RAIMIE TANG

LINKEDIN



INTERVIEW DONE BY LIM BEE LING

Raimie Tang, former CEO of dateideas, is dedicated to fortifying relationships. For over 5 years, he tackled the issue of high failure rates in long-term relationships. Raimie aimed to reduce broken families and unhappy children by empowering the next generation of couples. He grew dateideas into Singapore's largest couples' community with 50K+ subscribers and 20K+ Weekly Active Users. Presently, he co-founded Metafi (YC S22), a company building Blockchain Infrastructure for Web3 Games, marking his foray into this cutting-edge technology.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO PURSUE A DOUBLE DEGREE IN BBA AND CHEMICAL ENGINEERING, AND HOW HAS IT HELPED YOU GET TO WHERE YOU ARE TODAY?

I have always had the mindset to challenge myself to take on as many opportunities as possible. Before university, I always wanted to be a chemical engineer, while I considered business to be my second degree. During my National Service, I started learning about entrepreneurship and startups, which sparked my interest in the business world. Pursuing Chemical Engineering and Business as a double degree seemed like a logical choice. However, shortly after I started studying and delved deeper into startups, I realised that I no longer wanted to pursue a career as a chemical engineer. My passion shifted towards entrepreneurship. This is where the Business degree became more valuable over time.

That said, if I hadn't taken the opportunity to pursue two degrees, I wouldn't have gone this far to what I am doing today. Embracing new experiences and pushing myself to explore different paths allowed things to fall into place naturally. It's important to give yourself the opportunity to try new things and embrace different possibilities, rather than confining yourself to a predetermined path.

Studying engineering provided me with two essential skills. First is interpersonal skills. Both in BBA and engineering, I encountered individuals with different perspectives, broadening my outlook. Second, it honed my attention to detail, particularly when it comes to meticulous calculations and ensuring precision. These skills have been valuable in the business world, where I now engage in financial calculations and accounting. Additionally, my business skills in presentation and strategy come into play when interacting with potential clients and closing deals.

WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS? COULD YOU SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE AND TELL US ABOUT YOUR CURRENT COMPANY?

From a young age, I've always had a desire

to make a positive impact on the world and solve problems for people such that I can change their lives. Entrepreneurship is not about buying something at a low price and selling it at a higher price, where you earn the profits. Different from a traditional business, it allowed me to make a difference in people's lives and tackle problems that may otherwise go unsolved.

The idea for dateideas stemmed from personal experiences. Whenever I wanted to plan dates with my then-girlfriend, I found myself spending a significant amount of time searching online for good date ideas. However, I often encountered challenges. Many suggestions were too expensive, uninteresting, or didn't align with my girlfriend's preferences. This led me to recognize an opportunity to solve this problem for other individuals who might struggle with planning memorable and enjoyable dates.

Starting with the local market in Singapore, we developed dateideas to curate a wide range of date activities and experiences. However, as we expanded our reach to other countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, we faced new challenges. Each market had its own unique needs and preferences. Some markets didn't use Telegram or had limited familiarity with mobile apps. It became clear that while dateideas was successful and profitable within Singapore, we wanted to pursue something even bigger—a venture that could positively impact more lives on a larger scale.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE OUTLETS THAT YOU TOOK ADVANTAGE OF FROM NUS DURING YOUR TIME AS A STUDENT? EG. NOC/CCA. COULD YOU SHARE WITH US MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES AND HOW THEY SHAPED YOUR CAREER?

During my time as a student at NUS, I took advantage of various outlets that the university offered, such as NOC (NUS Overseas College) and CCA (Co-Curricular Activities). In total, I went on more than 10 overseas trips during my time as a student. These experiences had a significant impact on shaping my career.

