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Try, and you'll find out what you are capable of

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IN this week's Success: The Insight Story column, SunBiz tunes in to what Extreme Broadband founder & managing director Wong Weng Yew (pix) has to say.

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

One of the notable life experiences that made me who I am today would be the tough life that I had in the UK that taught me perseverance. I did my degree in engineering in the UK, and I had a partial scholarship to finish my degree there. My parents helped me by paying another half while I worked long hours in a Chinese restaurant to sustain and pay for my living expenses.

I was eager to be financially stable and wanted to earn as fast as I could. The tough life in the UK has definitely contributed and taught me to persevere. It prepared me for the challenges posed in establishing my own startup and made me the leader that I am today.

What traits do you look for in your talent or how do you decide who is right for a job?

I typically look for candidates who can demonstrate strong capability to solve problems. A habit in organising resources, and good communication skills are bonuses.

There is no right or wrong in determining which talent is the right fit, as I believe every individual brings different talents and skillsets to the table. Each individual has certain required or desired knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential for success on the job.

Given these talents and skills owned by an individual, I believe it is essential for an individual to have a high entrepreneurial spirit, where they are not afraid of trying new ideas as well as embarking on a new journey that is outside of their comfort zone. One would not know what they are capable of if they do not try, right?

How do you think the industry you are in will evolve?

The advancement and acceleration of technology have massively matured over the years. The industry is reshaping public and private sector structures, creating new opportunities for markets and businesses. Twenty years ago, we did not know how the

internet would unfold and change the way we live. But now we can see the ever-growing demand in the IT industry, with different trends shaping the way we live, from the increasingly competitive broadband market, the revolution of 5G, to the next evolution of the metaverse.

With this, I foresee that Malaysia is at the beginning stage of a digital transformation. As the speed of transformation ramp up, more data centres will be built around Malaysia, connectivity will be liberalised – users, especially in the business segment, have options to pick and mix connectivity ala carte to cater to anytime, anywhere working style, and Malaysia, thanks to its immense resources, will become the regional green internet hub. However, one thing is certain; the way we use the internet 15 years down the road maybe unrecognisable from what we know today.

We all know about the industrial revolution, are we in for a technological revolution? Your thoughts.

Yes, I believe our country is ready for technological change. The importance of technology and digitalisation in increasing quality of life and economic growth has become strongly intertwined. Our technological revolution will be accelerated by our national 4IR strategy, which intends to transform our country into a high-tech nation by 2030. The policy's fundamental goal is to create a science, technology, innovation, and economy-led environment. If we combine the adoption of developing technologies with the growth of our industries, we will be successful. It will also enable us to promote local technological development by expanding the scope of 4IR technologies.

How has mentorship made a difference in your professional life?

I did not have any particular mentor but I attended an executive training course known as Owner, President Management course by Harvard Business School. The short course, which is based on case study method, has taught me how to solve many of my business problems and definitely brings a transformational impact on my career.

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

Since EBB's inception, the team and I have spun off many business units, expanding from our core business of providing internet services to leasing telecom infrastructure and e-commerce. I then founded Open DC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of EBB that engages in the provision of data centre and co-location services through its connectivity-rich data centres across the nation. Open DC JB1 data centre is also home to DE-CIX-JBIX Internet Exchange (IX), a partnership synergy between Malaysia's second IX and the world's leading IX to accelerate the development of connectivity hubs in Malaysia.

Beyond what I hoped for when I started these companies, I hope to achieve new innovative and improved ideas in the services we provide to businesses, as well as provide next-generation telecommunications services that deliver reliable, high-performance internet and network connectivity services to enterprises, financial service industries, educational institutions, and content providers not only in Malaysia but throughout Southeast Asia.

Best piece of advice you ever got in your career?

One, to always take one step forward in planning things and to always prepare for the worst-case scenario.

Two, when embarking on a new journey, do not be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and try new ideas. If you believe that you can do it and take a leap of faith in yourself, you will see what you are capable of.

Most-admired business leader? Why?

After graduating, I had my first job with Newbridge Networks which was founded by Terence Hedley Matthews, a successful techno entrepreneur who was also Wales' first billionaire. He is my role model and my benchmark guy. Matthews has founded and funded over 100 companies in the high-tech communications field and has demonstrated exceptional leadership in the IT and communications industry.

Seeing his wisdom and sincerity in helping numerous entrepreneurs launch their own companies motivates me to follow in his footsteps and to be able to do what he does in helping businesses. In a way, Matthews' entrepreneur and leadership skills have also motivated me to revolutionise Malaysia's internet capabilities and to further improve and develop our internet capabilities.

If you could have an hour with any thought leader in the world, who would it be and why?

That would be Barrack Obama. How he motivated his followers to change and his vision have always interest me and have been the subject I studied.

What has been the biggest challenge you have faced, and what did you learn from it?

Throughout my journey to revolutionise Malaysia's internet capabilities, I have had my fair share of hard times securing contracts in such a competitive and cut-throat industry that is filled with more established and experienced industry players. Due to this, I assembled a team of highly committed executives and focused the team vigorously on delivering customer expectations and product differentiation. On top of this, talent management has been my focus of my work.

A must-read for every business owner or manager is ...

I love spending time reading about outstanding individuals like Robert Kuok, who is one of the most successful business magnates in Malaysia. It is one of those inspiring rags-to-riches stories. Drawing inspiration from his wisdom and perseverance throughout his business journey, Kuok believes that there are risks in every business and that if we are not brave enough to seize the first or next opportunity, we will be poor for the rest of our lives. I strongly believe this, and it's one of the things I hold on to. It has made me realise that the journey of starting a business is not easy. However, if we want to do something and make our way through it, we can and will, no matter the challenges thrown our way.

Meanwhile, the book that I found an essential read is *What to Ask the Person in the Mirror* by Robert Kaplan.