

# FRITTERING AWAY CORPORATE LIFE

AS TOLD TO LYNETTE TAN

*Audrey Chew was looking for something new to do in 2017 when she returned to Singapore after five years of working in China. Her father was then selling you tiao from a hawker stall in Toa Payoh – where it still stands today – and managing the business himself, but he was getting on in his years. Ms Chew wanted to preserve the business, but also saw potential in taking the product further. Hence, she decided to remodel the business by mass producing the fritters, setting up a factory and hiring workers in the process. Today, You Tiao Man has established itself as one of the few you tiao producers in Singapore. It also supplies to restaurants such as Tung Lok and Crystal Jade, as well as hotels and food courts.*



## HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE FOOD MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY?

I worked for 10 years in the commodities industry, and spent the last five years in China. When I came back to Singapore in 2017, I was a young mother and at the peak of my career, so starting a business was really the last thing on my mind!

I believe that fate is what you are born into, but destiny is your soul's call to greatness. It's the potential for what you could be, but it involves you stepping outside your comfort zone and taking a risk. Entering the food business was a huge risk because I was an outsider to the industry, but I think it was also my destiny. Thankfully, I had a lot of support from my family, friends and customers to help me get to where I am today.

## WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO START YOU TIAO MAN?

I started You Tiao Man because I felt that we had a very good product compared to what the market

was offering, and I was ready to try something new after 10 years as a salaried employee. With that, You Tiao Man was established in 2017 and we moved to our manufacturing facility in Mandai.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK WAS YOUR WORST BET FOR THE COMPANY?

The worst thing I did for the company was to be unknowledgeable in my field of business. When I started, I had just returned from China and I was unfamiliar with the food trends or modus operandi in Singapore. Instead of learning it myself, I spent a lot of money to hire consultants who recommended expensive programmes and equipment which did not suit my business.

## AND YOUR BEST?

The best decisions we made for the company have always been those that take our company into the future. Businesses must innovate and adapt in order to move ahead in the game.

*Ms Audrey Chew (left), co-founder of Inspired Snacks, who is putting a modern spin on her family's you tiao supply business You Tiao Man, together with business partner Bandana Kaur.*

We launched many innovative products such as charcoal *you tiao* and wholegrain *you tiao*. Our charcoal *you tiao* has generated much interest in the F&B (food and beverage) industry as a modern twist to the traditional *you tiao*. Our wholegrain *you tiao* is the healthiest in the world, and we were awarded the Healthier Choice Symbol by the Health Promotion Board.

In the next few months, Inspired Snacks, a company I co-founded, will launch *you tiao* chips, a first in the world. We hope to disrupt the snack market.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SKILLS THAT YOU HAVE HAD TO DEVELOP AND THAT YOU THINK ARE MOST CRUCIAL TO YOUR ROLE?

Resilience. I've always known that I was a determined person, but this business brought out a side of me I was not even aware I had. Resilience determines a person's ability to recover quickly from failures and adapt to adversity. Will you pick yourself up and learn from your mistakes, or will you give up and blame the world for it?

In the beginning, it was very tough. There were many factors that almost derailed us, but we fought back and emerged stronger. In order to build resilience in a business, the owner needs to face problems courageously, take decisive actions to solve and learn from them, so that mistakes are not repeated.

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REWARDING MOMENT OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

We supply *you tiao* to many restaurants, hotels and hawkers in Singapore, but most customers don't know we also manufacture them. So when I see families, children and working adults enjoying our *you tiao* and ordering a second serving, I feel happy and rewarded. It tells me that we're doing a good job and we have an outstanding product that Singaporeans love.

## WHAT WAS A CHALLENGING MOMENT IN YOUR CAREER AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME IT?

Some of the most challenging moments involved tackling gender biases in the workplace and in life. For example, when I was working in China, I would conduct meetings with employees at Chinese steel mills, where most of them were men. They would be surprised to see that I came alone for the meetings, and they were sceptical and quite at a loss about what to do with me. It was only by being technically adept and knowledgeable that I gradually won their trust.

Gender inequality is a difficult topic to talk about, but I believe that continuous open dialogue will encourage companies to eliminate these entrenched biases.

## WHEN YOU ARE NOT WORKING HARD IN THE OFFICE, WHERE ARE YOU TO BE FOUND?

At home, spending time with my son. My husband and I are very hands-on, and we love engaging our son in meaningful activities. ■

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