

CAN YOU SHARE WHAT YOUR STARTUP IS AND HOW IT CAME ABOUT?

Butler is a hospitality and real estate management service company that was founded in 2016 to help busy professionals free up time and enjoy greater convenience by integrating property management and hospitality services into homes, offices and buildings.

The business idea came about as I thought about ways in which people can save time from administrative tasks and chores at home and work. We started out by offering only daily housekeeping service at the beginning, but have gradually added additional services so that Butler becomes the one-stop management service for homes, offices and buildings. Currently, we offer housekeeping, concierge service, property management and maintenance, and more.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO START YOUR BUSINESS? HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR?

I believe that entrepreneurship is a difficult but rewarding journey that commands respect for whoever is willing to take part in this endeavour. Mine began when I was 14 years old when my dad was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He passed away within a year, which left my mother alone to run the family's food and beverage business.

We had 20 outlets and 200 employees, so my mother needed help running the business and making sure that the payroll was paid on time. The situation forced me to become an entrepreneur in order to help sustain my family and the business. Over the next five years, we managed to turn the business around and better yet, grow it significantly.

Then at the age of 18, I opened an American fast food cafe called Martins. I remember feeling down after the first day because I had only sold one serving of french fries to a building cleaner for S\$1.50. Luckily, Twitter became extremely popular that time, and I used it to promote our business. In three months, we were making over S\$2,000 a day and over the next two years, we had three outlets in Singapore. When I turned 20, I enlisted for National Service and was posted to the army. I spent some of my free time collecting referral credits on a certain hotel booking platform, which I then used to visit hotels and write reviews on my blog. Soon, I was getting sponsored by hotels in Singapore to write reviews, often getting an insiders' look at luxury hotels. During those two years in the army, I reviewed over 200 luxury hotels in Singapore and Asia, which taught me all about luxury hospitality and the hospitality industry. It became the genesis for Butler.

The idea and need for Butler only came into place after my stint in the army, when my mother retired. We no longer had a domestic helper at home – which I enjoyed for the increased privacy at home, but hated now that I had to do chores. It occurred to me then – what if I can enjoy the hotel experience at my own home? What if I can have my own privacy and the time to do other things while getting my home cleaned, laundry done, groceries stocked, and home appliances managed automatically – while I'm at work?

The idea of freeing up my time from chores and returning home to do the things I love compelled me to start what is now Butler.

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT?

Butler is the pioneer in bringing five-star hotel quality hospitality service to people's homes, offices and buildings. At a luxury hotel, you expect all your needs to be taken care of – from your room being maintained impeccably to miscellaneous requests outside the hotel being carried out.

Butler allows customers to achieve this convenience at



PHOTO: YEN MENG JIN

AT YOUR SERVICE

Poon Da Qian (above), founder and CEO of startup Butler in Suits, shares why he decided to create a housekeeping, hospitality and real estate management service company in Singapore

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their home and workplace, while receiving a single invoice for all requested services. Our obsession with providing the highest quality of services and allowing people to free up time created the comprehensive service that Butler offers today.

In essence, we are a one-stop property management service that is obsessed with delivering the highest customer experience for all your requests – which is something that no other business of today offers.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR LATEST DEVELOPMENTS?

We recently started providing services to serviced apartments and hotels. We entirely manage their housekeeping department and property maintenance, so that hotel and apartment managers no longer have to worry about the service quality of housekeeping or property maintenance. They trust us to deliver housekeeping services of the highest standard, and they are able to spend that time now focusing on building success for their business.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES AND HOW DO YOU INTEND TO OVERCOME THEM?

As the company grows faster than ever, the biggest challenge is making sure that we're not being blinded by success – which would in turn blind us from any risks that we may be exposed to. I intend to overcome them by staying true to our company's mission – which is creating

happiness for people. The first step to achieving that is by ensuring the welfare of our employees and providing an inclusive community for them so that it creates an environment that helps them thrive. We hope to continue creating employment that will uplift labour standards while delivering happiness and convenience to people.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

It is our plan to become a service supplier and manager that ultimately brings greater convenience to people's lives. We also plan on employing 200 more local employees, for whom we will provide the necessary training to nurture them into workers of the highest standard.

Butler Academy – the inhouse training programme – is designed to instill a sense of confidence and belonging into the industry workers. Last but not least, we are also looking forward to offering our services to more offices and properties in Singapore.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

We hope to expand regionally across Asia and become the leading brand that delivers happiness and convenience to people. By employing people who share the company's passion and mission in creating happiness, we hope to bring happiness to our customers. Ultimately, it is our goal to build an ecosystem that enriches people's lifestyles through convenience and belonging. ■