

INNOVATION AS A WAY OF LIFE

WHEN one thinks of entrepreneurship, we might assume one needs to give up the security of a stable income and run out into the world with flailing arms to follow our passions. Soon enough, challenges come, we run out of money and like puppies with our tails between our legs, we solemnly trudge back to our first jobs believing that *passion should probably just be left for the outstanding*. Or is it, really?



VIVAQUEENBEE.com

While travelling abroad, Azrina Naimuddin noticed how common it is to find products containing harmful chemicals. She also noticed that there are less choices for brands that are free from harmful ingredients; and there is a high level of education and awareness on potential cancer-causing chemicals in cosmetics and toiletries among consumers. She stated that it is a challenge to find products that are Muslim-friendly as most of these products have ingredients that may derive from animals and therefore, are not suitable for Muslims. It doesn't help that the ingredients on the labels are mostly in scientific jargons that make it hard to decipher if it is animal-derived or not.

Armed with a background in biomedical science, she started **VivaQueenBee.com**, an online shop selling cosmetics and toiletries that are free from harmful ingredients while being Muslim-friendly.

Azrina and her team seek to accommodate to customers' needs by providing access for customers to ask questions on all of their social media platforms and through *Whatsapp*. "As an innovator and entrepreneur, you need to understand your market. . . initially we wanted a beautiful website but over time we realised that with all the plug-ins, it hindered customers from purchasing our products. We needed to adapt to the needs and prioritise. As an entrepreneur, you need to adapt and to innovate according to the current status."

RECOMN

RecomN is an online service platform that connects people to service professionals. If you need an interior designer, a photographer, a baker, an event organiser, a construction worker, or any other service professional, **RecomN** seeks to provide you with trustworthy professionals who have been vetted by the community.

Jes Min Lua, the founder of **RecomN**, believes that innovation begins by taking little steps towards your goal.

"You may be creative like the Wright brothers who created the first airplane. . . or you may be innovative which is *pretty* much the rest of us," she says while laughing. Innovative people seek to **improve** the prototype.

"You might think you're not creative enough to start your own business but that isn't true! You don't have to be a guy who creates the aircraft but find the part of the aircraft that is interesting to you, that you have skills to address it *and* that you find meaningful. Keep pushing and



progressing and one day, you may find that you are a part of something magical."

Jes Min believes that building a safety net is key to becoming an entrepreneur. She says, "To build a safety net, work in a decent job for the first few years of your life which enables you to save money. Get good skills that you can always fall back on. These skills will help you so that if all else fails, you can always go back to being an accountant, an auditor or whatever you were doing before you started."

By **TAMARA JAYNE**
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Leaderonomics had the opportunity to speak to **five Malaysian start-up founders** on how innovation and entrepreneurship play a pivotal role in the journey to grow their businesses. These founders are among the 20 finalists of the **Alliance Bank SME Innovation Challenge 2016**, who will be in the running to bring their business to the next level.

"The man with a new idea is a crank—until the idea succeeds." —**Mark Twain**



The SME Innovation Challenge conducted annually is one of the many initiatives undertaken by the Alliance Bank BizSmart Academy to spur the growth of high-potential SMEs. For more information, visit www.BizSmart.com.my



SPEEDRENT

Primarily out of his own frustration when dealing with tenants, Wong Whei Meng decided to start **Speedrent**, an online platform to connect property owners and tenants to liaise directly with each other.

After sharing his experience with his friends, he realised that this frustration was not unique to him and that it happens to many people out there.

"So I decided to do something about it. Initially, I wasn't very committed to this idea of **Speedrent** because I have a separate full-time job, I'm a dad of three and if I need to do this, I need to spend a lot of time on it. So I just forked up the initial investment to start it. And the market seemed to be interested in it. So that got me thinking that since I'm doing something that

people love, I should invest more."

Wong believes that two traits an entrepreneur need is perseverance and passion. Without passion, you will face many challenges that make it hard for you to press through. But passion alone is insufficient. Perseverance gets you through. When asked what keeps him moving forward in difficult times, his answer was simply this:

"I ask myself, 'If I don't do it, who's going to do it?' If you have thought through it, business is actually safe because you are in control. Know the risks you can take. After you have figured out the key risks then try to minimise those risks so that you have a safe margin. Most people jump into business without thinking about the risks. But in business, you need to know your risks from the beginning."

PARKBOX

Ever circled for an hour looking for a parking spot in a busy area, only to find that the parking machine has a large *ROSAK* (Under Maintenance/Not Working) sign across it?

Or maybe you finally found a spot but it's raining heavily. After sloshing through puddles, you struggle to find coins in your wallet while balancing an umbrella over your head and finally reach your destination soaking wet and annoyed?

What **Parkbox** viewed as just an idea, became a reality when Spert Ah Chee Peng, founder of **Parkbox**, decided to bring this amazing concept of a hassle-free parking app to Malaysia.

Of course, not all concepts start off easy. But **Parkbox** was innovative enough to act on the idea. By eliminating the need to purchase "scratch parking tickets" and parking machines, **Parkbox** aims to make things convenient for everyone.

Spert (pic: right) sought to fix this need digitally. **Parkbox** is a street-parking mobile app that allows you to pay for your parking with a few clicks on your smartphone. The app was first launched in Taiping and is currently undergoing legal procedures to implement the system across Malaysia.

He says that a key trait an entrepreneur needs is perseverance. Without it, one wouldn't be able to keep moving forward when tough times come.



TEHCARE INNOVATION

It all started when Khor Kang Xiang, founder of **Techcare Innovation**, was in university building robots to compete in competitions worldwide. After winning a number of big competitions, Khor started to question his purpose and what he was doing.

"I went to a stroke centre one day and saw a guy my age who had a stroke. I watched him struggle through his physiotherapy session. This made me research on devices used at rehabilitation centres and I discovered that rehabilitation machines with just a simple mechanism can be very costly! This explains why few people are able to afford rehabilitation. . . and I wanted to solve this need."



This is how **Techcare Innovation** came about. **Techcare** stands for technology that cares. They seek to provide compact, portable rehabilitation devices for people in need of it. The main idea is to make training and rehabilitation fun to

encourage people to train frequently.

Khor believes that as an entrepreneur, there will be challenges but always go back to your higher purpose.

"There was a six-month period when I felt alone in the lab and was depressed. I printed a poster and pasted it on the wall in front of me. The poster had one question on it, '*How can I use technology to help people?*'"

Every time I saw it, I wrote down what I thought I could do. I used that to motivate myself out of that depressive state I was in."

"I know that even when I fail, I know I did my best and tried. That's how I overcome challenges. Do your best and keep your original purpose in mind. For me, it has always been the desire to help others," Khor says.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Great ideas are formed when one sees a need and seeks to meet that need. True entrepreneurs, like these finalists, epitomise the word *innovate* i.e. by introducing new ideas, methods, and products. The difference? These finalists represent true entrepreneurship by making a difference and helping the lives of others through innovation.



Log on to www.leaderonomics.com to watch videos of these amazing finalists share their inspirational stories.