was also doing my MBA. I was running my health down because I was burnt out every weekend."

Daniel also had to endure high levels of stress at work, dealing with corporate politics in a toxic work environment. "It was a very comfortable job, salary-wise, but I began to feel that chasing after the next promotion or a bigger paycheck didn't make for a very fulfilling life," said Daniel. He questioned whether he really wanted



“

It was a very comfortable job, salary-wise, but I began to feel that chasing after the next promotion or a bigger paycheck didn't make for a very fulfilling life.

”

to step into his bosses' shoes one day. However, the answer was unclear to him then. "I decided that I needed to take a year off just to recalibrate and ask myself what I want to do in life." He timed his resignation to coincide with his EMBA convocation, which he attended in Chicago, USA.

Right after the ceremony, Daniel, who had topped his MBA class, jumped on a plane bound for the Galápagos Islands. The place had been on his bucket list for

some time as he was deeply interested in British naturalist Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Ironically, the location of Darwin's enlightenment was quite near where Daniel's transformative journey was accidentally launched.

"Spending hours adrift in the middle of the ocean gives you plenty of time to reflect upon your life," he recounted. "It was my closest experience to dying, because we didn't know if anyone would get our distress signals."

To Daniel, the wake-up call not only made him keenly aware of the unpredictability of life, but also that he wanted to live a more meaningful existence. “The experience made me reflect on what is really important in life, and what I want to leave behind before I depart this planet,” he said, adding that he resolved there and then to get out of the corporate rat race. “I told myself that when I returned to Singapore, I would do something meaningful and hopefully live a life of impact.”

“
**I told myself that
when I returned
to Singapore, I
would do something
meaningful and
hopefully live a life
of impact.**
”

Delving into social entrepreneurship

Armed with his newly acquired EMBA, Daniel felt that social entrepreneurship was a good path to take to reach more meaning and impact. Following his year-long sabbatical, which included a solo motorbiking trip across Malaysia and Indochina – another bucket list item – Daniel was ready to put his plan into motion. He partnered with two like-minded friends

and, together, they pooled \$50,000 to open a cooking studio in 2012. Its mission was to help stay-at-home mums who faced employment challenges.

Why a cooking studio?

“During my year of travel, I attended a lot of cooking classes everywhere, simply because I ran out of things to do. After all, there are only so many temples and museums you can go to,” shared Daniel. “And every time I did a search on Google or looked up TripAdvisor on what to do, I kept seeing cooking classes popping up. So I signed up for a few out of curiosity.” He not only enjoyed the classes, but found that many who joined were tourists who saw it as a meaningful way to learn about a new place. It helps, too, that Daniel is a self-professed foodie and “decent cook” who is no stranger to the kitchen. “But I don’t live to eat,” he quipped.

When he landed back in Singapore, full of zeal to start a social enterprise, one of the first things he did was to sign up for several cooking classes just to check out the competition. “I was very surprised that, back then in 2012, there were very few cooking experiences that were designed for tourists. All of the schools I found catered mostly to locals and were run by trained chefs.”

When designing the new venture’s logo, Daniel was transported back to the time in Chiang Mai when he pounded chillies in a mortar and pestle for half an hour just to make the paste for a curry. Those traditional food prepping tools, used all over Southeast Asia, also resonates with the Singaporean cooking culture. “I wanted something that

can bring out the authenticity and heritage of our cuisine. And if you look at most of our heritage food, they are all very laborious,” he explained. “The tourists who come here want to experience our culture. So what better way to do that than to teach them how to cook heritage food that has been passed down through generations?”

And why the focus on stay-at-home mums?

Daniel shared that one of his co-founders was a stay-at-home mum herself who faced challenges in returning to the workforce. “I checked the official manpower statistics in Singapore and was quite shocked to see that there was a big pool of mothers who are underemployed or displaced from the workforce due to caregiving duties.” Stay-at-home mums may also be single mothers left to manage the household alone as well without a job, which makes their economic circumstances even more challenging, said Daniel. “We firmly believe that stay-at-home mothers are invaluable ambassadors of Singapore’s heritage, sharing our rich culinary traditions with visitors from around the world.”

A cooking studio run by stay-at-home mums appeared to be the perfect solution, melding together a viable business opportunity along with achieving a social objective. “We wanted Food Playground to be a gateway for mothers to re-enter the workforce,” asserted Daniel. This includes working around challenges such as arranging the opening hours of the studio around the typical schedule of the mothers.

All cooking instructors have to be trained, sometimes for months, to be able to conduct classes clearly and confidently.

“

We firmly believe that stay-at-home mothers are invaluable ambassadors of Singapore’s heritage, sharing our rich culinary traditions with visitors from around the world.

”

Daniel explained that, when selecting candidates, Food Playground looks beyond cooking skills alone. “We conduct auditions to assess the candidates’ ability to multitask, engage students effectively, and handle constructive criticism,” he shared. “Our emphasis lies in identifying individuals with strong soft skills and the potential to excel in a teaching role, as many of our hires have never taught cooking classes before.” He is confident that, through this process, Food Playground not only provides employment but also empowers individuals to discover and nurture their hidden talents.

A blessing in disguise

Although they were united by their vision, Daniel and his partners encountered



KITCHEN
THE GOURMET ART OF ASIAN KITCHEN







their first setback almost from the get-go, when their efforts in applying for a government grant came to nought. “The panel of judges expressed discomfort with our lack of experience in the food and beverage industry. Their stipulation that we enlist the services of professional chefs also seemed at odds with our core social mission,” Daniel stated.

He had resisted the idea of hiring professional chefs as that may have the opposite effect of the company’s mission to empower stay-at-home mothers. “Also, chefs tend to be very serious and strict as they usually focus on cooking techniques. If you make a mistake, they might shout at you, whereas home cooks provide a more intimate learning experience,” Daniel explained.

Despite the rejection, the trio stuck to their plan, re-strategising to appeal for funds through corporate sponsorships. When their first product sponsorship deal – worth \$15,000–\$20,000 – came through from Philips, Daniel was elated. Not only that, Philips was also their first paying client for their corporate cooking workshops. Soon, sponsorships from other companies – such as Neoflam, Ayam Brand, Lam Soon, Fisher & Paykel, and others – poured in as Food Playground’s reputation grew. Daniel remains grateful for their support during those early days.

Another setback occurred in 2014, when the landlord of their studio in Tanjong Pagar decided to triple their rent! “We were actually prepared to pay double,” revealed Daniel. This forced them to source for alternative locations in double-quick time. They chanced upon a two-

storey shophouse unit in Chinatown that was not only within their budget but was more spacious, which gave them the ability to host larger groups – an invaluable asset in their line of business.

While Daniel reflected on those challenges, it is clear that he views them as blessings in disguise. “They compelled us to adopt a resourceful mindset, seeking innovative ways to offset costs and forge valuable partnerships. In hindsight, the closed door of grant funding opened up a world of opportunities that propelled us towards success.”

“

[The challenges we faced] compelled us to adopt a resourceful mindset, seeking innovative ways to offset costs and forge valuable partnerships. In hindsight, the closed door of grant funding opened up a world of opportunities that propelled us towards success.

”

When COVID-19 struck, Food Playground switched from in-person classes to providing cooking classes online. “Overnight, our staff had to learn a new skill and become Zoom experts; it was a very steep learning curve for them to embrace technology. Suddenly, I also became a delivery driver as, for some of the classes, I had to deliver the ingredients to customers’ homes,” Daniel recalled with a smile.

As an entrepreneur, these experiences provided Daniel with an invaluable lesson. “It’s really about being resilient and bouncing back, and not just waiting for things to happen.”

Achieving success

According to Daniel, a pivotal moment that affirmed the viability of the business was when Food Playground achieved the top ranking on TripAdvisor within just a year of operation. In fact, Food Playground surpassed renowned attractions like the Botanical Gardens and other prominent establishments. “This achievement underscored the strength of what we had built and significantly bolstered our

business prospects,” said Daniel.

But it would be another six months before Daniel and his co-founder could finally draw their first paycheck with the approval of their accountant, which was another significant milestone. “It indicated that our cash flow had reached the point of sustainability,” he added.

In 2015, Food Playground received the Top National Award for Service Excellence from former Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. Three years later, they achieved another milestone by winning the Global Culinary Travel Award from the World Food Travel Association. “To this day, we remain the sole winner from Singapore on the global stage – an achievement we deeply cherish,” Daniel announced. “Beyond accolades, we are proud to be recognised as Champion of Good by the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre for our contributions to society. Giving back is integral to our mission, and we are continually exploring avenues to make a positive impact beyond our business endeavours.”



From their recruitment practices to media coverage, Food Playground's mission statement has remained front and centre – 'Bringing mums back to the workforce.' "This ethos guides our hiring decisions. I'm the only man in the company, with the entire team comprised of dedicated stay-at-home mums and active seniors. We have stayed true to our mission since Day 1."

Although his co-founders have since left the business, Daniel is still upbeat about the Food Playground. To give an inkling of the kind of boss he is, when two of his staff recently told him that they were quitting to start their own cooking studio, Daniel gave them his blessings. "I told them I'm happy for them. To me, it's a milestone for them to transition to a level where they're confident enough to come out on their own," he shared. "I think competition is good because it keeps us on our toes and it makes us better. When there's competition, you always want to innovate."

Family support

When asked whom he credits most for his success, Daniel breaks into a bright smile. "It's my wife. She's also an entrepreneur." They got married in 2015.

The pair were work acquaintances when Daniel was still in the hotel industry, but only got together after he quit. "She inspired me. She started her business nine years before I did, during SARS, which was a very difficult period," he stated. "She was also very supportive right from the start, when I had nothing and was trying to build the business from scratch." He added that she even helped to clean up and wash the dishes when the first few classes were so short-handed. "In fact, our company logo

was also designed by her team!"

Not surprisingly, there are people in Daniel's life who were apprehensive of his move from successful corporate executive to entrepreneur. "My dad didn't want me to leave my corporate job because he was so used to seeing me in a suit and tie. And he always felt very proud that I was working for a big company. When I swapped my suit and tie for an apron, he felt that I was wasting my education," he admitted.

While that perception has shifted little over the years, Daniel understands that his dad's concerns stem from worry over the stress and instability of being a business owner. "I will bring newspaper cuttings to show him, just to assure him that I'm doing okay; every award that I win I'll show it to him, too, and it has helped."

When asked to describe himself in three words, Daniel's answer of "resourceful, resilient, relentless" perfectly encapsulates the lessons he has learnt from his near-death experience. "It made me realise that life is so unpredictable and there's no point asking why things happen. The only thing we can control is how we respond," he stressed. Applying that to his business, he added: "Many times, things don't go according to your business plan. There's no point asking why this setback happened. You just need to bounce back, find the best way to deal with the situation, and try to learn as much as you can from the lesson." There is also nothing that he would change about the past. "I think there's a reason for every setback, and I think that's how successful entrepreneurs become more resilient and stay relevant."

