On The Dragon’s Tail

Associate Professor Michael Heng met his student Peh Ping Teik while in Vietnam on a consulting assignment for the International Labour Organisation. Ping Teik is now the Production Manager at Cai Lan Oils & Fats Industries Company Ltd, a joint venture company with the Ministry of Industry, located in Ha Long, which is situated 160 km Northeast from Hanoi, the capital of Viet Nam. Legend has it that Halong Bay was formed by a dragon thrashing it’s tail. The excerpts from his recent interview with E3World:

E3World: What has happened since you graduated?

Ping Teik: I graduated at the year 1995 and joined a vegetable oils/grains trading company at the same year. I was posted to a vegetable oils refinery plant in Malaysia for one and half year. As the group was expanding the business to Vietnam, I was approached to be seconded to Cai Lan Oils & Fats Industries Company Ltd at Ha Long Bay, Vietnam. I accepted the posting without little hesitation.

E3World: What is the nature of your job now?

Ping Teik: I am currently overall in-charge of the factory production and operational activities. The activities cover the oil import/export, oil refining, oil packing, quality control, warehousing, product dispatch, etc. I report directly to the parent company in Malaysia.

E3World: Why have you chosen this career path that takes you far away from home?

Ping Teik: This is a very challenging job. As a regional posting, I have the opportunities to deal with different people with different culture/mentality/mind set/language. I opted for this. I can sense the achievements when I see the impact of results after overcoming various problems/obstacles. For example, I had to build an entire factory from the ground up. For a EEE graduate, this is quite a daunting task...having to co-ordinate mechanical, civil and structural works with local authorities, managing cross-culturally, and at the same time keep close eye at the business financials. managed to do all these successfully, and felt a tremendous rush from the achievements and impact.

E3World: What lessons have you learnt during these times?

Ping Teik: Through the years, a lot of knowledge/experience was acquired through self-learning and personal initiative. For the technical aspect, it covered from the technical design of manufacturing process, civil construction of factory, equipment installation/commissioning, oil/packaging knowledge, etc. For the non-technical aspect, it covered from production control, factory management, local authorities relation, import/export procedure, etc.

E3World: What training during your EEE Beng course have prepared you the most since your graduation?

Ping Teik: The analytical skills gained during the Beng course has enabled me to acquire knowledge in the fast, logical and systematic way. The Human resource management and industrial management courses have exposed me to management and which became most useful in the job.

E3World: What other subjects or training at the University would have help to prepare you better for the past years?

Ping Teik: Pneumatics/hydraulics is an integral part in the machine control, which is common in the factor operations. I found myself lack of such knowledge when I first started dealing with machinery. A wider choice of subjects, instead of narrowly specialized ones, would have prepared graduates for wide-ranging career options.

E3World: By venturing out, you have acted quite differently from most of your classmates. What advice and suggestions could you give to EEE students in general, and the Final Year students in particular?

Ping Teik: Prepare yourself by exposure to a wider range of knowledge and to understand the different cultures. As the business world changes, the working environment has also changed. More and more companies are going regional, capturing opportunities in China, Vietnam, etc. Very often, you have to deal with things that are different from what you have learned. Very often, you have to deal with people with different culture/mentality/mind set/language. Learn to take risk and be prepared to venture outside Singapore to the less developed nations.

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