



“Branding, product development, intellectual property, customisation and concentrated risks were some of the key takeaways.”

Saw Hai Earn

Chief Executive
Golden Fresh Sdn Bhd
Member since 1998
VCE-610

WORLD CLASS RECOGNITION

Many takeaways from TEC/Vistage membership have enabled Saw Hai Earn to grow a small, family business based in Penang to a world-class processor of seafood products with an annual turnover of RM1 billion. His company's products under the Golden Fresh brand have attained international standards and global recognition.

As a Vistage member for the last two decades, Saw Hai Earn reveals that he has derived immense value from his time in TEC/Vistage in terms of both business and personal growth. It was in TEC where Hai Earn was first exposed to modern-day business management systems. This has helped him in his journey in growing a small family business based in Penang to a world-class processor of seafood products with an annual turnover of RM1 billion. Salt and pepper squid, crispy soft shell crab, and chilli mango prawns are among the company's 300 varieties of frozen seafood products sold around the world. Personally, he has learnt to become a more giving and empathetic person while developing strong bonds with the other 14 CEOs in his Vistage group.

Hai Earn recalls that his first Chair, Lim Kah Hooi, and the tagline "lonely at the top" made an impression on him. This resonated with him at the point in time, where he felt the need to talk to someone else besides his father and uncle whenever he ran into problems at work. He was unable to find solutions from family members, and "over time, I was running into a brick wall," he relates. There were many obstacles then, as the company was taking an 'old school' approach in their operations, focusing on keeping costs low as opposed to adding value.

Joining TEC has opened Hai Earn's eyes to many operational processes and business systems that has since propelled the company forward. Resource Speakers engaged by TEC introduced many lessons. "Branding, product development, intellectual property, customisation, and concentrated risks," were some of the key takeaways he was able to apply in the company.

Hai Earn took the extra step of engaging Resource Speakers to tap on their expertise. One of them was Dr Paul Temporal, a branding guru, who helped spearhead the branding journey of Golden Fresh's Pacific West, a brand now widely recognised in the marketplace. The company has also benefited in terms of bringing in the right talent. Hai Earn engaged two European experts after listening to a Vistage Resource speaker on the Adizes profiling system.



Saw Hai Earn with the team after winning the Seafood Excellence Global Award at the Seafood Expo in Brussels, May 2019

Now, as part of the company's recruitment process, applicants for management positions undergo a profiling test using the PAEI method to gauge whether they are inherently suited for the job. Additionally, because Hai Earn is an avid believer in "feng shui", he combines Eastern "feng shui" with Western profiling to best ascertain one's compatibility.

Having grown and evolved through the years, Golden Fresh has now attained international standards and global recognition. One of its products called 'Kuro Prawn' (Argentine prawn coated in bamboo charcoal crust) won the Innovation award at the Seafood Excellence Global exhibition in Brussels, Belgium in 2017. Another product called Prawn In Hor Mok Thai Coconut Sauce also won the Convenience award at the Seafood Excellence Global exhibition in Brussels, Belgium in 2019. Apart from winning prestigious awards, its products have been served at international events, such as the Sydney Olympics, Rugby World Cup and Wimbledon. Annually, some 10,000 tonnes of products are distributed worldwide by its overseas offices in Australia, United Kingdom, France, South Africa and Singapore.

Another notable mark of high standard is the fact that Golden Fresh is the first company in Southeast Asia to obtain the widely recognised Marine Stewardship Council certification (an independent non-profit organisation that sets standards for sustainable fishing). This speaks volumes for the company's consciousness towards the environment and care for future resources. Undoubtedly, this also acts as a competitive advantage when selling to top UK and European buyers who prioritise sustainability.

As a long-tenured member of Vistage, Hai Earn shares about the camaraderie he and his Vistage peers have developed over the years. Aside from business, "we confide openly on personal matters, even complicated family issues," he reveals, "supporting each other through thick and thin." He narrates one instance when a fire destroyed one member's factory, the others reached out by housing some of his staff in their offices until the insurance claims came through.

Hai Earn acknowledges the changes in him since becoming part of Vistage. "More patience and compassion, more rational and generous". He now enjoys the fruits of his labour. His role as CEO is mainly to oversee the operations of overseas offices as well as manage investments for the company. He hopes to give back by imparting what he has learnt to younger Vistage members and in turn, learn some things from them as well.

Golden Fresh was established in 1989 with its main seafood processing plant and cold room facilities in Butterworth, Penang. Its parent company, Butterworth Iceworks Sdn Bhd, started from humble beginnings as an ice factory in 1965.