

TRANSCRIPT FROM CAPITAL 95.8FM ON FRIDAY 4 JULY 2014

Last December [2013], the Ministry of Social & Family Development (MSF) initiated the Social Enterprise Mentoring Programme, with the objective of facilitating the transfer of skills from the commercial sector to social enterprises, by giving an opportunity for experienced business leaders from the corporate world to take on a mentoring role with social enterprises.



One of the five social enterprises involved in this initiative is Laksania, a restaurant that specialises in selling fusion Laksa. It works with organisations such as the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled (Minds), hiring a wide spectrum of people with disabilities to help make Laksa pastes from scratch in its central kitchen. Mdm Sim Sin Sin, former CEO of Secret Recipe and founder of Laksania, hopes that the mentor will be able to guide Laksania out of their financial struggles.

Mdm Sim: *"I remember it was around October, when the 'match-making' event was held. There was about ten professionals introduced to us, each with their own field of expertise. Each of us took turns sharing about our respective social enterprises, and the struggles or issues that we were currently facing. Then the professionals also shared more about themselves and what they do. We all then each listed our top three choices for mentor or mentee, and after comparisons, the match was done!"*



Six months into the programme, both participating social enterprises and their respective mentors have just finished their midterm assessment. Two pairs of mentor and mentee are here to share more on the success of the programme and their experiences.

The mentor for Laksania is the Founder and Managing Director of boutique corporate advisory firm, PLAN-B ICAG Pte Ltd, Mr Lim Soon Hock. He has more than 30 years of experience as a board member, CEO, and private investor across various highly competitive industries in a global environment. Under the mentorship programme, Mr Lim has monthly meetings with his mentee, Mdm Sim, to discuss business strategies to be taken forward.

Mdm Sim: *"Within the first meeting, my mentor had already enlightened me on several issues. He said, based on his years of experience, one of the most important factor of success is to know when to let go."*

Laksania originally had 4 branches and one central kitchen, but due to rising costs and low revenue, Laksania suffered huge losses. After much consideration, Mdm Sim decided to listen to the advice given by Mr Lim and take up his suggestion on closing down some branches.

Mr Lim: *"The social enterprise has to be viable. If you cannot make it viable, then you cannot deliver your social mission. Fundamentally, the problem as I see is cash flow. So I recommended to Mdm Sim a turnaround plan, which would require the enterprise to generate more revenue and cut costs."*

Mr Lim also suggested finding more investors and revising their marketing strategy to improve exposure to the public as a social enterprise.

By closing two branches, Laksania saved on costly rental and wages. Mdm Sim also decided to leverage the central kitchen to supply meals for nursing home, Simei Care Centre, as an additional source of revenue.

Mdm Sim believes the best experience in the programme thus far is the opportunity to work closely with the mentor to evaluate the company's issues and finding solutions together.

Mdm Sim: *"As a mentor, Mr Lim doesn't involve himself in our day to day operations. While I feel stuck or trapped because of our financial issues, he instead would calmly look at these issues in a different perspective, and ask tough questions, and give advice and suggestions."*

Mr Lim believes it isn't easy to be a good mentor.

Mr Lim: *"In mentorship you are actually providing advice, so you need to listen. You need to listen to what your mentee is telling you. But at the same time, you also need to be listening, understanding what makes sense and what is doable and what is not doable. And then the other important thing is that as a mentor, you should not make the decisions for the mentee."*



Laksania mentor, Mr Lim
Soon Hock

The participating Mentor for the social enterprise, Adrenalin, an events company, Mr Andrew Khoo Boo Yeow, Director of Business Development and Operations of ABR Holdings Ltd, shares similar views with Mr Lim. His role as a mentor was to help Adrenalin to visualise and develop future plans for their social enterprise.

Mr Andrew Khoo: *"Where I come from, our organisation is a listed company. We are a bit more established in that sense, so I think I try and give them that perspective of a bigger organisation, where there is a bit more of a structure; corporate structure, corporate governance. Those are the areas that they are trying to improve on. So I those are the areas that I feel like, maybe I add a bit of a value [to them]."*



Adrenalin has about 30 employees, amongst them about 30% are physically challenged, deaf or youth-at-risk. Five years since they started operations, Adrenalin has completed more than 100 projects for clients including Shell, DBS Bank, City Developments and the People's Association. Mr Richardo Chua, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Adrenalin, says that the

company has already established itself well in the local business, but the challenge moving forward is learning how to expand from a start-up to being an organisation.

Mr Richardo Chua: *"I have many ideas, concepts, and plans for the future, but I doubt we have, currently, the knowledge or resources to execute them satisfactorily. Through this programme, we hope to be able to lay down these ideas and plan neatly to form the blueprint for the future direction of the company. Since we are a social enterprise, Adrenalin has always been very*

patient, understanding and helpful towards our employees. Andrew reminded, however, constant poor performances from any employee needs to be handled accordingly to ensure quality of our business."

Mr Chua believes that for the mentorship programme to have continued success, the chemistry between mentor and mentee is critical.

Mr Richardo Chua: *"I feel that my working style fits with Andrew's [style] perfectly. He tends to be more inquisitive; he listens patiently, and attentively, then brings up a few critical points. I tend to have a plethora of ideas and plans in my head, and I need mentors like him to ask difficult questions to help push me in the right direction."*

Mdm Sim agrees. While she has a great working relationship with her mentor, she hopes that future social enterprises would have a longer timeframe to choose the best suitable mentor for themselves.

Mdm Sim: *"If you were to ask me, I can't say for sure that after a few interactions within the first meeting anyone would be able to determine that the mentor or mentee is the best fit for them. I think one possible improvement would be to give more opportunities for social enterprises to interact with their future mentor, a pre-meeting or a trial period of sorts, to set and match expectations for both parties."*

Mr Chua suggests extending the programme beneficiaries to include more management staff.

Mr Chua: *"This mentoring programme has been immensely beneficial for me. However, if the programme is extended to our management staff, let's say, in the form of an advisory board of sorts, we would be then able to grow as a company."*

MSF has employed another social enterprise, Empact Pte Ltd, to implement and manage the programme. Peter Yang, Founder and Executive Director of Empact, explains that their staff are present at every meeting to act as a coordinator and note taker. Last month [June 2014], Empact have just completed midterm assessment of the programme.



Adrenalin mentor, Mr Andrew Khoo



Empact Founder & Executive Director, Mr Peter Yang

Mr Peter Yang: *"From our perspective, we will have an assessment on say, how successful has the mentorship programme been in terms of imparting skill sets and knowledge to the social enterprises. And after we reach our targeted goals, we then wish to evaluate how beneficial the experience was for both mentor and mentee. During our midterm assessment, feedback from the mentors mentioned that volunteering their time and effort in this programme was an unexpectedly rewarding experience. As of now, I would say, based on our assessment, all of the social enterprises have achieved the goals they had set for prior to joining the programme."*



MSF reveals that they often meet up with Empact, to catch up on the progress of the mentorship programme. After the end-term assessment later this year, MSF will then evaluate and decide if the programme should continue and expand to include more social enterprises.

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