About Food Playground Pte Ltd



Incorporated in 2012, Food Playground offers immersive cooking experiences rooted in cultural exploration, primarily catering to tourists seeking to delve into Singapore's vibrant food scene. "Our establishment, nestled within a charming pre-war shophouse in Chinatown, boasts studios dedicated to crafting memorable culinary adventures," said founder, Daniel Tan.

Classes are meticulously designed to showcase quintessential Singaporean fare, including beloved dishes such as curry chicken, laksa, char kway teow and nasi lemak, ensuring a true taste of Singapore.

The social enterprise provides flexible employment opportunities for stay-at-home mothers and active seniors, empowering them through comprehensive training in facilitation and public speaking to become proficient culinary instructors and event facilitators. "Our decision to focus on hiring stay-at-home mothers stems from both practical considerations and a deep understanding of the challenges many women face when re-entering the workforce," said Daniel. "In Singapore alone, approximately half a million women have left their jobs due to caregiving responsibilities for children or elderly parents. We recognised the immense talent and potential within this pool of individuals,



and seek to provide them with meaningful employment opportunities."

Daniel describes the company culture as one that's "tightly woven together", characterised by a flat hierarchy that fosters a sense of family among team members. "Unlike traditional corporate structures with multiple layers of hierarchy, we opt for a more streamlined approach where everyone, regardless of role, is trained to be a full-fledged instructor or facilitator, so there are no assistant roles. This intentional choice encourages a collaborative atmosphere where teamwork is paramount."

Food Playground has been consistently ranked on TripAdvisor's 'Best of the Best' list for the past few consecutive years, a testament to its unwavering dedication to quality. "Maintaining this top position amidst intense competition demonstrates our ongoing efforts to exceed expectations and innovate within our industry," said Daniel.



BRANDS
for GOOD

DANIEL

food
playground
SINGAPORE

Terence Sim

Honouree of
SOE Award 2024

Director
iClick Media Pte Ltd

Industry
Professional Services & IT

www.iclickmedia.com.sg



Digital marketer *with a* heart for SMEs

~

It says a lot about you and the company you founded when your sister, who possesses a first-class honours degree in finance and could have her pick of jobs, decides to join your venture. Meet 42-year-old Terence Sim, the Founder and Director of iClick Media Pte Ltd, to whom this scenario applies.

Terence, the youngest of four siblings, had a typically Singaporean experience growing up. “I had quite a fun childhood, and could go out to play with my pals almost anytime I wanted,” he reminisced. “Of course, it wasn’t all play. I studied, too, but there was never any pressure to excel academically.”

Although his parents came from humble backgrounds – “my father, who recently passed away, was a stall assistant at Newton Hawker Centre, while my mother used to work long hours in a factory in Toa Payoh” – there was always food on the table. With a stable family life, Terence and his siblings never felt the urge to set up their own businesses. “My parents gave me the freedom to choose what I wanted to

do, what course I wanted to study, and where I wanted to work,” Terence said with a smile. “I really appreciate that.”

In fact, Terence’s desire to become an entrepreneur would come from another typically Singaporean experience – burn-out.

When he joined Yellow Pages in 2005, it seemed like he had found his calling in only his first job. He enjoyed running campaigns for clients. “You can really help the client to grow in terms of revenue, company size, and achieving their KPIs and objectives,” he said. This is a belief he still holds dear. In 2009, Terence was promoted to Head of Sales (Internet) – the youngest in Yellow Pages – but decided to tender his resignation soon after. This was because being in charge of Internet sales had taken its toll as, at that time, only a handful of salespersons were competent in that aspect of the business. “It was very stressful and challenging. So, when the opportunity arose, I decided to start a business of my own.” It was a good call, as Yellow Pages “went obsolete five to six years ago”.

Going down the digital pathway

Why did Terence decide to go into digital technology for his first venture as an entrepreneur?

Blame it on his passion for gaming. “When I was in primary school, I was into a lot of games – Nintendo, Sega, etc. When I got into secondary school, I started to be more interested in the nitty-gritty aspects of technology – the DOS, C drive, and the Windows environment,” he stated. “What started as gaming hobby is now a multi-dollar career option.”

Terence’s tertiary education – he studied web design in Temasek Polytechnic – also played a role in his decision to become an entrepreneur. A couple of clients who knew of his educational background persuaded him to create or revamp their websites. “So I did it for one or two clients, and they introduced me to their friends, and it kind of snowballed,” he recalled. As these “friend-friend” projects became bigger and bigger, an idea formed in Terence’s mind: “Hey, maybe I can turn this into a business!”

The meaning of entrepreneurship

When asked for his definition of entrepreneurship, Terence was quick to say: “From Day 1, it has never been about earning money. Entrepreneurship for me is always about helping the customer. We as a service provider are here to solve the various problems that customers have. If we manage to do that, only then will the customer stay with you, and you can then retain the business.”

“

From Day 1, it has never been about earning money. Entrepreneurship for me is always about helping the customer. We as a service provider are here to solve the various problems that customers have. If we manage to do that, only then will the customer stay with you, and you can then retain the business.

”

While it was easy for Terence to outline the kind of service culture his new venture would offer, the actual setting up and running of the company was much more complex. “It’s like fiddling in the dark,” he described. “It’s easy to register a company, but what do you do next? How to win clients, how to market yourself, how to retain business, how to attract talent – these were all very new to me.” Without a mentor to guide him, Terence admitted



“
It’s easy to register a company, but what do you do next? How to win clients, how to market yourself, how to retain business, how to attract talent – these were all very new to me.
”

that he groped his way through for a while after iClick Media was set up. “It was very much trial and error, to be honest.” Steering Terence out of the dark to some extent were the courses he took. “My advanced diploma and my degree are in communications, which includes advertising,” he shared. “I learned about defining a target audience and creating a comms plan. This was important, because it’s what iClick Media is offering as a service.” He is currently pursuing a Masters degree in communications.

Working as a family

Terence’s sister is not his only family member working in iClick Media – his wife is also a staff. However, he confessed that

he only got them on board about one year after iClick Media was established – when he was sure that the new company was stable, viable and ready to scale up.

“That was when all my clients started to get a lot more business from online. With more leads and queries, they became convinced that Google and Facebook platforms really can work, and decided to park a little bit more money with me,” Terence shared. “So, that’s when the revenue started to grow. As a lot of my clients really supported me, I was confident that the business will not only survive, but grow. That’s when I decided to get my sister and wife to join.” Terence quipped that, had things gone south, he could always join media giants such as Mediacorp or SPH.

When asked what it is like to work with family members, Terence said that there are pros and cons. One advantage is that, because they are family, they will go the extra mile for the company as they would want to support him. A disadvantage is that they tend to go overboard when it came to work. “My wife and I are often guilty of working on weekends, and even when we go on a holiday. You can’t really switch off!” The father of three admitted that he finds it difficult to switch off because he worries that “things will not be done well or not done at all”. He added: “Some people say that’s the curse of being a business owner.”

Treating the other staff like family is also a priority, which is why providing a conducive environment for them to work in is so important to Terence. “We try to give a good environment because it helps

staff to do better for the clients. The clients are happy with our service, and will thus continue to engage us,” he explained. In fact, iClick Media’s current premises is a vast improvement from the construction factory that was the company’s first place of work. “I rented one table at that factory in Sungei Kadut,” Terence remembered. As staff strength increased, he had to rent more tables before deciding that his growing team needed its own home. iClick Media thus moved into a rented space in Depot Road before setting up shop a year later, in 2014, in a unit in Betime Building, located in the MacPherson area.

This desire for the staff to be comfortable extends to the company dress code – there is none! “I always tell them to wear anything they want to work, including slippers and shorts,” Terence revealed.

“
We try to give a good environment because it helps staff to do better for the clients. The clients are happy with our service, and will thus continue to engage us.
”



iClick Media









Keep Going
Keep Growing

“Just don’t wear something offensive.” Of course, there are exceptions, such as when they are attending meetings outside the office.

Then there is Get Fit Friday, an official HR policy to get staff to undergo digital detox one Friday a month, when they would be dismissed from work earlier than usual. “I wanted to implement a programme to help my staff get away from their computers, tablets and mobile phones,” Terence explained. It was initially conceived as a group exercise programme to get everyone moving and sweating. Departments took turns to organise the activities, which have since evolved from being health-centric to include fun activities such as bowling. This evolution was something that the staff initiated, and Terence was happy to accommodate. “I know it’s a cliché, but we do indeed work hard and play hard,” Terence added.

Beyond altruism, these initiatives are also strategic ways to compete against the big boys of advertising and digital marketing in terms of attracting and retaining talent, said Terence. A bonus is that these initiatives have earned iClick Media the recognition of Great Place To Work Singapore four years in a row.

A heart for SMEs

One thing that sets iClick Media apart from other digital marketing agencies is its range of accreditations. “For example, we are the only digital marketing agency in Singapore that is SQC Singapore Quality Class-certified,” Terence announced. SQC, or Singapore Quality Class, is a tough and costly audit of a company’s processes, and usually avoided by

companies of iClick Media’s size. Terence is thus justified to be proud of this achievement.

“
We are the only digital marketing agency in Singapore that is SQC Singapore Quality Class-certified.

”
Another distinguishing feature is the company’s strategy of servicing small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). “Some agencies in Singapore don’t want the small businessess; they want the big multinational corporations,” Terence said. “Because of my background in Yellow Pages, a lot of my clients come from the SME sector. They are often one-man shows, or with just one to two staff.” For Terence, there is an added benefit to working with SMEs: “When you help an SME to grow, you really have a huge sense of accomplishment.”

Terence shared that one of his biggest success stories was when he took on a landscape supervisor as a client in 2014. The landscape supervisor was in the midst of setting up his own business and decided he needed a website despite not having much digital knowledge. Terence’s team created a one-page website and helped with digital advertising. Today,

the landscape supervisor has 30 staff reporting to him, and his firm is even capable of taking on large projects with the National Environment Agency.

Despite his focus on SMEs, Terence has had success with much bigger clients. In iClick Media's early years, it landed a big project to design and develop a website for Tradewinds, the travel agency arm of Singapore Airlines. "That was a very memorable job because it was our very first travel project," recalled Terence. "We created a website with the capability to book hotels, airlines and land tours. We also added a payment gateway for

“

That was a very memorable job because it was our very first travel project. We created a website with the capability to book hotels, airlines and land tours. We also added a payment gateway for instant confirmation.

”



instant confirmation.” The success of the Tradewinds project helped iClick Media carve a niche in the travel agency sector. “After we launched Tradewinds, we managed to secure other big names like Diners World Travel and UOB Travel,” Terence said.

Looking ahead

iClick Media already has overseas offices. iClick Indonesia opened in 2013; iClick India opened in 2016; and iClick Philippines opened in 2020. “But, during COVID-19, we stopped renting offices, so all the staff are working from home,” Terence reported.

Terence aims restart these offices within the next two years, then turn them into revenue generators. “Currently, the people there are more like an extension of our production staff. We send them work, they do it, then pass it back to us.” He is also keen to set up a unit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, within the next five years.

