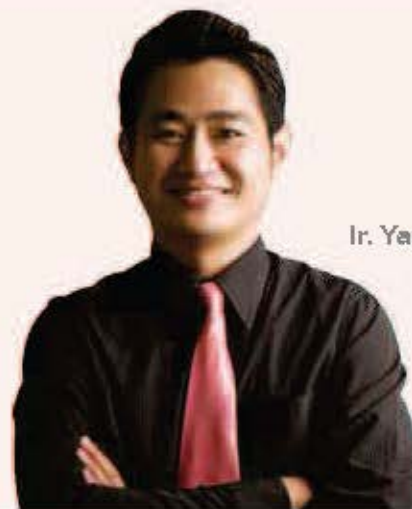


All About Sharing and Networking

by Tan Bee Hong



Ir. Yau Chau Fong, 34

INSPIRATION can come from many directions and in many forms. For Ir. Yau Chau Fong, it was his uncle, Ir. Runny Poh, whose stories about his engineering inventions and achievements sparked off a flame in the young Chau Fong that, over the years, fanned into a roaring fire that even a tsunami wouldn't extinguish. "I had always wanted to be an engineer, even as a young boy. It was because of my uncle, who is now retired, that I have always felt that engineering is one way we can help society," says Ir. Yau, 34, who grew up in Malacca.

"In secondary school, I loved Physics, especially the chapters on electricity. Of course I was also interested in Art and History but Physics was my real love." His teacher father and housewife mother were very supportive and encouraged him in his passion. He continues: "You know, I was very shy as a boy." Really? I think aloud that's really hard to picture the extremely articulate Entrepreneur-Engineer as shy, quiet boy.

He laughs and explains: "All this changed when I joined IEM and Toastmasters International. I wanted to learn to speak up... in public. It's very important for one's career development."

Today, his motto in life is "Burst Your Fear". And that is just one example of how the IEM has helped to develop Ir. Yau's career path. As a student at Universiti Malaya, he joined the Engineering Society of UM. IEM was always on the lookout for volunteers, so after he graduated in 2001, he signed up immediately and had never regretted it. "Again, Uncle Runny was a huge influence as he was also very actively involved with IEM," he says. Ir. Yau was Chairman of YES (Young Engineers Section) from 2006 to 2008. The year after, he became a Council Member and this year, he is also elected as one of the IEM's Executive Committee (Excomm) member.

SAY 'YES'

IEM and YES are doing a great job helping fresh graduates to grow professional skills, says Ir. Yau. But sadly, he notes, there are not enough volunteers. He cites the lack of time as just one of the reasons for this. "We need to help young graduates develop both hard and soft skills and to provide them the necessary guidance. Through YES, they can learn greater technical skills for their career and soft skills to help them move up the corporate ladder."



IEM G&S (Graduate & Student Section, now known as YES) AGM 2002, the first AGM which Ir. Yau attended



Ir. Yau giving his incoming chair address 2006/2007

With a grin, he adds: "Engineering can be a very fun profession, you know and YES can show them the way." He has one piece of advice to the present (and future) Board of Committee of YES: "Keep up the good work and focus on creating more events to get more people interested in engineering." Personally, Ir. Yau has no intention of stopping the good work. "I will continue to contribute to IEM. I believe there is plenty of room still for growth," he says. "When engineers are connected, they can share knowledge to grow faster."

ON MENTORING

Ir. Yau did not attain his PI through IEM's mentoring system but he is convinced that this is the better method for young engineers to do so. "If it's done through the supervisor-at-work method, the immediate supervisor may be too busy to have the time or not have the intention to do so," he explains. "I feel the mentoring system is still the better approach as it is more systematic and reliable."

SATISFYING TERM OF OFFICE

Looking back at his years of sacrificing his leisure time to offer his services to IEM, his eyes turn a tad misty with satisfaction. "I wanted to do something to revive YES, to create greater awareness of engineering as a profession. It was also my aim to inject new life into YES," he says enthusiastically. "For a start, I organised the annual dinner that same year in 2006. The dinner at Grand Blue Wave in Shah Alam, was a huge success, with 52 tables filled, a record of sorts.



IEM G&S Annual Dinner and Dance 2006

Another moment of satisfaction that he treasures, he says, is the chance to be organising chairman for the 13th YEAFEO (2006), the Young Engineers of the ASEAN Federation of Engineering Organisation (YEAFEO) Conference, in Kuala Lumpur. The event is held in different countries each year. "We had over 100 participants from all over the ASEAN region. The bonding and networking of young engineers is necessary for sharing of ideas and personal development," he says.

His latest project was as Chairman of the recent IEM Engineering Week 2013, held last month (September). "We organised activities to generate greater awareness about Engineering. But we had fun too, such as the Engineer's Run which had two options: 3km and 6.5km. Sports is a great way to get people together," he says, adding that there was also EINIX 2013 (Engineering Invention & Innovation Exhibition).

THE YPA

The Young Professionals Alliance was started towards the end of 2006. This group comprises not just engineers



EINIX 2013



Engineer's Run 2013

but also lawyers, pharmacists and chartered secretaries. What mooted the formation of YPA? Ir. Yau explains: "Life is all about sharing and connecting with others and when different professions can get connected, they can learn and share. Just because we are engineers, we needn't and shouldn't confine our knowledge to engineering only." Indeed, as today's world grows smaller, boundaries disappear. One never knows when a little knowledge of law and medicine may be imperative in one's life and this is what Ir. Yau cannot emphasise enough. "We just want to link up young professionals. It benefits each and every one," he concludes firmly. The YPA organises networking sessions and talks as well as meet up for festive occasions.

PERSONAL JOURNEY

An engineering degree provides the basics for a career but, Ir. Yau feels, there is much more to being an engineer than just that. He says: "There are endless career possibilities. Engineering (as a job) is not everything. Engineers need to develop soft skills as well. We need skills like sales and accounting for climbing the corporate ladder. We're not academicians." He cites his own career path as an example. "When I first graduated, I worked in an air-conditioner factory. But I prefer customer-related interaction, design

and creativity," he says. He next joined an engineering consultancy and stayed on the job for eight years. He then started his own business but he was too much of a greenhorn still. It lasted all of five months. "Customers weren't that confident in me as they thought I was too young and inexperienced to be doing what I was doing. I found that out the hard way," he says. So he returned to the workforce, this time in the consulting section of a data centre company. It was here too that Ir. Yau had some of the finest moments in his working life. "I was able to assist my client to obtain a tier accreditation for the data centre, one of the first to get one in the country."

A second source of pride was when he successfully "electrified" a diesel pump house in Genting Highlands in 2009. "It's in the middle of the forest and now, when I look at it, I get such a tremendous sense of satisfaction and continued amazement to think that I have done this." This month, Ir. Yau begins a new chapter in his career with the start of his own consultancy firm. We wish him all the best.

ON THE HOMEFRONT

With his intense involvement in IEM and YPA as well as a new career path, how does Ir. Yau manage to have a personal life? The father of two-year-old Charmaine smiles wistfully as he says he wishes there were more hours in a day. "24 hours are definitely not enough. I try to get home in time every day to see my little baby before she goes to bed," he says, chuckling sheepishly as he adds that he doesn't always make it and little Charmaine's asleep before he rolls into the driveway of his house. "With my new office in the same neighbourhood, I'm hoping I can squeeze in more time to spend with her and my wife," he says. ■