

Date : 5 JUNE 2011

Publication: SUNDAY MORNING POST - (FAMILY POST)

Client: MA BELLE JEWELLERY

Circulation : 75,374

PATHWAYS

For diamond trader Lawrence Ma, integrity is the key

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Where did you go to school? I studied at St Louis School, a Catholic secondary school in Western, Sai Yin Pun was not the most prestigious

locality. I met genuine people, who were not just materialistic. The religion reinforced people's belief in righteousness; this grounded me and made me want to work harder.

What were the other lessons of your early life? Education at school

should complement education at home. Parents cannot delegate education to schools, they have to show their own values by living what they tell their children. My father was an entrepreneur; he died when I was only 11. My mother decided to close all his businesses except the Lee Heng Diamond Group. It made me realise that things can disappear overnight and you have to pick up the pieces and move on.

How did you get into the diamond industry? I was born into the business. I was lucky in that I did not have a choice but I was also committed. When I was 11, I learnt to count, weigh and sort diamonds after school. They fascinated me.

Where did you go to university? I went to McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. While there, I stayed in the diamond business. I would travel down to New York every six weeks to look for diamonds to buy. At St Louis all the boys did

sciences; there was no choice. When I went to Ontario, I studied business administration and economics.

What are the key qualities for success in business? I think, for most industries, the most important quality is not a high IQ, but a sense of responsibility and work ethic.

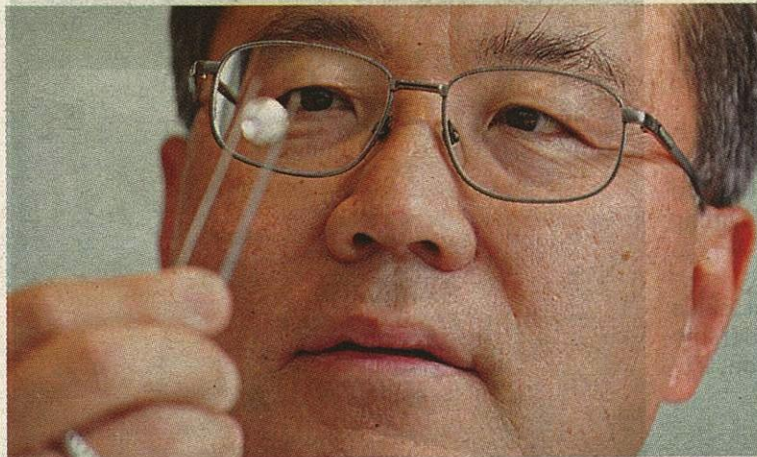
And for the jewellery industry? Firstly, the most important thing is to guard your integrity with your life. Secondly, work hard. Thirdly, be curious; be ready to question things and to answer these questions. Have your dreams and goals and then have perseverance and toughness. Aim for perfection, as in the search for perfection, you'll achieve excellence.

Should you ever show weakness? You should be ready to accept what you're not good at. Letting people know your weaknesses is not [being] weak, it's inviting other people to help you improve.

Any last words of wisdom? A wise man once said to me: "Money has legs, it can run faster than you. For you to chase it is difficult ... But if you do the right thing, it will run to you."

Lawrence Ma is CEO of the Lee Heng Diamond Group, founder and president of the Diamond Federation of Hong Kong.

Bachelor degrees in business administration are offered at Hong Kong University School of Business (2241 5538) and Chinese University of Hong Kong, Faculty of Business Administration (2609 7775). Masters' degrees in Business Administration are offered by the Graduate School of Business at Hong Kong Polytechnic University (2766 7087). The Hong Kong Institute of Gemology offers short courses on how to classify and identify diamonds, a Diploma of Jadeite Jade and a Master Valuer Programme (2815-1880). The Gemological Institute of America offers diploma and professional courses at its Hong Kong campus (2303-0075).



Lawrence Ma began learning to sort diamonds at age 11. Photo: Dickson Lee