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# Speak out, and share ideas

This week, SunBiz chats with Fajarbaru Builder Group Bhd executive director Datuk Seri Kuan Khian Leng

## SUCCESS: THE INSIGHT STORY

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

At Fajarbaru Builder Group, we look for people who exemplify our core values of integrity and respect. I am a person who values honesty and strong moral principles. Integrity and honesty are values you place on yourself and your work ethics.

For instance, in our work, we sometimes do make genuine mistakes but to me it is more important to be honest about it. It takes courage to acknowledge the mistake and speak the truth. You actually build the trust as long as you learn from the mistake and never repeat the mistake.

With this culture, I fully entrust my team with important tasks and can be assured that they take ownership and full responsibility of their work.

Respect is another trait that I place importance on. In our organisation, we encourage our staff to value others and accept each other's opinions and differences. We have seen when we have employees who respect each other and work well with one another, the company's productivity goes up and morale improves significantly.

### What advice can you offer those looking to start their career/own business?

I believe it is important to prioritise learning opportunities over monetary ones when you are starting your career.

Maximise opportunities given to you to learn something new and keep an open mind, do not be afraid to get your hands dirty.

Be willing to put in the extra hours, even working on weekends and public holidays if required. Be like a sponge and absorb as much as you can. Be proactive and take the initiative to suggest better ways of doing things. Speak out, share ideas.

You must be patient and don't rush into making impulsive decisions that you may regret later.

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

In the short to mid term, my aspiration for Fajarbaru Builder Group is to achieve market capitalisation of RM1 billion. Currently, we are at about RM300 million. RM1 billion is an ambitious goal but we are very focused on achieving our vision to be the most valued construction and property company in the markets we serve.

Value to me in this sense is not just about profit and shareholder value but also value to our employees, customers, suppliers, associates and the general community.

I hope that with the strategies we have put in place, we will be able to achieve our plan in the next five years.

### How do you stay abreast of issues affecting your industry?

In our line of business, it is important to network with our peers, to know the latest issues in our industry. Associations such as Master Builders Association Malaysia (MBAM), Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association Malaysia (Rehda) and so on provide great platforms for dialogues and exchange of information.

MBAM plays an important role in the development and advancement of the construction industry.

Rehda is a representative body for private property developers, being involved primarily in advocacy and governance.

Rehda's role is to represent property developers in ensuring that developers' views are heard by the relevant authorities and government agencies. These two bodies are also the voice of the industry players.

I am a council member and the chairman of affiliate membership committee of MBAM. We have a total of 34 committees, from safety and health to human resources, machinery resources and mechanical and electrical, just to look into the various issues that affect our industry.

### What was the biggest challenge you have faced? And what did you learn from it?

My biggest challenge was during a time in my previous company. I was part of the management team that discovered certain misconduct by a few ex-directors, which had caused the company to incur huge losses. Upon consultation with our lawyers, we took immediate action to file a police report, applied for a court order to freeze the perpetrators' assets and obtained an Anton Piller order from the court to search the premises and seize evidence without prior warning.

Subsequently, we initiated legal proceedings to sue the ex-directors.

The case took almost six years and it really drained all our energy.

The whole

process was an eye-opening experience and it really tested your courage to take the stand in court and being questioned by the opposing lawyer. It is a challenge to remember the exact details that had happened six years ago. In the end, we persevered and with our team of excellent lawyers to assist us, we won the case and managed to obtain some compensation for the company.

This event has given me invaluable lessons which not every company could offer. The most important lesson that I have learned is that in every business we do, we must conduct it with full integrity because no matter how you try to hide, you won't be able to cover up everything and just a little thing will be enough to expose your wrong-doings.

### What are the top three factors you would attribute your success to?

I would say my dedication, humility and support from people around me.

In everything I do, I am very focused on and committed to what I want to achieve. I tend to put in extra effort and I strongly believe in leading by example. It does reflect on our company as our employees are very dedicated and willing to put in the extra hours when required.

I believe success does not rely on an individual but rather it's the people in the company who make it happen.

I also believe in humility and mutual respect. Being humble is key to building long-term relationships with clients, business partners and staff. No one likes an arrogant person. Every day I still say "Good morning", "Please" and "Thank you" to all my staff including the receptionists and cleaners.

I try to have regular and open communication with my staff of all levels. It is important to let them know that you actually care.

Lastly, and probably the most important factor to me, is the support I receive from the people surrounding me. I am blessed to have unconditional encouragement from my family and great support from my staff. A successful leader usually has a team of extraordinary people behind him and my achievements are all due to these remarkable people.

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

I grew up in a family that cultivates self-discipline and respect of elders. Discipline and respect were the key guiding principles in my life while I was growing up. I was

very independent since young and this trait helped me to make my own decisions, whether right or wrong.

I learned from mistakes and became wiser, and bounced back stronger each time.

No doubt there are plenty of ups and downs in my journey and every

experience has made me learn to appreciate things in life and not to sweat over petty issues. Never have self-pity for the negative things that happen to you and always look at the big picture and have a goal set in mind and make sure you follow through.

### Best piece of advice you ever received on your career.

In my early years of working, I still recall one of my managers imparting this message into me, "If anyone can do it, so can you".

It really stuck in my head and over the years it has contributed to my positive thinking and anything is possible, never say 'no'.

I am a firm believer to saying 'yes' and new experiences.

Eric Schmidt, Google's executive chairman said: "Find a way to say 'yes' to things. Say 'yes' to invitations to a new country, say 'yes' to meet new friends, say 'yes' to learn something new. 'Yes' is how you get your first job, and your next job, and your spouse, and even your kids. Even if it's a bit edgy, a bit out of your comfort zone, saying 'yes' means that you will do something new, meet someone new, and make a difference. 'Yes' lets you stand out in a crowd, be the optimist, see the glass full, be the one everyone comes to. 'Yes' is what keeps us all young."

'Yes' is hard. Most of the time, it requires us to be out of our comfort zone. It requires action, commitment and engagement. Whether we like it or not, 'yes' sometimes lead to failure. 'No', however, is easy. We don't have to change our life with 'no'. There's zero risk of failure with 'no'. Of course, there's also zero chance of success and everything will be status quo.

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### What man-made innovation confounds you?

Out of the many innovations that we have today, to me, Waze stands out the most because it has deep impact on our social economy and we might not even be aware of it.

There was a time when we relied on our instincts to find our way to a location. We had road maps to guide us, we looked out for landmarks and we were always worried about getting lost. Now, with Waze, we can easily search the best route to our destination and the amount of time it takes to reach there. It is very accurate in letting us know how long it takes to reach our destination. Also, giving us alternative routes to our destination. Not forgetting alerts we receive on traffic jams, accidents, road hazards, and police roadblocks.

This intelligent navigation app certainly makes our lives a bit more convenient, saves time and we do feel a bit safer without the fear of not knowing where we will end up.

### A must-read for every business owner/manager is ...

Definitely Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*.

There are many variations but I would like to recommend the book translated by Thomas Cleary. *The Art of War*, compiled over 2,000 years ago, is a study of the anatomy of organisations in conflict.

Personally, I find the strategies very helpful and applicable in managing a company, from managing office politics to corporate strategies and how to succeed in competitive business situations.

