

A nose for a good story

> Philemon Soon returns to his passion for writing with a chronicle of the man behind the successful transformation of GDEX

BY YEEVON ONG

IT IS second nature for journalists to recognise a good story when they see one. Veteran business journalist Philemon Soon saw a great story to be told in the success of GD Express Carrier Bhd (GDEX) - one of the most popular carrier services in Malaysia today - and the revolutionary figure behind the company's mega transformation.

The figures on annual reports may speak of the company's value but it is Teong Teck Lean, the man behind the company, and his unwavering determination and perseverance in taking over the then-moribund company and turning it into a multi-million powerhouse it is today that caught Soon's attention.

And so was born *A Drive for Excellence*, a tale of Teong and GDEX's transformation. The book is also Soon's first venture into sole authorship, following a collaboration with other writers on a book on small medium enterprises in Malaysia.

Coming from a journalistic background, Soon, who helped start *theSun* daily in 1993, finds it renewing to return to his writing roots after having left the publishing industry to venture into business.

On his return to writing and publishing, Soon says: "I think I have done my share of reporting and editing so I want to try my hand in writing as I have gathered enough experience to have a better perspective of things and of life.

"You become more observant as you grow older, and like wine, it becomes better as it ages. So, I think I have become a better writer in that sense rather than a reporter or

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a journalist."

Embarking on a mission to write about Teong and his entrepreneurial endeavours wasn't a bed of roses despite the perfect ending. When he first started writing the book, Soon had doubts any writer would have - the fear of failing to write a compelling enough story.

"Basically, [to write a book] you have to work very hard and do a lot of research and interviews with the right people and you need to be determined and disciplined in doing what you want to do because you can get sidetracked along the way."

It was the initial stage of compiling facts to weave parts of the story together and the overcoming of a writer's quiet apprehension that was the most arduous.

However, with Soon's vast experience in corporate reporting and personality features on successful entrepreneurs, the author quickly recognises the entrepreneurial X-factor that Teong had, hence, making it easy for him to write the story.



ADIB RAWI/
THESUN

Soon (right) with the subject of his first book, Teong, at the launch of *A Drive for Excellence*.

"After I left *theSun*, I went into a variety of businesses, trying to emulate my heroes," recalled the writer at heart, who looked up to the corporate fathers of some of the biggest companies in Malaysia whom he had interviewed back in his journalistic days.

An entrepreneur himself, Soon currently runs a frozen distribution firm among other businesses. He is also one of the budding authors with eyes turned to the human touches of corporate success stories.

"I felt there is a need for journalists and experienced veteran writers like us to do our part in highlighting corporate stories like this in Malaysia or else such inspiring tales of drive and spirit will go unnoticed," said the father of two.

A Drive for Excellence may be Teong's story on how he revived GDEX but it is also Soon's return to his passion in writing.

"The book made me realise where my strength is and when you have a passion in doing something - like writing for me - you tend to be very much alive and active in wanting to do more of it," says Soon.

And that's how great success stories come about - through passion, hard work, prayers and hoping for the best when you have done your best.