



“The learning was very encompassing.  
All the Partners were entrepreneurs  
and own licences.”

**Richard Wong Chin Mun**

Founder & Chief Listener  
Vistage Malaysia  
VTA-1, VCE-3, VCE-16,  
KEY-6 & KEY-33

# PURSUIT OF PASSION

**Richard Wong Chin Mun was a high performing CEO at Nylex (Malaysia) Bhd with vast experience in a wide range of industries. At exactly 50 and at the pinnacle of his professional career, he decided to strike out on his own and was ready to give up his comfortable corporate lifestyle. He reflected deeply on what he really wanted and realised his desire to pass on his wide business experience and leadership skills to help small and medium enterprises succeed. Matching his passion was the opportunity of a CEO mentoring franchise gleaned from a magazine article entitled “Lonely at the Top”. All these formed the backdrop behind the bold start up of TEC Asia Centre (now Vistage Malaysia) by Richard Wong, 25 years ago.**

Richard Wong started to pursue his passion or calling in 1994 and has had a remarkable journey growing a successful executive coaching business in Malaysia. On hindsight, we see that he had the right CEO experience and a valuable network of contacts to start a brand new venture. We believe that the added dynamics was Richard’s leadership style of integrity and care for people. He has won the hearts and minds of many by leadership based on the Vistage values of care, trust and challenge.



*(L-R) Dr Bill Williams, Richard Wong, Yeo Beng Poh and Kenneth Chan at the TEC Awareness Event at KL Hilton in 1994*

Developing a service-based franchise from the US 25 years ago, in an Asian context, is no easy task. But Richard took it as a challenge and surprised his detractors with good results. He was a fast learner, picking up the tricks of the trade as a Chair as well as Vistage Partner. In the 20 Vistage Community of Partners around the globe today, he is well respected in both arenas.

Looking back, we see many fruits of Richard’s pursuit of passion. He has proven that the TEC/Vistage model works in Malaysia as narrated by “Transforming CEOs” in Chapter Four. On top of this, he has led Vistage Malaysia to be one of the five top performing International Partners (see Chapter Five), attaining 785 members spread over 64 groups with 44 active Chairs as of end June 2019 in Malaysia. As a Chair, Richard has achieved the highest recognition among his peers, winning the 2017 Don Cope Award (more in Chapter Seven).



*TEC-1 group with Richard Wong in its first year*



*Richard Wong (3rd from left, seated) and Dr Fred Chaney (extreme right, standing) together with other Chairs at the 1996 Chair Conference*

We presented Vistage Malaysia's successes in 2009 in its 15th Anniversary Book, but have more stories to tell as we near its silver jubilee this year. This 25th Anniversary Book incorporates the reflections of many people, local and abroad, who have played a part in Vistage Malaysia's colourful journey. We trust you will be inspired by the stories and will get more insights in the related Chapters. To start the story, we bring you highlights of the early years.

### **GETTING THE FRANCHISE AND CAKE ▲**

At the onset, the US owners of TEC International did not believe that Richard Wong could make it work in Malaysia. They reasoned that Asians are introverted and not likely to air issues and problems with others. However, Richard had convincing experience in the regional Forum Group of Young Presidents Organisation (YPO) that showed the contrary. He had been a member of YPO Malaysia and President of the KL Chapter for two years. He belonged to a regional Forum Group of CEOs from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand and the Philippines. The group met every two months to exchange views, moderated by a YPO member by rotation. This, in essence, had similarities with the TEC/Vistage process.

## TRANSFORMING & TRANSCENDING | PRIVATE ADVISORY BOARDS FOR CEOs, EXECUTIVES AND BUSINESS OWNERS

After half a day of discussion and bargaining in San Diego, US, Richard was given the franchise for Malaysia and Singapore, with options for other ASEAN cities and Southern China. The franchise agreement was effective July 1994. Richard then took a crash course in the art of chairing. He learnt the ropes in less than five days, covering one-to-one sessions, group meetings and observing other experienced Chairs in the US. He recalls that on the sixth day, he was presented with a cake with one candle. “This signified the birth of TEC Asia Centre,” he reveals.

### A ‘STAR’ IS BORN ▲

Back in Malaysia, Richard started the ball rolling with TEC Awareness Events (AE) in September 1994. Three AEs were organised back to back over two days. It was held at a posh venue called Windows at KL Hilton. Richard acknowledges that he did not have specific targets for membership at that time. “I did the best I could. The focus was on a first class place and first class catering to benefit the image of a CEO organisation,” he says. Dr Bill Williams, then TEC International President, flew in to Kuala Lumpur to conduct the AEs.

The attendees of the inaugural AEs were qualified prospects who came via invitation. Richard recollects that 12 CEOs expressed interest as they saw CEO mentoring as something new and meaningful. He signed up nine members in October 1994.

