

# PROFILE OF A SUCCESSFUL MALAYSIAN ENTREPRENEUR

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**By Ms Helen Elizabeth Read, Founder and Managing Director of MS READ  
5 December 2006**

Continuing our series of talks specially organised for our postgraduate candidates, Ms Helen Elizabeth Read related her success story as an entrepreneur as well as her personal struggles and achievements. We had a first-hand glimpse into a real success story and lessons which we can learn from our own successful Malaysian entrepreneur. The audience consisted mainly of Master of Business Administration candidates and staff of UTAR.

Entrepreneurship is said to be the symbol of business tenacity and achievement. Entrepreneurs are the pioneers of today's new business venture successes. Their keen sense of recognizing opportunity, their passion and drive for creativity and innovation, and their capacity for excellence and achievement have become the standard by which free enterprise is now measured. This standard has spread to almost all countries throughout the world, and Malaysia is no exception.

An entrepreneur assembles and then integrates all the resources needed - the money, the people, the business model, the strategy and the risk-bearing ability to transform the invention into a viable business. Entrepreneurship is the process by which individuals pursue opportunities without regards to resources they currently control. The essence of entrepreneurial behaviour is identifying opportunities and putting useful ideas into practice. The tasks called for by this behaviour can be accomplished by either an individual or a group and typically requires creativity, drive and a willingness to take risks. The three primary reasons that people become entrepreneurs and start their own firms are to be their own boss, pursue their own ideas and realize financial rewards.

Some of the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs are :-

1. Passion for the Business
2. Product/ Customer Focus
3. Tenacity despite failure
4. Execution Intelligence

In starting off her talk, Helen stated that in her life, she was exposed to various books which contributed to her learning. Her passion for business made her determined to succeed as an entrepreneur. Helen was determined to make her retail business a success not only for personal reasons but because she employed 50 to 60 workers. The workers depended on her for their livelihood. She had a mission to keep her factories running and survive. Ms Helen Elizabeth Read was nominated top-three finalist in the INAUGURAL MALAYSIAN ERNST & YOUNG WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR (2002) CATEGORY - an award that salutes a woman entrepreneur of Malaysia who exemplifies business building at its best, and which seeks to acknowledge and honour this special breed of women determined to create their own future, for their entrepreneurial excellence, and for blazing the trail for other women in the workplace who want to do it all.

Helen's entrepreneurial successes did not stop there. In February 2004, she started DELicious café inside her MS READ signature store in One Utama. Ten months later, her second DELicious café was opened in Bangsar Village. In early 2006, Helen opened her shops in Isetan, Subang Parade and Lot 10. Now, there are 11 MS READ retail outlets in the Klang Valley, Penang and Johor.

The product/customer focus of her business is to design and manufacture clothes which caters to plus sizes of 12 and above. Since department stores usually cater for sizes 8 to 12, there is a need of clothing for women who are in the plus sizes. She has managed successfully to reach this target group of women. The tagline of Helen's retail business is "Comfort is the lifeline of everyday luxury."

In the July 1997 recession, she had her orders cancelled by the department stores. However, most of her staff did not leave. They stayed with her through the difficult times. Part of her success story is how she managed to turn around her business and maintain a lucrative profit. This is tenacity despite earlier failure.

As faced by other retailers, the competition from China is very real. However, Helen used European fabrics to manufacture 'quality' clothing which is the image she wants to portray to the public. "Having started out as someone with a dream, and no experience, I had only passion to make that dream a reality." Where formerly she had to approach the department stores for business, because of her proven track record of quality clothing and profitable sales, department stores for example, Jaya Jusco approached her.

In conclusion, Helen holds on to her core beliefs and values which are integrity and honesty. She has not compromised on her core values in order to make profit for her business. With the right skills and attributes, one can succeed in business. Helen does not only spend her time in her business endeavours. She is very involved in community services - especially in the area of counseling. Her caring spirit has motivated her to set up a "Privilege to Care" (PTC) programme to encourage others to give back to the community.