Although competitors have mushroomed in the local market since iClick Media was launched, Terence is optimistic about the company’s prospects. “Absolute revenue is still growing, so you can still make a decent income from this business in Singapore in the next five years,” he predicted. He is, however, wary about new technologies such as AI and ChatGPT disrupting the market. “We’re already seeing these new tools affecting our industry. Certain positions are going obsolete or will have a change in scope,” he advised.

What words of wisdom does Terence have for people dreaming of starting a

business of their own? “My advice for the next generation of entrepreneurs is to be relentless – don’t give up what you believe in,” he advised. “If you believe that your business can make a difference or can solve a problem, then press on and overcome the obstacles. It may not be easy, but keep pressing on and then you’ll get there.”

“

If you believe that your business can make a difference or can solve a problem, then press on and overcome the obstacles. It may not be easy, but keep pressing on and then you’ll get there.

”

About iClick Media Pte Ltd



Established in 2009, iClick Media is an ISO-certified digital marketing company that has achieved both the Google Premier Partner and Microsoft Certified Partner status. It specialises in Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Social Media Marketing (SMM), web design, and web analytics – in other words, it provides Internet marketing strategies and solutions for its clients.

Speaking of clients, iClick Media has an impressive list of happy customers. They include MNCs and SMEs, and span the gamut of industries, from travel (Tradewinds, Diners World Travel, UOB Travel, CTC Travel) and computers (Acer) to government (Holland-Bukit Panjang Town Council, Nee Soon Town Council) and education (NUS, NTU, MindChamps Preschool).

It is no surprise that iClick Media, already the market leader in digital advertising in Singapore, has spread its wings and left its mark overseas – in Indonesia, Philippines and India. It also has plans to enter the Malaysian market in the near future.

Cementing iClick Media's status as a respected and reputable agency is the positivity of its staff – it is the only digital marketing agency to be certified by Great Place To Work Singapore four years in a row (2021-2024). This is not surprising, as iClick Media's Founder and Director, Terence Sim, being a father of three, is big on creating a fun and family-like atmosphere. After all, his wife is also a member of his staff. Initiatives for this include a relaxed dress code and switching off office lights at 6pm to encourage staff to have a life outside work. Terence's sense of altruism extends to accepting non-profits as clients at rates way below the company's norms. "It's a way of giving back to the community," he said.





Vincent Li & Yola Yu

Honourees of
SOE Award 2024

Co-founder & CEO
Co-founder & COO
Starry Homestead Pte Ltd

Industry
Interior Design

www.starryhomestead.com



Crafting dream homes *with heart*



Building a standout brand in the world of interior design is no easy feat. Yet, Starry Homestead Pte Ltd has risen to the challenge with warmth and creativity, thanks to two people with big dreams and even bigger hearts – Vincent Li and Yola Yu, co-founders of the company.

Their journey is not just about success; it is also about love for the craft, perseverance in the face of obstacles, and a shared passion for turning houses into dream homes. This is the story of how Vincent and Yola built Starry Homestead, a process filled with meaningful connections, hard-earned lessons, and unforgettable moments.

There is always a story behind a company name, and Starry Homestead is no exception. The inspiration came from an iconic piece of art: Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night*. Even though Vincent only saw a print of the painting and not the original, it still conveyed to him a sense of wonder and tranquillity. "I was on vacation, wandering through the streets of New York City. After a long day, I found myself in a hotel lobby, and there it was –

a print of *Starry Night*," Vincent recalled. "The beauty of the painting struck me in the way it turned a simple night sky into something magical."

At that moment, he realised this was what he wanted for his company – a place where creativity, beauty and the comfort of home came together. Yola, too, was enchanted by the idea. For her, the word 'starry' symbolised limitless possibilities: Homes that are not just functional but also full of wonder, much like the swirling stars in van Gogh's masterpiece.

With this shared vision, they knew Starry Homestead was the perfect name for their dream business.

Following one's passion and curiosity

Vincent's journey into entrepreneurship was not by accident; it was something he had been learning from a young age. Growing up in a family that owned a wholesale business, he spent his childhood in showrooms, watching his parents navigate the world of commerce.



From them he learned two core values: integrity and trustworthiness. These lessons have shaped his approach to business, laying the groundwork for what Starry Homestead would become.

On the other hand, Yola's entrepreneurial spirit was fuelled by her love for learning and personal growth. She was always pushing herself to explore new challenges, eager to evolve both personally and professionally. While Vincent brought years of business experience, Yola's curiosity and drive added an important dynamic to their partnership.

Although Vincent's venture into interior design may seem like a natural fit today, he had initially pursued a career in something far less glamorous: shipbuilding. But it did not take long before he realised that his

true passion and talents lay elsewhere. Even in college, Vincent excelled in communication and sales, often becoming the top sales performer at computer exhibitions. "I love connecting with people," Vincent said simply. "It feels natural." That ability to connect with others led him to take a leap of faith – switching from shipbuilding to interior design. He saw an opportunity to combine his technical background with his talent for sales. While it was not an easy transition, it was the right one. By 2014, after honing his skills for over a decade, Vincent was ready to launch Starry Homestead.

When Yola joined his new venture, her organisational skills became the backbone of the business. The combination of Vincent's design and sales expertise with Yola's operational savvy created a powerful

partnership that allowed Starry Homestead to thrive.

Starting a business from scratch is never easy, and Vincent and Yola faced their share of challenges. Gaining trust in an industry where reputation is everything took time, patience and perseverance. They had to prove themselves with every project, gaining credibility one client at a time.

Growing the company through creativity and credibility

To Vincent and Yola, sincerity has always been at the heart of Starry Homestead. “We can only focus on ourselves and strive to do our best,” shared Vincent. Their honesty and transparency with clients set them apart from competitors, particularly in an industry where scepticism towards new companies can be high.

“
**We can only focus
on ourselves and
strive to do our best.**

”

Yola always strives for credibility. “We knew that, to earn trust, we needed to show our work,” she recalled. They began documenting every project, proudly displaying accolades and client testimonials to back up their promises. These efforts paid off, as word spread

about Starry Homestead’s professionalism and dedication to quality.

For Yola, building the right team was one of the biggest challenges. In the beginning, they leaned on friends and personal connections to help manage their growing business. But that made ending the working relationship difficult. “When our first few employees, who were also close friends, decided to resign, it was a tough moment,” shared Yola. “But it taught us a valuable lesson about the importance of treating all employees equally and fairly. This experience shaped how we approach leadership and helped us build a stronger, more cohesive team.” Yola’s natural leadership and ability to foster a supportive work environment played a crucial role in keeping everything running smoothly during those critical early stages.

By 2018, after just a few years of hard work, Starry Homestead had expanded to three branches, employing 60 designers. Their combination of engineering expertise and creative design solutions helped them carve out a unique place in the market.

Memorable clients, memorable moments

As Starry Homestead grew, so did their client base. By viewing their clients as more than people to shore up their bottomline, Vincent and Yola have cultivated long-term relationships based on trust and mutual respect with many of them.

One of their first clients, an elderly woman, mistook their showroom for a furniture store. Instead of brushing her off, Vincent took the time to listen to her, and the team

“

But it taught us a valuable lesson about the importance of treating all employees equally and fairly. This experience shaped how we approach leadership and helped us build a stronger, more cohesive team.

”

explained their services with patience. Impressed by their sincerity, she entrusted them with the design of her entire home. That small victory was a turning point for the new company, as the elderly woman referred many of her contacts to Starry Homestead, giving the company a much-needed boost in its early days.

Another client who stands out in Vincent's memory came to the showroom with a strange request: He needed a custom horse saddle cover. Even though this was not something they typically handled, Vincent and his team went above and beyond to help. Two years later, that same client returned – this time, needing a complete renovation for his five-room flat. “It was a reminder that going the extra mile for someone, even in a small way, could lead to larger opportunities,” Yola affirmed.

While they are able to cite memorable clients, both Yola and Vincent are quick to stress that they value every client equally. “We approach every client with the same level of care and dedication, and it's always rewarding to see how their feedback and needs push us to refine our services and continue to innovate. Every client contributes to our journey, making them all equally important and memorable to us,” said Yola.

Being more involved in the smooth running of the company, Yola, is more concerned with maintaining a cohesive team in a conducive environment. Rather than clients, at the top of her mind when it comes to memorable moments is Starry Homestead's annual event held at Suntec City. Seeing the entire team come together for such a large-scale affair is proof of just



STARRY HOMESTEAD



“

It was a reminder that going the extra mile for someone, even in a small way, could lead to larger opportunities.

”





SUPERTRUST 2023 2022 SUPERTRUST 2024

HOME to DESIGN
Singapore's No. 1 Renovation Partner

SINGAPORE'S
TOP 10
INTERIOR DESIGN FIRMS 2021

STARRY
HOMESTEAD

Starry Homestead Pte Ltd

“

We approach every client with the same level of care and dedication, and it's always rewarding to see how their feedback and needs push us to refine our services and continue to innovate.

”

how far they have come as a company, and brings her immense satisfaction.

Showing resilience during the pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, businesses around the world faced unprecedented challenges. Starry Homestead did not escape the onslaught. “The outbreak of COVID-19, particularly during the initial month of the circuit breaker, was an unforgettable period in

my life,” Vincent said, reflecting on the uncertainty they faced as operations came to a sudden and grinding halt.

But instead of panicking, Vincent and Yola saw the pandemic as an opportunity to reassess and strengthen their business. They used the downtime to accelerate their digital transformation – a process they had already begun in 2014. By the time the pandemic hit, they had fully digitised their contracts and materials, allowing them to continue working with clients remotely.

Yola also focused on investing in their team, providing training and development to help staff adapt to the changing landscape. This commitment to their employees paid off, enabling Starry Homestead to emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever.

The power of partnership

At the heart of Starry Homestead's success is the strong partnership between Vincent and Yola. Their complementary strengths have been key to the company's growth. Vincent's expertise in design and sales, paired with Yola's organisational skills and attention to detail, have created a powerful synergy that drives the business forward. Their shared values – honesty, innovation and a commitment to building lasting relationships with clients – have earned them a loyal customer base and industry recognition.

For Yola, one of her biggest inspirations has been Claire Chiang from the Banyan Tree hospitality group. “Her commitment to social responsibility and sustainability in business practices deeply influences my

approach, pushing me to integrate these essential values into my own business operations,” Yola explained.

Looking back, Vincent and Yola have much to be proud of. One of their most significant achievements has been their commitment to digital innovation. By streamlining their operations and reducing paper usage, Starry Homestead has become one of the most digitally advanced companies in the industry. This forward-thinking approach not only improved their efficiency, but also allowed them to better serve clients during challenging times.

Another highlight was Starry Homestead being featured on the TV programme *House Everything*. This gave the company valuable exposure and further solidified

their reputation as leaders in interior design. This recognition was especially meaningful for Yola, as it reflected the hard work and dedication that both she and Vincent had poured into their business.

Looking ahead

As they look to the future, Vincent and Yola are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. They plan to continue expanding Starry Homestead, reaching new markets and pushing the boundaries of what is possible in interior design. Their goal is simple: To create beautiful, functional spaces that bring joy and comfort to their clients, while also leaving a positive impact on the industry and the environment.

