

'No success without effort'

Kam Foong Keng, executive chairman of New Hoong Fatt Holdings Bhd (NHF), tells SunBiz how she was able to turn the company that started as a distributor of automotive body replacement parts into a manufacturer and a market leader of such products, which now exports to more than 50 countries.

SUCCESS: THE INSIGHT STORY

How has your life experience made you the leader you are today?

I joined the company as a fresh graduate and worked in the trading section for five years. During the start of NHF's manufacturing division, it was a period of transforming the company, taking it to the next level from trading (sales strategies) to manufacturing, which required looking at processes, putting up a structure, control and procedures.

What were the highlights and challenges during your tenure at NHF?

The main highlight has certainly been the setting up of the group's manufacturing division. From practically no employees and processes, we built up the manufacturing division to produce metal and plastic automotive parts. We developed the overseas market and currently export to over 50 countries worldwide.

The main challenges were during the early days when we were building the manufacturing line to ensure that it all ran smoothly. At that time, to us, there was no difference between day and night; it was non-stop work.

Today, the challenges are in hiring, employing and developing the right individuals for the job.

What advice can you offer to budding entrepreneurs?

My advice to them is: be willing to learn and ask questions. Hard work and effort are also essential. At the end of the day, nothing comes easy. There can be no success without effort.

How do you maintain work/life balance?

I try my best to balance my time between work and family. My personal life is often my working life too because I really enjoy my work.

Over the last few years, I have been travelling a lot. As much as possible, I travel on weekdays, and reserve my weekends for home and family.

How has mentorship made a difference in your professional and personal lives?

It has definitely made a huge difference, both professionally and personally. My main mentor was my father, who started the business. For over 20 years, he guided and advised me based on his vast experience.

Over the years, I have also sought mentorship from different industry experts, ranging from banking to supply chain, to get a well-rounded business perspective.

What do you want to accomplish in the next five years?

In the next five years, the most important task is to put in place a succession plan for NHF.

In order for the business to

grow and be sustainable, we have to have the right people. I have always believed that people are our assets, and without them we would not have achieved the successes we have so far.

Most admired business leader? Why?

This has to be my father; primarily because of all the experience he shared with me. He was a humble man who had a vision for the company. His integrity and the trust he gained from people was also another trait that I admire. People said he "walked the talk".

The biggest challenge that you have faced?

Entering new and challenging markets such as China and Indonesia where



we were faced with a completely different business environment. In addition, we also faced hurdles in employing the right type of talent.

These ventures taught us good lessons, and I am happy to say that as

of today, our China and Indonesia trading arms are successfully developed and we are positive about seeing them mature.

Blue or red ocean strategy? Why?

We have seen the benefits of a blue ocean strategy primarily when we ventured into Indonesia to develop NHF's trading arm. Looking at the automotive replacement parts industry in Malaysia, we saw an opportunity as there was less competition. As such, NHF is fulfilling a need in the industry.

A must-read for every business owner/manager.

I recommend leadership books and biographies of successful and well-known individuals.

I am also reading spiritual books to develop a sense of deeper personal thinking. I recommend *Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle.