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Brandon Tay Hoe Lian

CEO
Guan Chong Bhd
Member since 2007
VCE-16

PEER ADVANTAGE

The peer advantage in Vistage has held Brandon Tay Hoe Lian in good stead as networking among members has helped him solve professional issues faster and benchmark standards for structures and systems. His public-listed company has grown to become Asia's largest cocoa grinder and the world's fourth largest.

Brandon Tay Hoe Lian is enthusiastic about the Vistage process as it has supported him in his journey to rebuild his family-based business to the success it is today.

Brandon took over the leadership of Guan Chong Bhd (GCB) in 2000 after a split within a three-way extended family-run business. At that time, he felt that there was no one to turn to within his family or his circle of friends to help him grow his business or sort out related issues. The company had limited resources to compete on a regional or international platform.

“Suddenly at the age of 35, I faced a big burden with huge debts. I was alone (in leading), left with obsolete equipment, I panicked and felt lost as my father couldn't help me much and others thought I could lead the way but inside I felt frightened.” He had to grow up overnight.

GCB was the “small guy with small margins, fighting to maintain costs and (focused on) the need to survive” as the chocolate market was dominated by Europe and the United States at the higher end. It has been a momentous journey as from the production, marketing, and sale of cocoa-derived food ingredients, GCB has now expanded its total annual cocoa grinding capacity to become Asia's largest cocoa grinder and the world's fourth largest. GCB's net profit has been growing from strength to strength and its share price climbing steadily.

“In 2018, we had a turnover of just over RM2.26 billion. In 2005, the year we listed on the KLSE, it was just under RM413 million,” Brandon notes. The Johor based company has cocoa processing plants in Pasir Gudang and Batam, Indonesia and is exploring expansion to the European and South American sectors.

The peer advantage of Vistage has held Brandon in good stead as connecting and networking among members has motivated him and helped him solve professional issues faster and benchmark standards for structures and systems.

A Vistage member since 2007, he shares, “Vistage has helped me grow as members have different systems and structures and their companies have gone through stages in growth (size).” As a result, Brandon has been able to and can still learn from them rather than reinvent the wheel, such as in adapting a tested rolling budget system.



Brandon Tay at Vistage Golf Challenge 2017

Brandon notes that being a Vistage member has provided him optimum benefit with concrete and reliable models and systems. Initially, he admits he was not even aware that some of these systems existed. Moreover, by networking with peers of different industries and of different sizes and seeing how they are actually performing, he is able to get a sense of how the world economy is performing and where it is heading.

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“This is priceless. We won’t be able to get this by ourselves. Business is not just about ourselves, but it is also about what happens to others as it can also happen to you. So how do we prepare to prevent that from happening to us or how can we rectify the situation when the time comes?” Entrepreneurs in Malaysia, opines Brandon, lack resources to upgrade themselves and Vistage fills this gap. He adds: “We feel lonely at the top so it is very positive to know that you have other members to rely on and share internal and external issues.” This is particularly so in his industry as the big guys are overseas in Europe and the United States.

Brandon looks forward to the monthly Vistage group meetings because every time there are different experiences or issues raised and opportunities to network with fellow group members who have become friends. There is a buddy bonding system allowing them to laugh together, share their experiences and learn from each other and give feedback to fellow peers.

“Where I may be embarrassed to ask other family members, it is okay to do so with my buddies here on anything, be it personal, family matters, business or investments.” He praises his Chair Richard Wong: “Richard leads the way in helping me think out loud for myself. The answer is in my mind but he helps me put it out there and so I can come up with the solution to any issue I am facing with lots more confidence and it makes me feel good about my solution.”

He notes that because of Richard’s vast experience in dealing with small to large companies, his knowledge of industry trends, and his open-mindedness in attitude and approach, he can go to him for any help. Brandon views Richard as playing various roles, including that of a mentor, friend and father to him and he admires how Richard has managed all these roles very well.

Over the years, Brandon believes he has learnt to listen and has also improved his leadership and communication style with the unbiased feedback of his peers: “Some people thought I behaved in a rather arrogant manner, that they didn’t like my manner of speaking. This was something I was not aware of, so I learnt and changed myself accordingly.”

Vistage monthly meetings are also a platform for him to forecast and prepare for future challenges that may come along. He highlights: “The meetings are evolving lessons that allow me to constantly monitor my present status and on-going concerns from different angles aided by a pool of elite independent directors.”

Brandon Tay graduated with a degree in business administration from the United States of America. Winner of the E&Y Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2012, he took over the helm of Guan Chong, a cocoa processing company, after the split within the family business in 2000 at the age of 35.

Today, the company’s cocoa ingredients are exported to over 70 countries and its clientele include world renowned confectionery manufacturers Mars, Hershey’s and Lotte (South Korea).