To their younger selves, they would offer this advice: “Never forget your dreams.



Keep fighting for them, no matter how hard it seems. Stay true to your vision and, with determination, you'll become the person you have always dreamed of."

With their passion, resilience and unwavering commitment to their clients, the future of Starry Homestead is as bright as the stars that inspired its name.

“

Never forget your dreams. Keep fighting for them, no matter how hard it seems. Stay true to your vision and, with determination, you'll become the person you have always dreamed of.

”



About Starry Homestead Pte Ltd



Starry Homestead, an innovative and dynamic interior design company based in Singapore, has built a solid reputation as a market leader through its commitment to excellence, personalised service, and digital innovation. Co-founded by Vincent Li and Yola Yu, the company sets itself apart from competitors with a unique blend of creativity, technical expertise, and an unwavering focus on customer satisfaction. Their philosophy is rooted in continuous improvement, not just competing with industry peers, but striving to outperform their past achievements.

One key differentiator for Starry Homestead is its forward-thinking approach to designer development. The company has a dedicated training department that ensures designers are always at the forefront of industry trends and product knowledge. Monthly training sessions, site visits, and factory tours enable the team to stay well versed in the latest practices, which translates into superior service delivery for clients. This comprehensive training framework allows the company's designers to excel in both product comprehension and innovative design solutions, further setting Starry Homestead apart in a competitive landscape.

Another major factor that distinguishes Starry Homestead is its pioneering

digitalisation efforts. Long before many competitors jumped on the bandwagon, the company embraced digital technology to optimise its operations. By digitising processes, Starry Homestead can remotely complete tasks that once required in-person meetings, leading to significant time saved. The integration of big data also allows for deeper insights into customer preferences, enabling more efficient and tailored service. This digital evolution enhances operational efficiency and gives the company a distinct competitive edge, allowing it to respond swiftly to client needs and industry shifts.

At its core, Starry Homestead's culture is centred around the principle of CARE, a guiding philosophy that influences every aspect of its operations. This commitment to care begins with their employees, ensuring their well-being and professional growth. The company places great importance on a collaborative work environment, where team members are supported and motivated to deliver their best. This ethos extends to clients, with personalised attention and tailored solutions that exceed expectations, as well as to vendors and partners, where long-term relationships are built based on trust and respect.

The CARE principle also reflects Starry

Homestead's dedication to community engagement and environmental sustainability. The company actively participates in local initiatives and has integrated sustainable practices into its operations, minimising its ecological footprint and contributing positively to society.

Looking ahead, Starry Homestead's vision for the next five years is focused on both growth and resilience. The company plans to strengthen its local market presence by investing in talent development and continually refining its operational systems. While international expansion remains a long-term consideration, Starry Homestead is currently prioritising strategic local growth, recognising the

importance of adapting to the post-pandemic landscape and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Through their commitment to innovation, customer-centric design, and a culture of care, Starry Homestead continues to set new benchmarks in the interior design industry. With a robust foundation in place, Vincent and Yola are confident that Starry Homestead will maintain its leading position locally, and that the groundwork has been laid for future expansion opportunities regionally and globally.



Eunice Yeung

Honouree of
SOE Award 2024

Director

EYSY Digital Pte Ltd

Industry

Advertising Activities

www.eysy.digital



Entrepreneurship *as a* role-playing game



Methodical, sincere and fiercely protective of what is important to her, Eunice Yeung of EYSY Digital stands as a formidable force in the realm of entrepreneurship.

Over the past seven years, Eunice has meticulously crafted her company into a close-knit and dynamic team, making sure to weigh every decision carefully to ensure it serves the best interests of both her team and their clients.

Founded in 2017, EYSY Digital is more than just a digital consultancy – it is a reflection of Eunice’s personal commitment to making the digital world accessible and straightforward, and to equip businesses with the tools to succeed. The name ‘EYSY’, pronounced ‘easy’, encapsulates their core mission: To simplify digital marketing for clients, and to deliver impactful results effortlessly. Musing on her personal resonance with the company, Eunice shared: “The initials ‘E’ and ‘Y’ are a nod to my own name, Eunice Yeung, symbolising my personal commitment to demystifying the digital world for our clients.”

Eunice likens the process of starting a

business to playing a role-playing game (RPG). For her, the objective is not merely to achieve victory or maximise profits, but to forge meaningful connections and experience the rich adventures that the journey entails.

Curiosity- and care-driven processes

During her time at Singapore Polytechnic about two decades ago, Eunice was tasked to start a business for her final-year project. Given half a year, she had “a lot of time to really figure out how and to really get [her] hands dirty and try out.”

At a tender age of 18, thanks to a collaboration between SP and Bugis Street, Eunice managed to secure a retail unit. However, that was only the start of the story. She had to execute the business plan from start to end – from what to sell and where to procure the products to manning the booth herself. “Basically, I had to figure everything out and find a way to make it work.”

However, what was really memorable to Eunice was her conversations with storekeepers rather than the assignment itself. “I am not an A-list kind of student. In school, I was pretty average, usually

HubQuarters



scoring Bs and Cs. Not being a natural in terms of academics, the day-to-day learning was due to me knocking onto walls, trying to get through the wall. That helped me to get to who I am today, where I know the dos and don'ts," she shared.

Despite her introverted nature, young Eunice was not one to stay in her comfort zone. She was so curious about the storekeepers' experience in Bugis Street that she overcame her reticence and took the plunge to engage in numerous conversations.

“
Not being a natural in terms of academics, the day-to-day learning was due to me knocking onto walls, trying to get through the wall. That helped me to get to who I am today, where I know the dos and don'ts.
”

“I was so curious about the store opposite mine, where they were selling decent-quality bags for really cheap. I couldn’t stop myself as I really wanted to understand how that was possible and sustainable.”

Fast forward to the founding of EYSY Digital, where Eunice’s tenacity and curiosity continue to be a beacon. “My interest in the digital industry stems from a personal passion for learning and growing within this dynamic field.

“
My interest in the digital industry stems from a personal passion for learning and growing within this dynamic field. The digital space is vibrant and constantly evolving, offering endless opportunities for innovation and problem-solving.
”

The digital space is vibrant and constantly evolving, offering endless opportunities for innovation and problem-solving. Being part of a digital agency also allows me the unique advantage of working across various sectors, including education, food and beverage, medical, and more,” she said.

In the formative years of her company, while she was still laying its groundwork, Eunice faced a particularly challenging client whose tendency for verbal disrespect took a toll on team morale. This situation prompted Eunice to make a bold and courageous decision to terminate the client’s contract. “I didn’t want to subject my team to unkind working environments,” she asserted, highlighting her unwavering commitment to maintain a supportive and respectful workplace environment.

Eunice’s passion and perseverance also shone through in another episode. At one stage, when she was feeling very down and stressed by all the projects she was managing, a friend suggested that she shut down the company and go back to being a salaried employee so as to enjoy stable pay and more structure. “Upon hearing that, I felt like my tears had a reverse gear and, instead of flowing out, it went back in,” she recalled. “I then asked myself why I started this journey in the first place. Sure, I wanted a better life for myself. But after having experienced good and bad bosses in the corporate world, I wanted to start a business with a work environment that people appreciated,” she stressed. “In that sense, I reminded myself that I could have a meaningful impact on my life and on the life of my future employees.” Evidently, Eunice’s vision transcends mere

profit margins; she places a high priority on the emotional well-being of her team over short-term financial gains. “So what if it will bring my company profit? It’s not worth my team’s emotional health,” she firmly stated.

“
**So what if it will
bring my company
profit? It’s not
worth my team’s
emotional health.**

”

Her dedication to creating a holistic environment extends to everyone involved – even her clients. Eunice’s commitment to this principle is manifested in every aspect of her work, highlighting the value she places on nurturing a positive and productive atmosphere.

Clients as co-partners

This profound care is also evident in Eunice’s interactions with her clients, whom she prefers to refer to as co-partners. For Eunice, EYSY Digital is not just a service provider or vendor, but a collaborator that is working alongside clients to elevate their respective businesses to new heights. She invests

considerable time in understanding the core values of her clients, formulating strategies that align with their needs through rigorous, data-driven processes. This approach demands substantial time and resources, but Eunice believes it is essential. “It is our responsibility to ensure that we don’t take the trust that our clients have placed in us for granted.” To Eunice, relationships are sacred and must be managed with the utmost respect. This philosophy is reflected in her honest and effective planning, which aims to benefit clients in the long run.

Emphasising that EYSY Digital develops marketing campaigns based on what best serves the client’s objectives, Eunice added: “It doesn’t matter what our personal preferences are; what matters is the best way to represent our clients.”

Challenges along the way

The journey of entrepreneurship, much like an RPG, is marked by a steep learning curve. Eunice started with “basic equipment and could only conquer lower-level monsters”, gradually gaining more experience and team members that allowed her to “explore more maps and fight tougher monsters”. She chuckled as she recounted how her team sometimes faced “higher-level bosses”, which required brainpower of the entire team to tackle.

These challenges have only strengthened her resolve to ensure quality and effectiveness through meticulous resource allocation and strategic planning. Establishing credibility in the early stages was particularly daunting, as Eunice had neither a physical office nor an existing client base.









“

It doesn't matter what our personal preferences are; what matters is the best way to represent our clients.

”

Yet, honesty is a principle that Eunice holds close to her heart. When asked about their lack of office space, her candid answer was: “I don't have office space but I have all these experiences that are unique, so you can decide whether you want to award me the contract or not.”

Eunice's diverse range of experiences – from her early days as a call centre agent to roles in sales, consultancy and technical support – has provided her with a robust foundation. By the time she transitioned from running an SEO consulting firm to founding EYSY Digital, she had accrued a treasure trove of knowledge and experience. Her unconventional path to entrepreneurship, built from the ground up, has enabled her to empathise deeply with her clients.

This also led Eunice to realise how important it was that she could rely on her team members, as she could not possibly do everything on her own. After all, she is only human, with flaws and weaknesses inherent in being one. For example, she relies on her team

members for their sharp evaluations and insights during the hiring process. This collaborative approach fosters a culture where everyone contributes their best, rather than shouldering burdens alone. This culture of care is evident not only in internal team dynamics but also in their client relationships.

Long-term relationships beyond transactions

It is no surprise that clients who have worked with EYSY Digital continue to do so over long periods of time.

Eunice reflected: “Numbers are not the only thing EYSY Digital cares about; especially if, in the long run, it's not beneficial for the client's brand.” Her commitment to authenticity and meaningful representation ensures that the campaigns she develops align with the client's true identity, fostering lasting relationships.

Eunice's approach extends beyond addressing immediate digital gaps; she also serves as a sounding board for those who are still defining their identities

in a fast-paced and saturated market. Through genuine dialogue and thoughtful reflection, she helps old clients to focus on aspects of their business, and clients who are just starting out to find their footing.