From the beginning, I knew that joining NUS and participating in NOC was crucial for me as a budding entrepreneur. I had always been interested in startups and entrepreneurship, and the idea of being in an environment like Silicon Valley fascinated me. So, getting into NOC was my top priority when entering NUS. Over time, I realised that each individual experience, whether it was NOC or other overseas trips, had something unique to offer. I discovered that going on more trips could contribute to personal growth and development in various ways.I took part in programmes such as the BIZAD Leadership Development Programme (BLDP). BLDP involved trips to Singapore, Tsinghua University in China, and Hyderabad in India. These trips exposed me to advanced technologies in China and the real challenges faced by people in India, highlighting the importance of exploring different perspectives beyond Singapore. I also went on other overseas trips, including visits to the Middle East for the Study Trips For Engagement & EnRichment (STEER) programme, Bangkok for a hackathon, leadership trips to

Malaysia and Indonesia through my hall, and the Student Exchange Programme (SEP). Each trip had a profound impact on my life, broadening my horizons and helping me develop as an individual.

I understand that some may perceive overseas trips as expensive or time-consuming, and many students will choose to focus on internships instead. However, I highly recommend taking advantage of these opportunities as they can truly be life-changing. Even during my time, many students didn't explore these options fully. I encourage you to venture beyond the Singaporean mindset and consider the immense value that these trips can bring to your personal and career development.

HOW CAN STUDENTS STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN PURSUING INTERNSHIPS AND MAXIMIZING THEIR OVERALL STUDENT EXPERIENCE?

Initially, if you're unsure about your interests and career path, it's beneficial to try a bit of everything. Take part in one or two overseas trips, engage in internships, and then evaluate which experiences contribute more to your personal growth.

In my case, I didn't pursue any internships except NOC. Instead, I dedicated my breaks to participating in overseas programs or working on my own projects to foster personal growth. However, I've also witnessed individuals who have benefited greatly from internships, securing job offers and valuable industry experience. Yet, it's worth considering that without exposure to overseas opportunities, they may have missed out on even better job offers abroad. For instance, among my peers in NOC, many received job offers from the companies they interned with, often with significantly higher salaries compared to local positions. The world out there is very different.

ARE THERE ANY INTERESTING EXPERIENCES, OR CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACED DURING NOC (E.G. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES)?

In the beginning. I faced an unexpected challenge related to an inferiority complex when interacting with Caucasians. Despite feeling confident in my ability to communicate well among Singaporeans, I struggled to maintain eye contact while conversing with my American boss without stuttering. To overcome this, I actively attended various events, forcing myself to engage with native English speakers. Over time, my confidence improved, and I was able to switch between accents seamlessly. This was a significant learning experience that helped me grow. It was an interesting experience because I never felt so demoralized or unconfident in my life until that happened. Besides that, I noticed that Singaporeans tend to speak quickly, which sometimes led to confusion for international colleagues who would ask for clarification or say "pardon." This realisation highlighted the differences in communication styles and prompted me to be more mindful of my pace of speech. These were valuable learnings and experiences that I found intriguing during my time on NOC.

Additionally, I participated in 27 hackathons during my time on NOC, allowing me to meet new people and engage in exciting projects.

However there were also unexpected incidents, such as my car being broken into. Furthermore, just before my planned trip to Canada, my passport was stolen. Thankfully, as a Singaporean, I was fortunate to experience the efficiency of our embassy, as they promptly issued a new passport within a week. These incidents reinforced my appreciation for my nationality and reminded me of the advantages of being Singaporean.

Moreover, it was interesting to witness the high regard that NUS enjoys worldwide. Whenever I presented or interacted with people, they would recognize me as a Singaporean and often mention the prestige of NUS as one of the top universities in Asia. Initially, I didn't fully grasp the significance of NUS compared to other local universities. However, these encounters made me proud to be an NUS student and appreciate the recognition it holds.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO STUDENTS TO ADAPT TO WORKING IN A CROSS-CULTURAL TEAM?

To adapt to working in a cross-cultural team, I would recommend going beyond seeing your colleagues as just coworkers and making an effort to understand their cultures better. Connect with them on a personal level by showing interest in their traditions and customs. For example, ask if you can join them and their friends for a national tradition event. This not only helps foster professional collaboration but also promotes open-mindedness as an individual. When you can connect so deeply with someone so foreign, you'll find it easier to assimilate in both professional and informal settings.

