



“Growing up I did a lot of sports - wrestling, football, basketball. That helped me build my character and ability to work in a team and understand that everyone has a role.”

Ben Wong, Assistant General Manager
Eureka Nova Accelerator
Chinese University of Hong Kong, MBA ‘15

Ben Wong is a self-made man. More than dreaming of success, he is a doer who makes things happen. From an English teacher to a copywriter, Ben now heads Global Sources Direct and Startup Launchpad, Asia’s largest hardware trade show, a platform that links startups to online and offline retailers around the world.

Lessons in sports applied to life and business

Positive, eloquent and driven, Ben said lessons from playing sports back when he was younger helped him get ahead in business, and in life. He is a visionary – but more than knowing what he wants and where he wants to be, it was open communication, a great sense of teamwork and determination to achieve his goals that pushed him to always strive to be better.

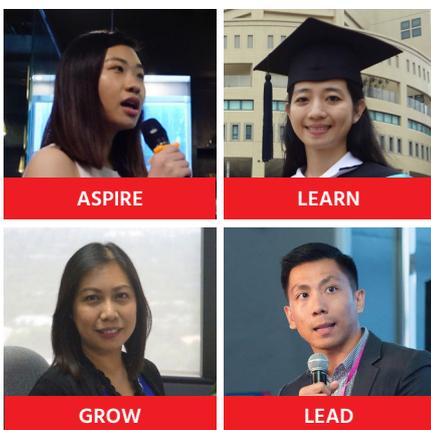
“I grew up around sports. I did wrestling, football, basketball, baseball and I think that helped me build my character, the character of being able to work in a team and understand that everyone has a role.”
But everything worthwhile also takes time, and more often than not, there will be pivots, and more valleys than peaks along the way, but Ben emphasized that teamwork in business, more like in sports, means sticking together despite tough times and setbacks that are inevitable.
“When everyone’s in sync, you’d be unstoppable.”

Open communication

Ben, a Hinrich Foundation MBA scholar at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, started as a copywriter for Global Sources and worked his way up to special projects manager and executive assistant (EA) to the then owner of Global Sources, Merle A. Hinrich. He almost quit two years into the job, but open communication with his superiors propelled his growth in the company. Ben is already on his 9th year with Global Sources.

“What helped me was that I communicated to my manager all the time on what I require to be better at my job whereas, I think, my colleagues at that

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time were more quiet and depended on my manager to provide them of what is required for them to do their job well.”

“Through that whole process, I learned that in every step of the way, constant communication is important to make sure that your manager knows where you’re at and what your deficiencies are and how it can be solved by your manager’s help.”



Ben’s experience while in the MBA program of the Chinese University of Hong Kong includes a visit to Sao Paulo, Brazil, to compete for the Hult Prize award in 2014

Ben said Global Sources has always been supportive of his career because aside from a two-way communication, he would always ask what more he can do for the company.

“A lot of people complain about their companies, saying my company doesn’t do this for me, my company doesn’t help me succeed, but I strongly believe that your faith in a company belongs to yourself. You really need to communicate to your managers, to the company, what you need to be successful and to help them know. If the company realizes that you are growing as a business professional and you want to do that by helping the company, they would always be supportive, but if it’s just about helping yourself, then that’s a big question mark.”

By supporting the growth of employees, Ben said companies can count on loyalty and care from employees to grow the business further in return.

“It is super, super important for every company to look at how to grow their employees, train them, provide them enough resources for them to be better, but it is the employees’ job to communicate what they need. When both communicates really well, you get a lot of good people that come out to help the company, because, in the end, the employee will feel that they’re really part of a family business because they feel that they’re able to grow and be able to contribute to the growth of the company.”

Know your strengths and weaknesses, take risks

Having a mentor also helped Ben big time in handling difficult situations and people, faster and in constantly improving himself through constructive feedbacks.

“Mentors are always good because these guys bring a load of experience whether it’s on dealing with people, dealing with a situation that they’ve seen hundreds and hundreds of time, and they too have gone through a test of what worked and what didn’t work. So learn and leverage from your mentors as much as you can.”

For people starting up and future scholars of the Foundation, Ben noted the importance of setting goals, knowing your strengths and weaknesses, believing in your abilities and the value that you can add to your workplace.



Ben grew up around sports. He did wrestling, football, basketball, baseball which helped him build his character

“Throughout my life, I have learned – and taught what I learned. After all, that is how change begins.”

“You really need to have a good understanding of who you are as a person. Are you the type that wants to be a CEO of a large company, or are you content with just doing something that has a lot of value to you? You need to define that first; two, when you start becoming a business professional, you need to know and be aware of the people around you –if you’re a positive person, people around you will also remain positive, but if you go in there and you’re very negative, people around you will not be willing to help you; number three, never, never, never be content and comfortable. And I think contentment or being comfortable is super dangerous, because that’s when you kind of give up.”

The key to persevering through hard times, he said, is also to remain optimistic. Bad things happen all the time, but it’s up to you to choose to bounce back or stay down there and allow difficulties to take you down.

To the younger Ben, and the younger generation, he would advise not be afraid to take more risk. “Take risks, keep going, try to execute, and be okay with failure.”

Entrepreneurial beginnings

Being the head of Global Sources Direct, responsible for developing cross-border O2O distribution channels for emerging brands and startups from the Asia Pacific region and Startup Launchpad, Ben helps connect hardware startups find distribution channels offline through B2B tradeshow and tech conferences,



Ben receives recognition for his high productivity in 2009 while working as a print copywriter for Global Sources

showcasing at least 300 startups to more than 63,000 global buyers from 149 countries. But everything did not come easy for him.

He took a risk to come to China fresh out of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Business and Management to try his luck in a place where he believed opportunities are and will be.