Giving back to her roots

Eunice's commitment to nurturing long-term relationships is further exemplified by her return to Singapore Polytechnic, where she was once a student. This time, however, she was the one sharing her entrepreneurial journey to a classroom filled with the next generation of innovators. Reflecting on this transition, Eunice mused: "I was there 18 years ago listening to people share about their business. And now, I am on the other side. It's surreal!"

This role reversal emphasises the importance of giving back and fostering the growth of emerging entrepreneurs. Eunice's experience documenting the 2024 iteration of Republic Polytechnic's iDARE Entrepreneurial Challenge is an additional testament to her dedication to inspire young visionaries. "These young people are so creative in responding to the dynamic world we live in now," she observed, noting their innovative entrepreneurial solutions to pressing global issues like food wastage and climate change.

Eunice poured her heart into ensuring that the spirit of entrepreneurial hope and creativity was vividly communicated in order to honour her commitment to



amplifying the voices of these young entrepreneurs. By investing her time and energy in supporting and encouraging the next generation, Eunice is not only giving back but also planting the seeds for a future where innovation and resilience continue to thrive.

A message to her younger self

Reflecting on her journey, Eunice said that she would advise her younger self to embrace bravery and curiosity, to push forward despite struggling with low self-esteem. “Rather than telling her about my current achievements, I’d focus on encouraging her to stay curious, keep asking questions, and continue learning and growing no matter where life takes her. It’s that curiosity and willingness to

learn that has been key to my journey, and I’d want her to hold on to that as she navigates her own path.”

Her transformation from a shy young woman to a confident leader serves as an inspiring reminder of the power of self-belief and persistence. To fellow entrepreneurs, Eunice offered a piece of valuable advice: Remain alert and adaptable. The unpredictable nature of business means that even the most meticulous planned strategies can be disrupted by unforeseen events, like the global pandemic. Eunice’s message is clear: Equip yourself to handle the inevitable curveballs that life and business will throw your way, and do not be complacent.



About EYSY Digital Pte Ltd



As a full-fledged digital consultancy, EYSY Digital offers a comprehensive suite of services designed to address every digital need under one roof. From digital marketing strategies and content creation to data analytics, web design, SEO, and user experience improvements, it provides end-to-end support tailored to help clients succeed. Interestingly, EYSY Digital does not run any marketing campaigns for itself, and relies fully on word-of-mouth referrals, thus establishing a sterling reputation in the digital consultancy realm for its trustworthiness and expertise.

EYSY Digital's goal is simple: To empower businesses by refining their online presence, driving meaningful engagement, and offering deep insights into their audience. EYSY Digital's commitment to excellence means its clients can trust it to deliver effective, easy-to-implement solutions that make a real difference in their digital journey.

The core differentiation of EYSY Digital lies in its belief in a data-first approach. This principle is not merely a buzzword, but a fundamental aspect of the company's operational and value delivery strategy, and is the basis of how it crafts highly targeted ad campaigns for each client.

With a firm foothold in Singapore, EYSY Digital has plans to expand to other strategic locations. The longer-term goal is to become a regional brand while continuing to serve a diverse pool of clients with their unique blend of creative and data-centric approaches to digital marketing.





SOE-Neo Startup Award Honourees' Stories



Part

4

SOE-Neo Startup Award Honourees

Benjamin Ling

Happie SG Pte Ltd

Robin Yoo

Agile 8 Advisory Pte Ltd

Sammi Lim

Brilliance Capital Pte Ltd

Gene Kwok, PBM

Damnzai Pte Ltd

Benjamin Ling

Honouree of SOE-Neo
Startup Award 2024

Founder & CEO

Happie SG Pte Ltd

Industry

Wholesale / Retail

www.happie.com.sg



Turning towards *the right path*



At age 31, Benjamin Ling is the proud owner of Happie SG, a specialised provider of innovative and premium water purification solutions in Singapore and beyond. While that is a remarkable achievement, his cheerful demeanour hides the challenges he faced before he decided to become a business owner two years ago.

“I mixed with the wrong company as a youth, dropped out of school, and wasted a lot of time partying and drinking. I had a wake up call only a few years ago when I realised I that I didn’t want to live my life this way anymore,” he shared.

Without a formal education, he stumbled into the industry via the recommendation of some friends when he was just 19. It was a position in sales, where he found himself knocking on doors in HDB blocks to sell water purifiers. “Door-knocking can be quite tiring and demoralising, especially when people just don’t like it and will slam the door in my face,” he recalled. “To be honest, without an education, there were no other paths available to me. So I decided to just give it my all.”

For nearly a decade, Benjamin honed his sales skills, becoming one of the top salespersons in the industry. Rather than spending his commissions on luxuries, he saved nearly 95% of his earnings, laying the foundation for what would become

“
Entrepreneurship means taking a lot. It’s about taking responsibility for your life. It’s no longer just about yourself. It’s about working together as a team to achieve a shared goal.

”

Happie SG. “Many other people would use it to buy cars and watches, but I did not touch it. This gave me a decent startup capital,” he stated.

Reflecting on his journey in entrepreneurship, he said: “Entrepreneurship means taking a lot. It’s about taking responsibility for your life. It’s no longer just about yourself. It’s about working together as a team to achieve a shared goal.”

From his early days of hedonism, the realisation that his life does not just belong to him, but also to those he cares

about and those who care about him “woke [him] up and made [him] want to do better”.

Lessons in discipline and pushing forward

Benjamin’s grit is evident long before he started his first job as a salesperson. As a teenager, he was on his secondary school’s badminton team. While his teammates trained twice a week, Benjamin pushed himself and practised every moment he could. At his most vigorous, he trained six days a week, leaving only one day for rest. “I wanted to give it



my all to see how I can get better in this sport that I love, so of course I trained as much as I could. I made sure to also train during the weekends with my parents' support," he added with a sense of pride.

This same drive and commitment carried him through the whole eight years of his sales career, even while maintaining a partying lifestyle. "Even when I was drinking the night before and felt very tired, I'd still show up for 9am appointments for home demonstrations. Even one sale was worth it," he remarked.

“
Challenges are inevitable, but everything has two sides. If there's day, there's also night. I've learned to find the good in every situation because nothing's all bad.
”

He draws parallels between his dedication to badminton and his work ethic. "It's the same feeling as when I was in my school's badminton team, even when I needed to drag myself to the training session – I will still make sure I show up and give it my all."

Holding on to optimism

"Challenges are inevitable, but everything has two sides. If there's day, there's also night. I've learned to find the good in every situation because nothing's all bad," Benjamin advised.

His brand of optimism is not one that is wilfully naive, but a clear-eyed one grounded in reality. In his vision for the business, he makes sure that he leaves little to chance. "We might not be the most established or oldest brand, but I made sure that everyone on my team is ready and well-equipped with everything," he said. To do that, he makes sure to do ample research before making any business decisions, trusting that the quality that Happie SG brings to the table speaks for itself.

Everything else, Benjamin mused, "is not up to me".

A business born from passion and persistence

Happie SG, founded in 2022, is Benjamin's first foray into entrepreneurship. His vision was simple but profound: Create a company culture centred around happiness and sincerity, both for his employees and customers. "I want everyone working here to remember that they need to be

happy before they can serve a customer. No one will buy from an angry or bad-tempered salesman,” Benjamin affirmed.

The company name reflects this philosophy. Benjamin explained: “Water is something everyone drinks every day. It’s close to people, not a luxury item. I want the name ‘Happie SG’ to make my customers feel comfortable and connected.”

The company’s debut at an IT show in Suntec City just two weeks after its inception was a baptism by fire. Without a website or Google reviews to back them up, Benjamin and his team had only their passion and sincerity to rely on. Yet they managed to stand out because their competitors, although more established, lacked the energy that Happie SG brought to customers. “Customers felt comfortable because we were so passionate and excited, while the other salespeople had no emotions,” he remembered.

Sacrifices made along the way

“Honestly speaking, that period was when I missed out on a lot of family gatherings. Every single birthday – I remember so clearly still – I could only spend 30 minutes with my family before rushing out for my appointments. For a few years, I was so consistent in my sales that I was the top salesman for quite some time,” Benjamin shared.

Despite this, his partner in business and life for over 15 years, Sharon Thiam, stayed by his side and worked hard alongside him. Now, she takes care of the operations part of the business,





“

I want everyone working here to remember that they need to be happy before they can serve a customer. No one will buy from an angry or bad-tempered salesman.

”

#happiefamily





HALL OF FAME

TOP SALES (JUL)

TOP REVIEWS (JUN)

SALES QUARTER

“
The most important thing is to help one another. This supportive culture will help the business move forward, and nobody will obstruct the way. We already have many competitors outside – I don’t have time for internal conflicts.
”

and is his pillar of support as he takes on the macro aspect of Happie SG to ensure that it flourishes.

The support he receives from his family goes beyond companionship; it also instils in him values such as independence and care through concrete acts of service.

Reflecting on parenthood

Benjamin acknowledged how different the expectations were in his mother’s generation compared to his own: “Back in my mother’s generation, maybe parents didn’t worry so much about boiling water for their kids. But my mum always made sure I had clean, boiled water ready.” In recalling the extra care that his mother took for his well-being, he added that it was a simple yet profound act of service that he did not fully appreciate until he became a father himself.

Now, as a parent, he understands the demands that come with raising a child, and how the little things, such as having access to clean water, can make a world of difference. “There’s no one to boil water for me anymore. I have to do it myself,” he stated, pointing out how much responsibility he now bears as both a parent and a provider.

This shift in perspective became even more significant when he was preparing his baby’s formula. “When you’re making your baby’s milk, it can be stressful. You’re trying to make sure the water is at the right temperature, while also juggling so many other tasks – whether it’s calming your baby, managing feedings, or dealing with sleep deprivation.”

Having clean water readily available, whether for making formula or ensuring the family’s health, became a small but important issue in the whirlwind of parenting. “It takes a lot off your plate when you don’t have to worry about something as basic as clean water. It’s one thing less to manage, and it brings peace of mind.”



This personal experience, coupled with his understanding of the importance of clean water for everyday life, became a driving force behind his passion for Happie SG. It is not just about selling water purifiers; for Benjamin, it is about making life a little easier for people, especially those with families, by providing a dependable source of clean water.

The culture of support and growth

Happie SG's success stemmed not just from its products, but also from the supportive and close-knit culture that Benjamin has cultivated.

Having experienced a cutthroat sales environment in his previous jobs, where colleagues would snatch each other's sales, Benjamin was determined to create a different atmosphere at Happie SG. "In Happie, they help one another," he stressed. Teamwork and mutual support are big factors in the company's rapid growth and high morale.

"The most important thing is to help one another. This supportive culture will help the business move forward, and nobody will obstruct the way. We already have many competitors outside – I don't have time for internal conflicts," he quipped.

JOY WATER



Convenience



Reduces
Health Risks



Sterilisation



Hydrati

removes taste
mutants from v
is always fre
may affect its

Ch

y Metal

Benjamin has a heart for everyone working with him, be they customer or staff. He views them all as people trying their best. It is why he has compassion and empathy for them. Due to his personal struggles with school, when he is recruiting for the company, he prioritises attitude and drive rather than academic achievements. “Paper qualifications don’t determine the worth and ability of a person,” he affirmed.

