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## Ex-Hwa Chong scholar bounces back from retrenchment

 MAY 13, 2020 BY  ENG BENG  2 COMMENTS (EDIT)



## **Eugene Seah, 41, is the founder and chief coach of Trainium Academy. — Photo by CharmaineWu.com**

At 36 years old, he was already earning \$20,000 a month as an expatriate in Hong Kong. But two years later, Eugene Seah was retrenched from his investor relations job with Nomura, a top Japanese bank, in 2014. His world came crashing down. Until his retrenchment, he was leading the high life.

“My boss flew my whole family to Hong Kong, we were all very happy being treated like a king... and the bank paid me really well — \$20,000 a month. I felt that I had arrived, I was set for life,” said the 41-year-old father of three kids.

His life was then unfolding according to the Singapore success story script: A lower middle-class kid who studied hard to get into Hwa Chong Junior College, became the president of its students' council, and was later awarded a bond-free Singapore Exchange (SGX) scholarship for his university studies.

But reality hit him hard when he realised he couldn't pay his credit card bill one day. He had remained jobless for nine months despite intensive job search after his return to Singapore.

“I cried a few times... how could this happen to me? I was so successful in my studies and CCAs. I was the HCJC students' council President for goodness sake,” he recalled his ordeal.

“There's a board in Hwa Chong JC that listed every year's students' council president, these people were CEOs or CFOs of their companies. I kept looking at their names and wondered what's wrong with me.

“How did I end up as a good for nothing when we went through the same education, joined the same CCA, elected as president? That's how I treated myself — a good for nothing. It's really horrible.”



– Photo by CharmaineWu.com

Eugene, who now runs a successful personal branding and training company, was sharing his life story with me in an interview held at the LifeLong Learning Institute.

He's my senior in NTU's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information. He's from class of 2001, I was from class of 2007. We never knew about each other until we connected on Facebook.

Intrigued by his work as a personal branding coach – most mass communication graduates work in the media field – I decided to interview him for Happiness Notebook. My intention was to help my readers to explore more career choices.

But during the interview, he shared candidly about his darkest moments, the struggles and humiliations, and how he later came to acceptance of his failure, learnt about humility and the importance of financial literacy.

### **Material chase**

Eugene was then living his life according to the society's expectations, not on his own terms. He's like one of those people who are caught in a race to obtain more expensive and high-status commodities. They subconsciously believe that success is about having bigger cars and bigger houses.

“My son was (then) still going for expensive tuition at Learning Labs, the most expensive tuition centre in Singapore. I wasn’t very good in financial planning, I even bought a car without a job. My savings depleted a lot faster than it could have,” he said.

Why buy a car when you just lost your job?

“I was confident of getting a job very soon. And because I had a car in Singapore before I moved to Hong Kong, so when I came back to I wanted to go back to my previous life as if nothing had changed.”

He was living in denial. And when he finally got a job offer that pays \$8,000 a month, he rejected it!

“To me, it’s an insult,” he said, adding that headhunters had told him that he could command \$14,000 salary based on his work experience.

But his arrogance soon gave way to desperation when he saw his savings dwindling fast. He started looking for any kind of jobs. “Very ironic, I gave up a job that would pay me \$8000 a month, then I ended up looking for jobs that pay \$4,000 a month,” he said.

Despite lowering his expectation, he still couldn’t find a job. He almost sunk into depression, but thanks to his religious faith as well as support from his wife, friends, counsellors and pastor, he was able to lift himself up. His elder brother lent him a five figure sum to tide over.

### **Returning to his passion**

With no luck in the job market, Eugene co-founded a training company Trainium Academy ([TrainiumAcademy.com](http://TrainiumAcademy.com)) with an entrepreneur friend in 2014. As a trainer and consultant, Eugene provides training for executives in sales, communication, and leadership. He also runs a personal branding programme called SuperBrand Me ([EugeneSeah.com](http://EugeneSeah.com)), and a kids’ programme called Megachamps ([Megachamps.com.sg](http://Megachamps.com.sg)).

“I am now earning nowhere close to \$20,000 a month but I feel very comfortable. I live very frugally, I don’t own a car, I stay in a HDB flat, and go to restaurant perhaps once a week,” said Eugene, who has been the sole breadwinner of his family since 12 years ago.



— Photo by CharmaineWu.com

He's just glad to be able to make a living from his passion. Since young, he has always been interested in being on stage. He loves speaking, acting, directing, scriptwriting, and watching videos. Hence he chose to study mass communication in university. But along the way, he gave up his dream to enter the rat chase.

"During university, I interned in MediaCorp for six months as an assistant producer. I had to buy coffee, find talents and venues. It was fun for the first few weeks, but I could not foresee myself doing these after graduation," he said.

"The fact that I was getting married — I married early, one year after graduation — it complicated matter. When you have a family, you won't think of burning your weekends and nights. So that part of me died down."

After graduation, he joined the Singapore Exchange as a marketing communication executive. He was promoted every two years or so, and later became assistant vice-president of investor relations.

"My desire to work in the media field was replaced by KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), money and stability. Before I knew it, I had subconsciously changed track from pursuing my dreams to pursuing promotions. Every time, I got promoted, my desire for my dreams lessened and my desire to earn more money increased. I slowly became a corporate zombie, working for money," he said.

### **The sweet spot**

Today, Eugene has found the sweet spot in his life, running a successful and purposeful business. He's not resting on his laurel though. He's working hard to expand his business — but it's all for a good cause.

"Life is pretty comfortable but I am not satisfied. I want to impact more lives, I want to be able to build a trust funds, to be able to sign cheques to help the poor in Africa and more," said Eugene, who volunteers at SG100 Foundation, a mentoring programme for the youth of Singapore.



— Photo by CharmaineWu.com

He finds joy in helping people to avoid making his past mistakes. He sees training people in personal branding as a way to help them to stay employed, find better jobs or build their business. To create greater impact, he's adding personal finance into his repertoire of training and consulting services.

Reflecting on his disastrous financial management in the past, he said: "Looking back, I realised we never study finance from primary school to secondary school to junior college and university. My first financial education came from the book Rich Dad Poor Dad by Robert Kiyosaki. Why didn't our schools teach such critical skills?"

"I am very excited (about my new focus), I call it *life coaching*. It will involve training on how to rebrand themselves when they are out of job, how to expand your business if you are an entrepreneur, how to plan your personal finances," he added.

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### Key lessons:

- Study personal finance – be rich, don't appear to be rich.
- Live life on your own terms, not by society's expectation.

Stay tuned for [Click here for the second part of Eugene's interview](#) where he shares in greater detail on how he started his business, as well as tips on how one can stay employed in the current disruptive economy, and what to do if you are retrenched.

Enter your email below and follow my official Facebook page for updates. Meanwhile, check out other inspirational stories on my website.

If you support what I am doing here for Happiness Notebook – interviewing people like Eugene, sharing their tips on success and happiness – share this post using the social media button below.

To connect with Eugene and find out about his personal branding, finance or kids' programmes, visit [EugeneSeah.com](#), [TrainiumAcademy.com](#), or [MegaChamps.com.sg](#)



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**Delvin Goh**

It'll b a strange feeling to call my friend's father as my college senior. I prob consider him or anyone who graduated 6 yrs prior as an alumni

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