

DETERMINATION WILL GET YOU THROUGH ANYTHING

MR. CHANNA WIJESEKARA

MANAGING DIRECTOR, LEEMA CREATIONS

Mr. Channa Wijesekara, Managing Director of Leema Creations is a leading entrepreneur in Sri Lanka. He started

his career 35 years ago and now has developed his industry to a remarkable position in the country. It's really interesting to go through his timeline. He was born and raised in Matara district and his father was a Principal and a well-known, well established personality in the region. Little Channa had the opportunity to grow up amongst village boys since he went to a village school with minimum facilities, while his elder sister and brother was sent to major schools in Colombo & Galle to study in the English medium.

However, he took it as an opportunity to learn how to deal with different personalities and to be social and popular among them. At the completion of his primary

education, he was sent to Richmond College for further studies and half way through he joined Nalanda College, Colombo and it was the beginning of a new era.

He has proven his talents through many extracurricular activities and was good in acting; therefore, he got the opportunity to act in several stage dramas including two movies. While maintaining the proper balance in his life, he focused much on vocational training to gain practical skills. After his secondary education he joined the University of Moratuwa and followed the Diploma in Civil Engineering Course after which he joined as an assistant irrigation officer, which was his very first working experience. At that time he was involved in many curriculum developments with NAITA for vocational training and he got the opportunity to join some carpentry workshops and it was his





main inspiration to start his career.

He was a lecturer at NAB and taught carpentry and wood work related disciplines. The main turning point of his life is the scholarship he won to do his further studies in Germany, on carpentry and woodworks. Two year full time course was fully comprehensive with practical exposure, and he gained the skill of

dealing many types of machinery and other craftsmen skills. He was able to complete his course with extraordinary achievements and returned to Sri Lanka and continued his journey again as a lecturer. In 1987, he followed the "Diploma in Educational Administration" Programme at Landau University in Germany.

During this time, he had started a consultancy service on wood works and got involved in curriculum development. In 1995, he was appointed as the Deputy Principal at ATI and at the same time, he joined University of Moratuwa as a Visiting Lecturer for the program of Bachelor of Designing (Furniture). Secondly, he joined a leading construction and interior company as its Production Manager in charge of furniture, wood productions and

interior sections and worked for 3 years. Then he worked as the Factory Manager of leading furniture export company and an interior production company for another 02 years.

He was motivated by many life lessons learned throughout his journey and had the desire to start his own business. In 1999, he chose the wood & interior industry to rejuvenate his career, by investing 800,000 LKR initially. The knowledge he gained through the time he spent at NAITA was very useful for him, and the excellent reputation he got from Germany was a blessing to him. The beginning was a tough period to him and he humbly recollected that he had only one machine, and one worker and the other worker was himself. Bearing all the difficulties,

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he initially produced some pantry cupboards which cost 30,000 LKR and now he handles more than 1000 projects with more than 550 million turnover, a year.

His business grew, so did his ambition and determination. He looked for ways to expand it and to start with, he invested in a land, with an extent of 1 1/2 acres to put up a factory. This factory with small beginnings is now equipped with latest state of the art sophisticated and computerized machinery with no other furniture manufacturer could match.

Unlike many entrepreneurs, his knowledge was not limited to theory, he has the ability to handle any type of machinery and possesses excellent skills in carpentry. Thus, he knows how to teach the others and how to motivate them to do their best, as well as how to train them properly. He has proven that designing furniture should not be limited to a paper qualification, it needs to come through advanced skills gained by an individual.

Not only that, he is a visionary futuristic leader, who has the capability of providing many employment opportunities to people, and he really enjoys looking at how they personally achieve and develop their lives. His vision can be categorized into 3 main objectives;

1. Providing various employment opportunities to many
2. Producing high quality products to the market
3. Serving people

Through this journey, he was able to raise his business to a remarkable position and now many are following his footsteps. The secret behind his success was, he dumped everything he earned from the business to develop it and now he is in a very stable position, where the

others feel difficult to compete with. The most intriguing and admirable aspect I heard whilst interviewing him, his amazing confidence and belief in himself and his abilities, he stated that he knew from the very start that he would be successful in the future.

From his point of view, his key driving force was the foreign exposure he gained when he was in Germany. Furthermore, he is a very good listener with very humble attitudes and can certainly be identified as an inspiring personality and a role model in the Sri Lankan wood industry. He currently employs over 225 workers and is very happy to groom them all. Disregarding all marketing strategies and competition he could get from other similar industries, he trained them and transferred his knowledge to other business colleagues wholeheartedly, and with a cheerful smile, he said, "now they all have started competing with Leema but still, they are unable to shake my business!"