Challenges, resilience and perseverance

Starting a business is never without its challenges, and Benjamin faced more than his fair share. Competitors tried to cut off his suppliers and spread rumours that Happie SG would not last beyond six months. Some even blocked him from entering key markets and trade shows.

However, instead of being discouraged, Benjamin saw these obstacles as blessings in disguise. “I really count these challenges as my blessings

because they pushed me forward,” he reflected. “When I look back, the companies that started a year earlier than we did are nowhere near Happie SG. The speed that I am growing is way faster because of all these ‘angels,’ as I call them.”

For Benjamin, perseverance is key. He does not believe in backing down. Even when faced with closed doors – literally and figuratively – he tries his best before letting go. “I always believe that if I try my best and the door still doesn’t open, it means it’s not meant for me,” he said. This mindset has helped him remain resilient through difficult times.

What is next?

Benjamin’s vision for Happie SG is ambitious. He aims to make it the leading brand in the home wellness appliance industry in Asia. But he knows that achieving this requires taking small, consistent steps. “I’m more focused on the baby steps to keep everyone aligned with the vision. If my employees don’t

“

When I look back, the companies that started a year earlier than we did are nowhere near Happie SG. The speed that I am growing is way faster because of all these ‘angels,’ as I call them.

”

trust me, the vision is just for myself to hear," he explained.

Weekly meetings help keep the team on track, and Benjamin is committed to making sure everyone grows together. "When the whole team pushes themselves to their limit, everyone wins. The real happiness is when not only the company wins, but the salespeople win, too," he proudly revealed.

Beyond his business success, Benjamin sees Happie SG as a force for good in the community. His water filtration systems not only provide convenience

for families and offices, but also contribute to sustainability by reducing plastic waste from bottled water. "In offices, people use a lot of bottled water, which wastes plastic and space. With our products, you just connect to the water point, eliminating unnecessary waste," he described.

Looking ahead, Benjamin remains focused on innovation, growth and creating a lasting and positive impact through his products. His entrepreneurial journey is a testament to resilience, perseverance and the power of a positive mindset in the face of adversity.



About Happie SG Pte Ltd



In the competitive landscape of water purification, Happie SG distinguishes itself through its commitment to personal engagement and cutting-edge technology. Founded by Benjamin Ling, Happie SG has rapidly emerged as a leader in the industry by combining high-quality products with a deeply personal approach to customer service.

Happie SG is dedicated to sincerity and personal interaction. Unlike many e-commerce-based businesses that rely on automated customer service, Happie SG emphasises a hands-on approach.

Benjamin personally responds to customer inquiries and often appears in promotional videos and public discussions. If necessary, Happie SG would even arrange for personal visits to provide customer support. This sets Happie SG apart from competitors,

which would usually focus solely on product features.

Additionally, Happie SG's water dispensers are designed to offer unparalleled convenience and efficiency. Their tankless systems purify both cold and hot water, eliminating the need for reservoirs, which take up space. The sleek, compact design of their dispensers allows them to seamlessly blend into any environment, from modern kitchens to a busy office pantries. This design not only enhances functionality, but also adds a touch of sophistication to any setting.

Named endearingly as Joy, Dream and Delight, Happie SG's products cater to a variety of needs. Their diverse range of water dispensers ensures that every sip is refreshing and pure. They have also ventured into other water-related products such as scented shower filters.

Robin Yoo

Honouree of SOE-Neo
Startup Award 2024

**Managing Director
& Co-founder**

Agile 8 Advisory Pte Ltd

Industry
Services

www.a8ile.com



Infinite horizons



The seeds of entrepreneurship began with reflections of failure. For Robin Yoo, Managing Director and Co-founder of corporate secretarial services startup Agile 8 Advisory Pte Ltd, witnessing his father's entrepreneurial struggles in hairdressing, karaoke entertainment, and sand reclamation instilled in him an understanding of its challenges. "Seeing him in action subconsciously pushed me to be an entrepreneur," he reflected. "I am glad and grateful that dad showed me the dark side of doing business, so I can ensure I don't go through the same."

For 27 years, Robin's business philosophy remained unchallenged during his career as a corporate secretary. But since founding Agile 8 five years ago, he has been stress-testing it. Although he had initial aspirations to be a banker, the diversity of interactions in corporate secretarial work kept him engaged. "In this line of business, I get to interact with many industries – manufacturing, F&B, commodities, banking and even education. It's not for the money, but the love and passion in this line that sustains me."

Infinite visions for the people

The respect for the people he serves came through when naming Agile 8. A nod to the

symbol for 'infinity' (∞), the name reflects the startup's vision of limitless possibilities as a one-stop, end-to-end business solution service provider for their clients at every stage of their growth. "It means we need to be flexible in whatever we do, and there is nothing we can't do," explained Robin.

Agile 8 specialises in compliance and statutory filings for corporate and individual clients, including services related to accounting, tax, payroll, scrutineering, insolvency and more. Services aside, Robin also takes time to sit with clients to further develop their businesses. "When we know our clients better, you can configure the set up for them. We differentiate ourselves from our competitors with our personal approach," he shared. As such, Agile 8's customer base is built mostly through referrals. "We take pride in knowing our clients and being relatable to them – I can be their butler, chaperone, consultant or advisor. We don't want to be seen as clerks or administrators, but we add value to your business as partners," he asserted.

For Robin, the notion of adding value extends to larger communities around him. "We believe in supporting the Singaporean core and do not outsource any part of our operations to other countries to cut costs.

agile
Infinite Solutions



“

We take pride in knowing our clients and being relatable to them – I can be their butler, chaperone, consultant or advisor. We don't want to be seen as clerks or administrators, but we add value to your business as partners.

”

From humble beginnings to limitless growth

Agile 8, then

1 laptop, 1 computer, 1 printer, 2 staff,
4-person desk, 120ft² of office space

Agile 8, after 5 years

>20 staff, 2,000ft² of office space,
100% local shareholding company



We want to create opportunities and jobs for Singaporeans,” he said. Robin’s people includes his peers. “To me, the spirit of enterprise is not defined by just the word ‘enterprise’, but of togetherness for all fellow entrepreneurs,” he said. He likens entrepreneurship to a marathon. “As we see fellow runners drop out, let’s pull them along. We may not be able to pull everyone, but if we can bring one or two along with us, that’s the spirit of enterprise,” he added.

A bumpy start to the race

Robin’s marathon analogy stems from personal experience. At the sound of the starting pistol in October 2019, the race was off for Agile 8, only for the startup to encounter – just three months after – a major hurdle that was the COVID-19 pandemic.

Helping him weather that storm was the blessed buffer of sufficient capital from the prior sale of his flat, the company of former colleagues and clients who joined

him at Agile 8, and solid support from his family. However, new clients were needed to build the fledgling portfolio. “Trust has to be earned. You need to knock on people’s doors to say: ‘Give me a chance.’ Being persistent and a little thick skinned helps in overcoming challenges,” shared Robin.

Today, this vision has been realised, if not exceeded, with a staff strength of more than 20 and an office space of 2,000ft². “When I compare what we have now with what we had back then – with one computer, one laptop, one printer, and a four-person desk in a 120ft² space – it’s very fulfilling” Robin said, pride palpable in his voice.

These early struggles reinforced his belief in gaining through pain. “COVID-19 made me understand how adversity can strengthen our resolve. The key lesson for any entrepreneur is to never give up. You can only control things like cash flow, employee growth, or strategy; as long as we continue on the path with passion, we have already won 50% of the battle. Leave the other 50%

to the forces of the universe,” advised Robin.

To his fellow entrepreneurs thinking of joining the marathon, Robin reminds them to keep an eye on the horizon in this long race, which means having sufficient cash flow from the start and being guided by a long-term strategy rather than short-term growth. Time is also a precious resource. “I started Agile 8 so I could spend more time with my clients and family, especially my daughter,” he revealed. “Everyone is equally given 24 hours a day. But the ability to embrace time as our friend or to see it as the enemy is up to us.”

Today, far from his father’s mistakes, Robin’s startup is cementing its presence in the market, with plans for Agile 8 to dominate part of the of market share and be in the top five companies within the mid-market

segment by 2029. While expanding abroad is on the cards, Robin remains focused on local expansion. “Up to a certain stage of growth, sometimes small is beautiful. And we need focus to do beautiful things.”

“
Everyone is equally given 24 hours a day. But the ability to embrace time as our friend or to see it as the enemy is up to us.

”



Sammi Lim

**Honouree of SOE-Neo
Startup Award 2024**

Executive Director

Brilliance Capital Pte Ltd

Industry

Real Estate

www.brilliancecapital.sg



Realtor royalty



Once touted as the shophouse and strata queen, Sammi Lim is now setting her sights on an unconventional niche in the real estate industry – car parks.

As the Founder and Executive Director of Brilliance Capital, a real estate agency and brokerage of commercial, industrial, residential and luxury properties, Sammi found her initial footing in overlooked markets.

“In entrepreneurship, I believe it’s crucial to set your own trends rather than following the pack. Nobody knew how to sell a shophouse years ago, but I was the forerunner and triggered the market for sale of shophouses and strata,” Sammi said exuberantly. “Now, when people ask me what queen I’d like to be, I say: ‘Car park queen.’”

It was Sammi’s budding knack for sales – even as a final-year student at Singapore Management University – that caught the eye of a prescient professor, who arranged for her internship at Collier’s International. At the end of that stint 10 weeks later, she was offered a position in the company. “That was when real estate entered my blood, and I’ve never looked back,” Sammi recalled.

Sammi had notched nearly 20 years of experience with “the big boys” before

deciding to strike out on her own. That was when Brilliance Capital was born.

Filling the gaps

Moving from one major firm to another, Sammi noticed that departments such as Sales and Leasing were often siloed in their operations. The gaps between presented an opportunity where a startup could shine with the promise of a seamless one-stop service. Her goal was to go beyond mere transactions and access to high-end properties, with an end-to-end service tailored to her clients’ unique preferences and lifestyles. “I can sell you a shophouse, but also help lease your building, manage it when you’re not in Singapore, and handle the nitty-gritty of finding tenants so you can have a peace of mind.”

While Brilliance Capital started about four years ago as a one-woman show, a co-agent at Sammi’s very first deal as a solo entrepreneur was rather insistent about joining her company. It turned out that Sammi’s reputation had already spread throughout the industry via media appearances and talks that she had been giving. It was the newspapers that had crowned her ‘shophouse and strata queen’, although she joked that she prefers to be called a princess instead.



