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# The habits that shape success

BY WONG EE LIN & ANETTE APPADURAY

**KUALA LUMPUR:** To be able to take an idea, gather the necessary resources and brave huge financial risks in a quest to succeed — even while knowing that most start-ups fail — really takes a special kind of courage and tenacity. That's why entrepreneur-

ship is never for the faint-hearted.

With that determination to succeed, many entrepreneurs develop habits or routines they stick by that may seem insignificant at first glance, but are usually the very thing that gives them the edge by making them more energised, more effective, more informed and more primed, to reach their goals.

So what are the habits the top nominees of the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year 2017 believe helped them score in their games? *The Edge Financial Daily*, as the media partner of EY for the 16th iteration of the coveted award this year, checks out what four of the 16 nominees have to share on the topic.

**MOHD FADZIL HASHIM**  
 FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF BRAINY BUNCH SDN BHD  
 Top nominee in the Master Entrepreneur category



Wake up very early, as early as 4am if you can, said Mohd Fadzil Hashim. "Or at least be awake by 5am. You need to be an early riser because there're so many things to be done and when you wake up earlier than most people, that's actually your quiet moment to plan the rest of your day," said Mohd Fadzil.

But it isn't just about planning, because planning comes from having an idea or a goal to reach. The common adage is that the early bird gets the worm. But to Mohd Fadzil, the early bird gets ideas, because that early quiet time allows him to think without distractions, to contemplate life in solitude, to come up with solutions, and to strategise.

"If you study successful entrepreneurs, I believe this will be one of the common traits you'll find," he said.

It is during such an early morning that the idea came to him that he should do more to give his children a better education than what's available in the market today, and how to do it with one struggling kindergarten business he had acquired for passive income.

Drawing inspiration from an Islamic Montessori Kindergarten which he was sending his children to at the time, and the parental demand he sees for English education for chil-

dren, he developed a system with the help of an education consultant to provide English-based Islamic kindergarten education, which gives students the chance to learn at their own pace rather than having the whole class dependent on a single textbook.

He tested that system for preschool and elementary learning with that one kindergarten in 2008. It was so well received that he soon expanded his idea — or his business, which he named Brainy Bunch — to include Cambridge and Montessori learning for secondary and high school levels. Today, nine short years later, Brainy Bunch has 72 schools spread across the country, with two in Singapore, one in Indonesia, and a charity school in Gaza.

With his business picking up so fast, one would think Mohd Fadzil will be working overtime to stretch the hours in a day. But they would be wrong. "After dinner, most people get exhausted. So, working long hours a day isn't effective. It's how you manage your time and use it efficiently, that's more important," he said.

**EDWARD LAW**  
 CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND FOUNDER OF SECUREMETRIC TECHNOLOGY SDN BHD  
 Top nominee in the Technology Entrepreneur category



More than anything, Edward Law believes in keeping one's promises, as it shapes one's reputation and reliability in every aspect of his or her life. "I strongly believe this is one of the most important characteristics of any successful entrepreneur," said Law.

This healthy respect for and adherence to keeping promises have helped his company SecureMetric, which began outsourcing production of IT security-related products like dongles, tokens and smart cards and readers in 2007 with just seven staff on hand, win over 700 clients from the government sector, financial institutions, transportation and software companies.

Bit by bit, Law, who doesn't believe in promising more than what he can deliver, carved a name for the company in the highly competitive field of digital security. After all, what is security if not reliability? Today, SecureMetric is one of Southeast Asia's leading players in the field, and boasted some RM24 million in turnover last year with some 90 staff and six offices in the region.

With his regional success, Law also has this advice for young entrepreneurs: Don't limit yourselves to Malaysia when you start out. "If China can have Huawei, South Korea can have

Samsung, why not Malaysia to one day have SecureMetric?" said Law, who aspires to be recognised globally.

Besides keeping promises, keeping fit in both body and mind is one habit Law adheres to religiously. "I believe that exercising regularly not only keeps us healthy by relieving stress. Very importantly, it also keeps our mind fresh," said Law.

If he can't find time to go to the gym, he does a type of cardiovascular workout called high-intensity interval training at home. On average, Law exercises four to five times a week.

Reading whenever there is time to spare is also important to Law, who usually reads whenever he travels. "Even as a boss, we shouldn't stop learning, and sometimes some good books may give us some new inspiration or motivation."

For instance, he recently read a book on how a steamboat restaurant in China stands out by focusing on what was termed "heart-winning" customer services. "This book gave me indications on areas of improvement which my company could adopt," he shared.

**DATUK DR MOHD ABDUL KARIM ABDULLAH**  
 GROUP CEO OF SERBA DINAMIK HOLDINGS BHD  
 Top nominee in the Master Entrepreneur category



Don't keep to yourself but network and interact, said Datuk Dr Mohd Abdul Karim Abdullah, for doing so will give you a real view of what is happening in the world, as well as the opportunities and threats that are present. It will also help hone problem-solving skills as you learn to deal with different people and characters, he said.

So be it employees, clients, members of the press or analysts, interact with them regularly, he said.

These are what his experience as group chief executive officer (CEO) of Serba Dinamik Holdings Bhd, a Main Market-listed company primarily involved in providing maintenance and engineering solutions to the oil and gas and power generation industries, has taught him.

Under his stewardship, Serba Dinamik, which was just listed in February at an initial public offering price of RM1.50 apiece, had jumped 78% to end at RM2.67 last Friday, driven by a slew of project wins. Mid-October, the stock hit its highest at RM2.73, after the company announced it was going to jointly set up and operate a chlorine skid mounted chlor-alkali plant in Tanzania, which marks its expansion into the African continent. The company currently has oper-

ations in Malaysia, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and the UK.

To cultivate a successful business, Mohd Abdul Karim believes one "very important habit to develop" is to spend one's time wisely and productively. "Time is precious and should not be wasted, especially when you are running a business," he said.

Never procrastinate and completely focus on the task at hand, he advised. Only this way can each goal be reached in the most effective and timely manner, he said. "For example, if you are in a meeting, it is important to focus on the agenda at hand and not deviate too much so that you don't get sidetracked from important matters," he said.

And always reflect on one's SWOT or strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, he said. "I believe being self-reflective is important and one way of doing this is through the SWOT [analysis] method, which will help in narrowing one's positive action plans to help one achieve specific targets."

**MATT TAN AND LEVIN TAN**  
 CO-FOUNDERS OF MATTAN ENGINEERING SDN BHD  
 Top nominees in the Emerging Entrepreneur category



Keeping oneself updated with corporate news and just read any business-related content is a good habit to have, particularly for budding entrepreneurs, said partners Matt Tan and Levin Tan, co-founders of Mattan Engineering Sdn Bhd.

"Keep your eyes peeled for information on possible new markets, which will help you position your business to [leverage on] expansion opportunities," said Levin, who is a former banker.

Travelling often is another good habit to have, said Matt, a chartered accountant turned entrepreneur, which he said helps him open his mind and think outside the box.

"I travel at least once a month to different destinations, whether for work or pleasure. The goal is to open myself up to new cultures, new ideas and expose myself to different perspectives."

"As an entrepreneur and businessman, it is important that I am able to think creatively and outside the box, as this drives innovation and ideas, which helps the business to grow," Matt added.

Meanwhile, Levin stressed the habit of keeping business and feelings separate, in order to avoid having one's judgement being clouded by emotions and

to ensure that decisions are made in the best interest of the company.

Running the only multi-discipline renewable-energy company in the country takes a lot of dedication and efforts, so Matt and Levin believe that having an exercise regime to keep the body healthy will also help keep one's mind healthy.

"I make it a point to do Crossfit exercises three times a week, because I think keeping fit will help keep the mind in check," Matt said.

Levin agrees, and said that staying active through exercise helps keep his mind alert, and helps him in decision-making, thereby increasing efficiency at work.

"Exercising the mind is important for clarity of thought. Everyone likes different sports, but my personal favourite is playing a game of golf, which tests my patience and strategy skills. The ability to make a comeback from a bad shot in a game of golf will reveal your level of determination to recover from setbacks," Levin added.