Now "Leema" is a well-established brand in this region and can be identified as a pride to the nation. His vision and mission was recognized by many prestigious national and international awards and following are some of them:

1. Brand Excellence in Interior Decorators and Designers Award for the SAARC region at the South Asian Partnership Summit and Business Awards Ceremony held on 29th October 2017 at Le Meridian Hotel, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
2. National Gold Award (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2016'
3. Provincial Gold Award (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur Of the Year 2016'
4. National Gold Award (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2015'

5. Provincial Gold Award (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur Of the Year 2015'

6. National Bronze (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur Of the Year 2014'

7. National Merit Award at 'CNCI Industrial Excellence Award 2014'

8. National Bronze Award – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2014'

9. National Bronze Award – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2013'

10. Provincial Bronze Award – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2013'

11. National Merit Award – 'CNCI Industrial Excellence Award 2013'

12. Merit Award at 'Best Web 2013-Best Consumer & E-Commerce'

13. National Merit Award at 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2012'

14. Provincial Bronze Award at 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2012'

Winning the SAARC award was another milestone of his journey and now he focuses most of his time to build the community, via many community service programmes and donations of large amounts of items and funds.

This generous entrepreneur, with all his attributes and accolades to his name, is indeed one of a kind. As someone who loves to share his knowledge and know-how with anyone who seeks it, he has also been a great support to the NSBM Interior Design undergraduates, many a time, at no cost at all. Countless training sessions and workshops conducted by him and his team, including hands-on experience at his factory has indeed been a precious and valuable contribution.

Mr. Channa Wijesekara is indeed an entrepreneur who never stops giving, and for that, we and so many others, would always be immensely grateful ■

By Archt. Upeksha Hettithanthri

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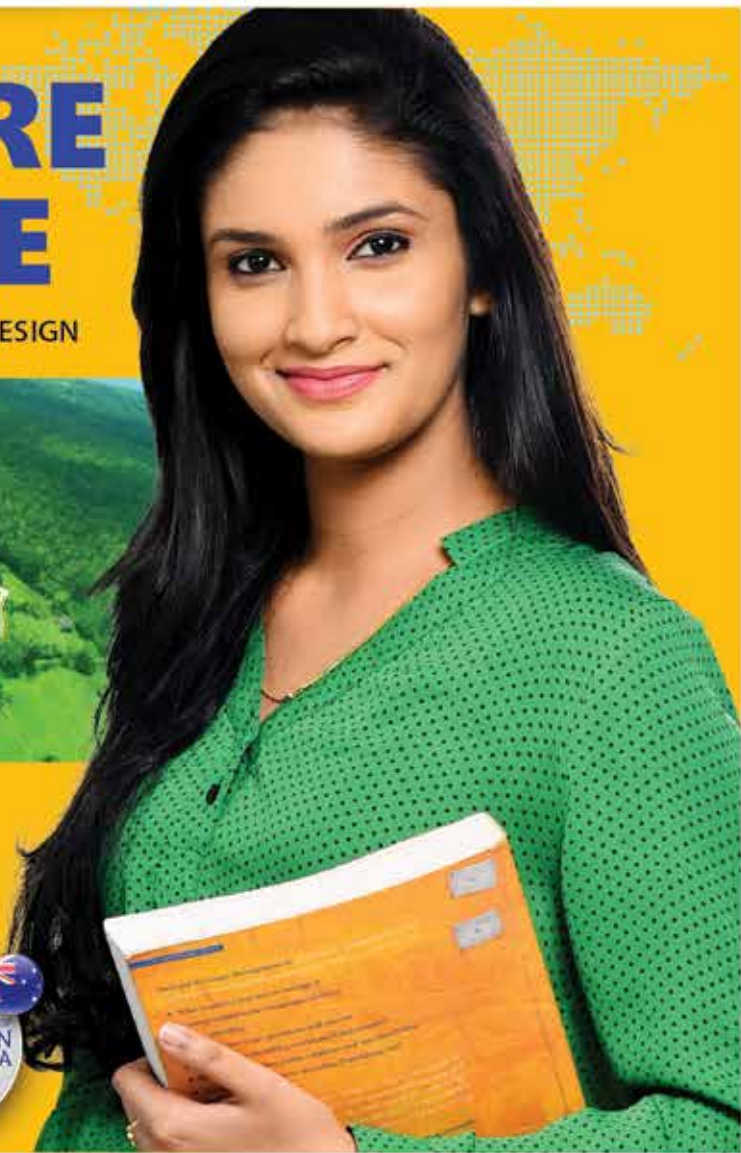


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ENJOY DOING SO MUCH, INTO
A CAREER ”