Nevertheless, this new regime in the territorial market of real estate needed allies to flourish. “I was prepared to lose my larger, institutional clients, knowing that they typically favour established agencies,” Sammi said. With the support and trust of her international buyer, Sammi brokered the sale of Yew Tee Point for Fraser’s Property for \$220 million – which turned out to be a milestone in the industry. It was also a turning point for the fledgling company, and opened the doors to the trust and support from international and institutional clients. This success was repeated with the sale of Bukit Timah Plaza car park for listed company Keppel in late 2023. “A common misconception is that the chance of success for a startup is slim, especially when competing against established names; this is far from the truth,” advised Sammi. “We may not be the biggest, but we aim to be the mightiest.” What Brilliance Capital has achieved in less than five years of existence is impressive, to say the least. Future expansion plans include growing her team and adding new departments as per market

demands. While Sammi remains primarily focused on the domestic market, the startup has broken through national borders with its entry over the past three years into the Forbes Global Properties Network, an exclusive membership network that allows Sammi to tap into the global community of real estate professionals and take their

“
A common misconception is that the chance of success for a startup is slim, especially when competing against established names; this is far from the truth. We may not be the biggest, but we aim to be the mightiest.
”

listings beyond home ground. “My goal now is to create more leaders within Brilliance Capital, more Sammi Lims who can drive the company forward,” she shared.

Staying grounded

Despite these achievements, Sammi grounds herself in the life lessons provided by her mother, a single parent who raised three children while juggling multiple jobs. “I worked hard from the start because I wanted to support her early retirement,” she revealed. “She taught me that there is no easy success in life. There is no such thing as work being too hard, too tough, or too tiring. Everything is a matter of mindset.”

This mindset includes having a community-minded ethos. “When we achieve success, we cannot forget about sharing and giving

back. I am a true believer of making an impact on people and my clients. I received help from bursaries and the community, and now I want to contribute back to the society,” Sammi stated.

As testament to that, Sammi serves as a grassroots leader in Tiong Bahru, and as the assistant treasurer of LadiesFirst, a collective of women entrepreneurs aiming to improve the social mobility of women. She also sits on the board of directors of the Industrial and Services Co-operative Society (ISCOS), which supports ex-offenders in their reintegration into society, and has raised funds in public campaigns for Breast Cancer Foundation.

“I want to stay ahead and lead the industry through my deeds or attitude.



I do not want to wait for things to come to me, but to create the opportunity for myself,” Sammi declared. “Do not wait. Create your own opportunities and have a vision to stay ahead. This is what entrepreneurship means to me – creating your own magic.”

“
**Do not wait.
Create your own
opportunities
and have a vision
to stay ahead.
This is what
entrepreneurship
means to me –
creating your
own magic.**
”

Crowning glories of Brilliance Capital

Office / Retail / Industrial

Yew Tee Point

S\$220.0 million

Samsung Hub

S\$67.9 million

New World Centre

S\$43.0 million

Parkway Centre

S\$26.4 million

Paya Lebar Square

S\$17.3 million

Southpoint

S\$15.6 million

The Octagon

S\$15.5 million

Apex @ Henderson

S\$14.5 million

Peninsula Plaza

S\$13.8 million

Manhattan House

S\$11.0 million

Grand Building

S\$7.0 million



Car Park

People's Park Complex

S\$39.33 million

Bukit Timah Plaza

S\$32.58 million

Holland Road Shopping Centre

S\$17.33 million

Parklane Shopping Mall

S\$16.18 million

Shophouse

64 Club Street

S\$26.03 million

81 South Bridge Road

S\$15.70 million

84 & 86 Tanjong Pagar Road

S\$10.68 million

161 Geylang Road

S\$8.63 million

Residential

22 La Salle Street

S\$18.50 million

15 / 15A / 15B Richards Ave

S\$11.96 million

7/9 Ludlow Place

S\$11.64 million

29 Greenbank Park

S\$9.90 million

2 Tamarind Road

S\$7.35 million

62 Kensington Park Road

S\$6.08 million

25 Jalan Baiduri

S\$4.00 million

Cairnhill Crest

S\$3.87 million

The Botany

S\$3.28 million

Gene Kwok

PBM

Honouree of SOE-Neo
Startup Award 2024

Founder

Damnzai Pte Ltd

Industry

Marketing & Infocomm

www.damnzai.com



Beyond the bottom line



It took just \$1,000 for him to take the plunge. For Mr Gene Kwok, founder of startup Damnzai Pte Ltd, starting a business never needed to entail too much initial capital or complexity. “It’s a misconception that you need very large capital or an overly detailed business plan to start,” Gene explained. “In reality, it’s about embracing uncertainty and agility, and adapting quickly. The sooner you start testing ideas, the faster you’ll find what works and what doesn’t.”

With that modest amount, Gene covered the paperwork and logistics to establish Damnzai as a media consultancy and agency focused on online strategic marketing for brands. Then, it was off to the testing grounds.

An unusual business model

What Gene had in mind was an uncommon practice among agencies back then – a monthly subscription model without tied contracts, allowing clients to cancel anytime. This approach allowed clients to continue building a relationship with Damnzai as long as results were achieved. Gene’s test has paid off in the last five years. “Some clients have stayed with us since the

beginning and have had remarkable growth stories; some have grown 10-fold in just a few years, and are now some of our best advocates,” Gene revealed.

With a background in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Gene has always approached pricing from a pragmatic business perspective, which allowed Damnzai to offer pricing structures and services that truly align with client needs instead of following industry norms. “Many agency founders typically transition from roles in established agencies, but because I did not come from that background, I could see things from a different perspective,” Gene explained. “For most SMEs, it just doesn’t make sense to have to pay an arm and a leg for fancy graphic design or go through overly complicated processes. They just want cost-effective solutions that drive results and growth.”

Interestingly, this out-of-the-box approach launched the small player into the arena of giants soon after Damnzai was formed.

Then a three-person team, it went up against a large multinational agency in a pitch for a well-known brand. “We had a chance to meet their Head of Marketing

“

Many Singaporean brands have the potential to compete and thrive internationally. Just as we send athletes to represent Singapore at the Olympics, I hope to see more of our homegrown brands flying the Singapore flag high and making their mark globally, and we aspire to be the local agency that helps them achieve that!

”

on a Friday. She told us she was open to our proposal if we could deliver it by Sunday,” Gene recalled. Despite the David-Goliath difference in staff strength, Damnzai eventually earned the account with its fresh ideas and unique approach. “Winning that account was a significant moment. It signalled that a small team like ours could be entrusted with the business of a company of such stature,” Gene affirmed.

Since then, Damnzai has added many notable brands to its client roster and earned various accolades. In 2022, the firm was recognised at the Singapore Business Awards as the ‘Best Conversion Advertising Specialist’. In 2023, Damnzai gained entry into the Top 10 ranks in four advertising categories, including ‘Most Effective Use of Omnichannel’, ‘Digital’, ‘Programmatic’, and ‘Integrated

Media’, through its iconic work with Singapore Sports Hub and the Singapore Rugby Sevens.

Despite these laurels, Gene reported that Damnzai is not fixated on chasing after the big names, and assures that SMEs will always be a part of his client roster. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Damnzai provided pro bono digital transformation services to struggling SMEs and continues to sponsor charitable campaigns, such as free ad placements for the Singapore Cancer Society.

Entrepreneurship beyond financial gains

“Entrepreneurship is driven by a deeper sense of purpose beyond financial gains. It’s about creating a legacy that transcends individual existence. I resonate with the idea that a meaningful life is one where



you leave behind something enduring that impacts people in a positive way,” Gene reflected.

This purposeful mandate is evident in his involvement in various community initiatives, such as being a former Chairman of the Zhenghua Youth Network, and serving on the Central Youth Council of People’s Association’s Youth Movement for over 10 years.

Flying the Singapore flag high

Gene’s zest and passion for Singapore is also reflected in the startup’s name. “The phrase ‘damn zai’ is familiar to many Singaporeans, reflecting a bold, daring spirit. As many competitors

had foreign ties, I wanted a name that would stand out, exude confidence and authenticity, and be uniquely Singaporean,” he explained.

Driven by its next goal of helping Singaporean companies succeed on the global stage, Damnzai has opened an office in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and has already begun plans to establish its next overseas office, to be located in China, by 2025. “We believe that many Singaporean brands have the potential to compete and thrive internationally. Just as we send athletes to represent Singapore at the Olympics, I hope to see more of our homegrown brands flying the Singapore flag high and making their mark globally, and we aspire to be the local



agency that helps them achieve that!” Gene shared.

But while Damnzai’s business traverses across borders now, there was a time when it was much more grounded. Clients’ budget constraints during the COVID-19 pandemic were a strain on Damnzai. Yet, ensuring the well-being of his team was foremost on Gene’s mind. “In those tough times, I paid myself last. There’s a saying that goes: ‘Leaders eat last.’ True leadership entails owning the responsibility with few accolades to affirm you. The pats on the back become scarcer as you ascend the ranks. Being a leader is both a privilege and a responsibility. You celebrate the successes, but you also shoulder the failures.”

Gene’s journey with Damnzai has been driven not just by his vision

“
Winning that account was a significant moment. It signalled that a small team like ours could be entrusted with the business of a company of such stature.

”

and determination, but also by the unwavering support of his partners and family. “Building a business is never a solo endeavour,” Gene said. “Through the highs and lows, the encouragement from my family has been instrumental. My parents and aunt have been incredibly understanding of the sacrifices, especially my frequent travelling. They’ve been my pillars, offering advice, motivation and even constructive criticism when needed. Entrepreneurship is often a sacrifice for everyone, not just the founder, and their patience and belief in me have allowed me to remain focused on the bigger picture, creating a lasting legacy through Damnzai while staying true to my values.”