RELATIVE RISK AVERSION DECREASES AS WE AGE. DO YOU THINK THAT OUR UNDERGRADUATE YEARS WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO START (AND POTENTIALLY FAIL) OUR FIRST STARTUP?

I started dateideas part-time during my final 3 years of university. So if I did not take the risk then, I probably wouldn't be so confident in pursuing startups full-time after I graduate. If you are already considering starting a startup, undergraduate years provide an excellent opportunity to take that initial leap. If it turns out that startups are not for you, you still have time to explore other career options. On the other hand, if you discover a passion for entrepreneurship, you can spend your university years building something that you can continue working on full-time after graduation.

Even for those who don't see themselves as startup founders, taking a calculated risk and working on a project with friends can teach valuable skills. Engaging in a challenging endeavour, whether it's a CCA or hall project, pushes you to set higher standards for success. This experience raises your expectations for future projects and achievements in the workplace.

Regardless of the outcome, engaging in a venture that you can be proud of during your university years can have a significant impact on your personal and professional growth. So, whether you have aspirations of being an entrepreneur or not, don't be afraid to take a chance and pursue something that you'll be proud to have attempted, even if it doesn't work out.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE TRYING TO WIDEN THEIR CIRCLE THROUGH NETWORKING?

I would break down networking into three different categories. The first is, and this is where everyone starts, taking advantage of the networking opportunities provided by the school. Explore various programs and events within your own faculty as well as across the entire university. Don't limit yourself to your specific discipline, as there may be valuable programs or grants that are open to the wider university community. Additionally, don't hesitate to extend your networking efforts beyond your own university. Look for opportunities at other institutions like SMU, NTU, or SUTD, as they may offer grants or competitions that are open to all Singaporeans.

the next category of networking is self-sourced networking. While school-based events are beneficial, there may come a point where you feel you have exhausted those resources. Seek networking sessions and events outside of your university that attract more senior individuals who can provide valuable insights and guidance. Utilize platforms like LinkedIn to connect with founders or industry professionals who have achieved significant success. Send them a direct message asking if they would be willing to share their knowledge or schedule a call. Keep in mind that busy individuals may have limited availability, so be respectful and understanding.

Lastly, networking is not the silver bullet. Networking is not just about receiving knowledge and advice, but also about adding value to the relationship.

To me, this is the silver bullet. Take the time to invest in your own personal growth and development. Continuously learn and enhance your skills as an entrepreneur. When you network with others, ensure that you bring something valuable to the table. Share your background, experiences, and achievements, demonstrating that you have something to offer in return. Building mutual, two-way relationships where both parties benefit is the ultimate goal of networking instead of one-way acceptance of knowledge.

IS THERE ANY ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO BUDDING ENTREPRENEURS WHO MAY HAVE A KEEN INTEREST IN THIS AREA BUT HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT TAKING SUCH AN UNCONVENTIONAL ROUTE?

Start small and do things in layers. It's important not to try to change the world right from the beginning. Instead, focus on doing something that brings you instant gratification. It could be as simple as creating an email or Telegram list, or manually providing a service to a small group of individuals who can benefit from it. For example, if you want to build a better application, instead of building the application from the start, you can begin by manually solving a problem for a small group of people, even if it's just ten friends. When you witness even a few people benefiting from what you're doing, it boosts your confidence and conviction to take the next step. If you don't reach that initial goal of helping a few people, you'll likely doubt yourself and question whether you're good enough or doing things right. The feedback and support from those initial beneficiaries will

motivate you to improve and expand your ideas.

Changing the lives of many people can sound intimidating. Many people underestimate the power of starting small and end up giving up because they focus too much on changing the lives of thousands before even starting. Instead, focus on changing the life of just one person, maybe even yourself. Ensure that what you're offering benefits you personally. By doing so, you can assume that five other individuals who share similar needs will also benefit. Successfully making a difference in one person's life paves the way for scaling your impact to 10 people, and beyond.