"After I graduated, I took a small risk and go to China, and the only way for a recent graduate to get a job there was to be an English teacher so I took that job and about 4-5 months later, I found a job with Global Sources and that's when I basically started my career."

While teaching English, Ben started his own businesses. He opened a firm for custom-tailored websites and a copywriting company for Chinese manufacturers. Both companies had to close down eventually.

"That was when I decided, hey, it was good to have this good entrepreneurial spirit but I really need a lot more experience and that's when I decided to go back in the corporate."

Ben has always been entrepreneurial, and it runs in the blood. Raised in New Jersey and originally from Kuala Lumpur, he recalled how at an early age, they were thought to be responsible for making things happen for themselves. As a child, he already has a self-made mentality.

"I was always entrepreneurial, my parents were also quite entrepreneurial, they open up their own Chinese restaurant in the US and basically growing up, I have a childhood that has a kind of self-made mentality so everything did not come into a silver spoon. It was more of hey we have very little in our pockets and we have to make things happen, so having that chip on the shoulder, really helped us to always strive for something better, always strive to exceed the status quo."

"More so, because I will be at the helm, I will be able to help more students reach their goals and bringing about positive change in my country."



Ben talks about how corporations can better help startups scale up during a panel discussion at an event in Hong Kong in 2016

“Keep dreaming and pushing yourself hard. Keep learning and proactively share that learning.”

Defining success

Success for Ben is all about family and seeing his peers succeed.

“When I was young and aspiring, I would say I want to be a multi-millionaire, a billionaire, I want to run a big company, but I started realizing that what’s most important to me is my family. And I think, being able to provide for my family a comfortable lifestyle, that is success for me. It’s no longer that big company I want to run, or a multi-million dollar business, but being able to provide well for my family. If I’ll be able to achieve that, then I’d say that I’m successful.”

But success doesn’t happen overnight. Ben said people starting up may have to give up some things while working their way up— and that’s okay. It’s just a “constant process of changing your priorities at different stages of your life and weighing what’s important to you at that point in your life.” A strong drive to succeed will also keep you trying until you realize your goals.

“I still remember having a conversation with my dad, he asked, Ben, what do you want to do with yourself? I said, Dad, I want to be able to support you guys one day. When I graduated, I want to make \$70,000, but then, I decided to take the risk and earn \$800 a month as a teacher in Shenzhen and that’s when my Dad started asking me what I’m doing with my life

He said my goal has completely shifted, he didn’t believe in me, and that’s when I told myself, I’m going to prove you wrong, and even until today, I’m constantly trying to prove them wrong in a positive way, that’s when I think there was a big change in my perspective that someone told me I couldn’t get things done and I took it as a challenge in a positive light and continue to make sure that that point of my life is proven wrong, so having a drive is super important.”

Hinrich Foundation and pursuit of excellence

His continued pursuit of excellence and constant self-evaluation led Ben to aim higher and gap what he thought then was his weakest point – Finance. About five years into Global Sources, he started looking for opportunities to support further studies, and that’s how the Hinrich Foundation, helped changed his life, forever.



Ben's MBA experience also includes a visit to Iceland in 2015 when his team qualified to join The Negotiation Challenge, an international negotiation competition

"I can't thank the Hinrich Foundation enough for helping me through that process. I was the first Chinese University MBA scholar at that time. At my MBA, I met so many people that were just like me –who also strive to do great things in life, and we were able to sit in rooms, work together, solve problems, come up with business ideas, travel around the world to pitch our business ideas, I went to Iceland, I went to Rio, Brazil, I went to Singapore."

Ben recalled how meeting like-minded people during his studies became a "game-changer" for him.

"It brought back memories of me being in a sports team again, a lot of the people were coming from different industries, some people were very strong in finance, some people are very strong in marketing, and some were strong at sales. By combining you in groups were people have different strengths, we became a very strong team."

Pursuing a trade-related career allowed Ben to affect the lives of many people and contribute to a bigger cause of development. He said trade has a significant factor in how the world progresses –as it supports exchange not just in goods, but knowledge and technology.

"I think without trade, the world will not be where it is today."

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Giving back

Eventually, Ben sees himself starting his own business "that actually helps people" owing to his very socially-responsible nature. "I want to help the elderly. I think that the elderly are forgotten around the world, I think that unfortunately, the ones that did not have a good upbringing are forced to be on the streets ... I do want to find a way to help them so once I take care of my family, I want to take care of other people's families."

Ben spends his time off with his wife, playing and watching sports, and walking his dog. American football is his favorite game, Malaysian dish Chow Kway Teow is his favorite dish and one of his favorite songs is the classic "Stand by Me" by Ben E. King. Asked to pick his favorite destination in the world, Ben said it would be oceanic island Sipadan, also in Malaysia.

Read more stories of inspiration from our Hinrich Global Trade Leaders [here](#).



“Success for me is living a valuable life by making positive impact on society and family.”

Phoebe Lu

Co-founder
AceEver Technology
Limited

Hinrich Foundation alumna
Hong Kong Baptist University
BBA '14



“It’s important to find passion in even small, mundane jobs. In the completion of little tasks lies the key to achieving bigger things.”

Khiem Vu

Chief Representative
Global Sources
Ho Chi Minh City
Vietnam

Hinrich Foundation alumnus
Chinese University of
Hong Kong, MBA '16
Hong Kong Baptist University,
MAIJ Studies '07



“The key to any positive transition is to get out of your comfort zone and explore new opportunities.”

Mohammad Nurun Nobli

Engineer
VF Asia Limited
Bangladesh

Hinrich Foundation alumnus
HK Polytechnic University-
Warwick IGDS, Master
of Science in Manufacturing
Systems Engineering'16



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