Among these were Mok Sew Wah (see his story in Chapter Four), Ray Cheah and Dato’ Liew Sew Yee. The first CEO group called TEC-1 was launched in November 1994.

Based on the record number of new members, TEC Asia Centre became the fastest TEC licensee to kick off the first group. The quick and successful start up of TEC Asia Centre astonished TEC International. In the first full year, membership stood at 40, double what TEC Headquarters expected. “We became the star licensee at that time,” says Richard.

### PILLARS OF STRENGTH ▲

Richard was most fortunate to get support during TEC Asia Centre’s early history from two persons, namely Sherine Cheng (now Executive Director of Vistage Malaysia) and Dr Wilson Tay (the first TEC Asia Centre CEO). Their reflections and stories are shared later in this Chapter. In various roles, they supported Richard, the Chairs and office staff to grow the business.



## TRANSFORMING CHAIRS & CEOS ▲

In the initial two years, Richard, Kenneth Chan, Dr Wilson Tay and Lim Kah Hooi were the pioneer Chairs. They faced challenges in recruiting Chairs with CEO or senior management experience.

Richard notes that potential Chairs when approached viewed the role as “daunting and unnerving”. They did not understand that they had to be good facilitators and not consultants. Richard had to change their mindset and took them through training over two months. To keep abreast of new developments, Chairs travelled to the annual ChairWorld Conference in the US.

The early Chairs put in a lot of work to build and retain their group members. It is to Richard’s credit that many of them, notably Ooi Toon Kit, Heah Kok Soon, Hong Khay Chai and Simon Soh (read their Reflections in Chapter Three) are still with Vistage today.

In his story, Master Chair Ooi Toon Kit says that Chairs benefited from incentives and subsidies to deepen knowledge on chairing and gain exposure and networking with their international colleagues.

As shared by TEC/Vistage members in different groups, effective coaching by Chairs and peer support have given them the building blocks to structure and grow their businesses. Many credit Vistage for giving them more holistic lessons in business optimisation and leadership (elaborated by nine CEOs of various tenure in Chapter Four).

## LEARNING FROM TEC/VISTAGE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS ▲

As a newcomer to CEO coaching, Richard received valuable advice from foreign TEC partners who had vast years of experience. He picked up best practices in the early years by flying to the US and UK to meet with Partners every six months. “The learning was very encompassing. All the Partners were entrepreneurs and own licences,” he reveals.

Upon reflection (see Chapter Five), Nigel Stoke, Chairman of TEC Australia and TEC New Zealand and Dr Phil Meddings, Founder of TEC Australia and Vistage in the UK recall the fast-learning Richard. They are impressed with how well he started and grew. Nigel attributes Richard’s success to “absolute passion and absolute drive to run the first group, be a good Chair and share how learning gets done.”

In comparison, they point out that there are only five significant non-US Vistage countries across the world, of which Vistage Malaysia is one. The others are UK/Ireland, Argentina, Canada and Australia/New Zealand.



TEC Asia Team Retreat to Japan in 2007

## VISTAGE MALAYSIA CORPORATE CULTURE ▲

While TEC/Vistage Malaysia grew in size (see Chapter Two) over time, Richard strengthened the company with the added bonds of good corporate culture and values. He treats the Vistage Team which includes both staff and Chairs as an extended family and inculcates the Vistage values of care, trust and challenge.

How did Richard cultivate this culture? He created a set of internal values to guide the staff and encourage teamwork. To make it easy to remember, they are encapsulated in the acronym GIFTS which stands for Growth, Integrity, Family, Transparent and Synergistic. These values appear to have permeated well to young and old alike (enjoy the Vistage Team's quips in Chapter Six).

- G Growth** – we must continually grow to help others grow
- I Integrity** – deliver on our promise
- F Family** – we are an extended family
- T Transparent** – open and frank in our communication
- S Synergistic** – Teamwork wins

Based on external observations, Richard has created a corporate culture that is admired by many in the Vistage Community. For instance, TEC Canada Founder cum Executive Chairman Dr Lynn Tanner sees it as “a model of the kind of atmosphere and culture you want to build in other companies and administrative structures.” He describes it as one of consistency, care and mutual respect.

## THE PASSION CONTINUES ▲

Fast forward to 2019, Richard, who has been calling himself The Chief Listener for more than 10 years now, is still brimming with ideas to make a difference to the lives of Vistage members, Chairs and staff. His personal passion continues to drive him. He affirms that he is still as excited as he was on Day One to do what he set out to do because of the very meaningful rewards. “There is immeasurable satisfaction in seeing people grow and transform. It is meaningful and it feeds me.”