Damnzai by the numbers

>300

campaigns for clients



7-figure amount

in annual digital adspend

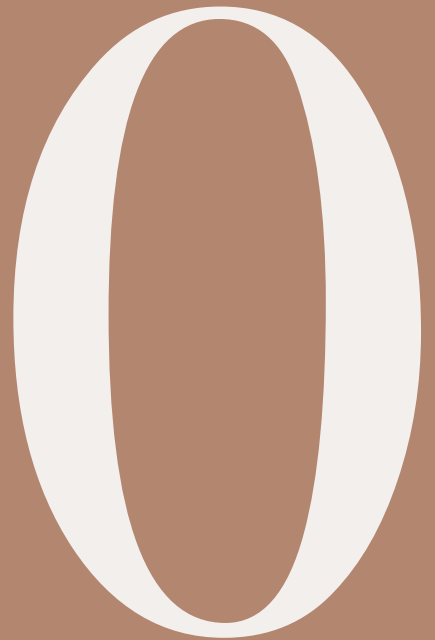


**3 key markets for
the near future**

Singapore, Malaysia, China



Honourees



SOE 2024 Honourees

Student Interviewers

SOE Partners

Part

5

SOE-CLA Global TS Entrepreneurship Award 2024

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
The Soup Spoon Pte Ltd www.thesoupspoon.com	Anna Lim SouperChef, Founder	F&B

SOE Award 2024

(By company name, arranged in alphabetical order)

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
Aik Chin Hin Pte Ltd www.aikchinhin.sg	Mr Lawrence Seow Hock Cheng Director	Manufacturing
Apex Asia Management Group www.asipty.com	Ms Jocelyn Tan Shu Mei Group CEO	Real Estate
BeyondEdge Pte Ltd www.beyondedge.com.sg	Mr Tang Chee Weng CEO	Information Technology

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
D'Penyetz www.dpenyetz.sg	Mr Edy Ongkowijaya Director	F&B
DP Dental Pte Ltd www.dpdental.com	Ms Louisa Lee Managing Director & Founder Dr Yue Weng Cheu Chief Clinical Director & Founder	Healthcare – Dental Services
Eelit Agency Pte Ltd www.eelit.sg	Mr Patrick Ee Founder	Domestic Worker Employment Placement Agency
EYSY Digital Pte Ltd www.etsy.digital	Ms Eunice Yeung Director	Advertising Activities
Food Playground Pte Ltd www.foodplayground.com.sg	Mr Daniel Tan Founder & CEO	Training Courses / Cooking School
Gems Origin www.gemsorigin.com	Ms Venessa Lim Managing Director	Retail
Gemstory World Pte Ltd www.gemstory.asia	Mr Glenn Poh Director	Retail

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
Harts Salon Pte Ltd www.hartssalon.com	Mr Noel Ng Director	Retail / Service
Heartland Rehab Pte Ltd www.heartlandrehab.sg	Mr Balaji Prem Chand CEO	Healthcare
iClick Media Pte Ltd www.iclickmedia.com.sg	Mr Terence Sim Kuan Jin Director	Professional Services & IT
Integrated International School Pte Ltd www.iis.edu.sg	Dr Vanessa von Auer Founder & CEO	Education
Invade www.byinvade.co	Mr Kent Teo Founder & CEO	Event Management

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
Invictus Law Corporation www.invictuslaw.sg	Mr Josephus Tan Joon Liang Founder & Managing Director	Legal / Law
L&H Food Enterprise Pte Ltd www.frozt.co	Mr Glen Lee Tong Liang Co-founder, Director Mr Terence Lee Tong Hong Co-founder, Director	F&B Manufacturing
Patisserie G Pte Ltd www.patisserieg.com	Mdm Gwen Lim Director	F&B
SpaJelita Pte Ltd www.spajelita.com	Mrs Fadilah Abdul Majid Director	Beauty
Speco www.speco.sg	Mr Benjamin Chua CEO	Manufacturing (Chemicals)
Starry Homestead Pte Ltd www.starryhomestead.com	Mr Vincent Li CEO Ms Yola Yu COO	Interior Design

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
Sunrise Trading Pte Ltd www.sunrise168.com.sg	Mr Lor Sy Tuck (John) Managing Director Ms Cheng Chiew Fong Director	Manufacturing
Supreme Cars Pte Ltd www.supremecars.com.sg	Mr Devin Koo Managing Director Mr Eric Chua Managing Partner	Automotive
Sweetest Moments Pte Ltd www.sweetestmoments.com.sg	Ms Rachel Chong Ee Ping Founder & CEO	Manufacturing / F&B
Synergy Financial Advisers Ltd www.synergy.com.sg	Mr Adrian Peh Chief Executive Officer	Financial Advisory
Truegenics Pte Ltd www.truegenics.com	Mr Alvin Huang Chief Executive Officer	E-commerce / Health
WriteHaus Asia www.writehaus.asia	Ms Durga Poonambalam Creative Director	Management Consultancy Services

SOE-Neo Startup Award 2024

(By company name, arranged in alphabetical order)

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
Agile 8 Advisory Pte Ltd www.a8ile.com	Mr Robin Yoo Managing Director	Services
Brilliance Capital Pte Ltd www.brilliancecapital.sg	Ms Sammi Lim Founder & Executive Director	Real Estate
Corridor Farmers Pte Ltd www.corridorfarmers.com	Mr Roc Koh Chit Song Co-founder	Agrotechnology Consultancy Services
Damnzai Pte Ltd www.damnzai.com	Mr Gene Kwok, PBM Founder	Marketing & Infocomm
Exponential Learning Lab Pte Ltd www.eblity.com	Ms Lily Phang Co-founder	Education Technology
Fix Bot www.thefixbot.com	Mr Joel Chin Director	IT Services

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
Frass Pte Ltd www.thefrass.com	Mr Zihan Poh Founder	Agriculture
Haldyplus Nutrition Pte Ltd www.haldyplus.com	Mr Pushendra Nath Sharma Founder & CEO	FMCG (Consumer Packaged Goods)
Happie SG Pte Ltd www.happie.sg	Mr Benjamin Ling CEO	Wholesale / Retail
MOA Digital Media Pte Ltd www.moadigitalmedia.com	Ms Chew Zhiqi Evelyn Managing Director	Video Marketing
Navdeck Pte Ltd www.navdeck.com	Mr Sean Tan Sheng Han Co-founder & CEO	ICT
Octopus8 Pte Ltd www.octopus8.com	Mr Lawrence Luan CEO	Information Technology

COMPANY	HONOUREE	INDUSTRY
<p>Rolling Pineapple Pte Ltd www.rollingpineapple.sg</p>	<p>Mr Nicholas Choy Managing Director</p>	<p>Education and Healthcare</p>
<p>Sin & Savage Pte Ltd www.sinandsavage.com</p>	<p>Mr Tan Wei Shan Founder, CEO & Chef</p>	<p>F&B</p>
<p>Swimwerks Asia Pte Ltd www.swimwerks.com.sg</p>	<p>Mr Herron Ho Wei Chong Director</p>	<p>Education & Manpower Contracting Services</p>
<p>The Love Studios Pte Ltd www.thelovestudios.co</p>	<p>Mr Hayden Chan Director</p>	<p>Photography & Media Production</p>
<p>The Muscle Remedy Pte Ltd www.themuscleremedy.com</p>	<p>Mr Salman Fitri Managing Director</p>	<p>Healthcare</p>
<p>Werms.inc www.wermsinc.com</p>	<p>Mr Aaron Chen Managing Partner</p>	<p>Agriculture</p>

Student Interviewers

ITE College Central

Chris Goh
Geraldine Chan Xinlu
Evan Lim Ze Long

Goh Yu Ning, Renilda
Cassandra Diana Hendricks
Muhammad Syakir Bin Abdul Ghafar

ITE College East

Naomi Ong Yu
Teresa Tan Yi Xin

Aqil Durratulhikmah bin Mohammad Hashrin

ITE College West

Lee Zong Han Ryan
Irvine Chew Wee Loon

Javier Loh Kin Peng
Tan Kai Heng Josef

Singapore Institute of Management (SIM)

Quek Cheng Joo Joie

Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)

Sebastian Hoe Wee Kiat

Temasek Polytechnic

Ng Ye Kai Maxx

Student Interviewers

Singapore Polytechnic

Goh Jun Hui (Jalen)

Haiqal Huzairie Bin Harzelly

Janine Liaw Yu Lin

Jolyn Ong Jing Han

Angela Goh Siew Ting

Ezekiel Ashton Fong

Chan Bock Yean

Chong Wei Jun

Lim Ze Kai

Tan Xuan Ting

Lee Si Xian Eva

Tan Hui Yi

Fang Luo Lin

Yang Xin Hui Chloe

Zhang Chen Yang

Desiree Lui

Nur Syarafyna Bte Roslee

Ethan Tan Wei Yi

Daniel Lim Kar Zun

Republic Polytechnic

Lim Tong Ying Amanda

Lim Shao Wei Tristan

Komal Bhandari

Alysia Nadia Binte Mohamed Satria

Low Zi Tian

Keefe Lim Wei Rong

Chin Yong Wu Damien

Azad Akim Ahamed

Ng Hao Zhe Brian

Ng Jeng Jack

Matthew Kwek Geng Hao

Ryal Qusyairi Bin Mohd Zaidi

Eric Koh Ming Feng

Wong Jing Tong

Yap Meiyi Michelle

Asuncion Avelino III Dela Cruz

Alejandro Alyssa Nicole Cerrero

Yumni Koi Binte Zulkiflee

Lau En Ci Clairre

Muhammad Hakim Bin Muhammad Rostam

Nikesh Sundara Nageasuwaran

Kylie Tan Si Ning

Chloe Goh Xin Yi

Safiyah 'Aliyah Binte Suraidi

Goh Yen Ting Trishelle

Movida Kimberly Anne Pareja

Ong Qian Ying, Dionness

Voon Jing Wen

Key Partners

Main Partner

CLA Global TS
The Growth Strategist For Asia

Strategic Partner

PropNex.com

Growth Partner



Corporate Social
Responsibility Partner



Sustainability
Partner



Official Partners

REZT+RELAX
INTERIOR DESIGN

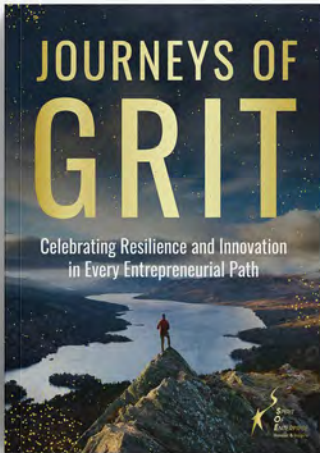
REDWOOD
bringing your design alive

JAG ENGINEERING (S) PTE LTD

NEW

SOE BOOK 2024: Now available online

Explore the inspiring journeys of Singapore's top entrepreneurs with the all-new online edition of the SOE Book! Gain insights into their success stories and learn valuable lessons for your own entrepreneurial path.



Share the inspiration!

Motivate your friends and loved ones by sharing this QR code and let them discover how resilience and innovation shape successful businesses.



Be part of the next edition!

Have a story to tell? Scan the QR code above or visit www.soe.org.sg to find out how you can become an SOE Award honouree and share your journey in the next edition.

Start sharing and inspire the next wave of entrepreneurs today.

The Spirit of Enterprise (SOE) book is an annual celebration of the entrepreneurial spirit that defines Singapore. In this 21st-year edition, *Journeys of Grit* honours the resilience, innovation and determination of six established companies and four dynamic startups. Their stories reveal the real struggles behind every success and showcase the strength it takes to thrive in today's competitive landscape.



Lawrence Seow
Aik Chin Hin Pte Ltd



Jocelyn Tan
Apex Asia
Management Group



Daniel Tan
Food Playground Pte Ltd



Terence Sim
iClick Media Pte Ltd



Vincent Li
Starry Homestead Pte Ltd



Yola Yu
Starry Homestead Pte Ltd



Eunice Yeung
EYSY Pte Ltd



Benjamin Ling
Happie SG Pte Ltd



Robin Yoo
Agile 8 Advisory Pte Ltd



Sammi Lim
Brilliance Capital Pte Ltd



Gene Kwok, PBM
Damnzai Pte Ltd

Each year, the SOE book adopts a new theme, creating a treasured collection that captures the evolving challenges and triumphs of entrepreneurs. With its powerful stories and valuable lessons, *Journeys of Grit* is a must-have for students, SME owners, and investors, offering inspiration and insights into the entrepreneurial journeys shaping Singapore's future.

Collect each edition — a beacon of entrepreneurial wisdom that belongs in every library.

