



## A Defined Diversity

Chairman **Willie Wong**  
WillieWong Group Pte Ltd

**Spirit of Enterprise Honouree 2012**

**Industry**  
Venture Capital

**Established**  
Year 1999

**Website**  
[www.williewonggroup.com](http://www.williewonggroup.com)

Seizing new opportunities and recognizing potential business from a simple idea is the principle that has catapulted Mr. Willie Wong to the success he has fashioned today. Busily responding to e-mail pings and notifications, whilst sitting comfortably in the large boardroom of WillieWong Group, the surroundings Willie inhabits today are a stark contrast to where his journey began. From a child growing up in rural Sarawak in the 1960's surrounded by blue skies and nature – sans electricity, running water or television, Willie grew up inhaling the natural environment and enjoying the simple life. As Willie grew older, relocating from the village to the city and embarking upon his studies, he soon realized that business opportunities surrounded him as long as he was determined and pro-active in securing them. With the desire firmly set to find opportunities that would enable him to reach his full potential within the workforce Willie became a sponge, soaking up as much knowledge and information as he could and utilizing each opportunity that came his way. Willie began climbing his way to the peak of each role he secured, carving a successful name for himself and building upon his reputation until finally he solidified his business identity, creating his own investment holdings company – “WillieWong Group Pte Ltd.”



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## Continually looking for the next step up...

The true entrepreneurial spirit was apparent within Willie even in his teenage years. At 16, attending the final 2 years in secondary school in Lundu, a seaside town 70 km away from Kuching, Willie teamed up with his brother to run mini-markets, selling food supplies and stationary to villages, schools and government tenders who lacked access to the city. It was evident that even in his youth, Willie had the motivation to earn money, find a job, and it was his aspiration that business opportunity was a path to get out of poverty so he can support both himself and his family. He was sharp and realized quickly that if there wasn't a job available, he would have to create one.

Financial stability was vital. Willie's time living in the 'city' taught him that more opportunities were available in an industrialized environment. With this knowledge also came the realization that the job market he would later enter was highly competitive, thus he would need to further his academic studies. Taking the climate of the current market into consideration, Willie enrolled in a discipline that he thought would increase his chances of finding a job.

With some of his peers enrolling in university after completing their Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, in order to stay on par, Willie enrolled into an Engineering Degree. Throughout his College and University years, Willie worked 2 part-time jobs, one as a dishwasher and then as a waiter to support himself. He graduated middle of his class. Knowing that his academic record didn't shine from his class peers, he decided to bite the bullet and throw himself straight into the workforce and commence his career.



**“Willie has conquered his fear and flourished within his role....”**

Willie relocated to Singapore and secured a junior role in a Marine Engineering Company. The shift in environment from the lecture hall to the office proved difficult for Willie - he had entered a predominantly skill-based environment from a theory-based background. Willie channeled this difficult period to his advantage. His fellow colleagues were resistant in welcoming him to the workplace. As a result, testing his confidence, Willie set himself the personal challenge to overcome his weakness of interpersonal communication.

“I knew my weakness was dealing with people. I suffered with an extreme lack of confidence, so I said I will give myself 2 years in Singapore to become a better communicator.”

Willie forced himself to face uncomfortable situations head on and within 6 months, the workforce slowly began to strengthen his confidence. Two years later Willie was not only a respected member of staff but also a good friend to many of his work colleagues. Willie has conquered his fear and flourished within his role. Within the next three years, he was promoted from Junior Engineer to Sales Manager.

“It was in these early years that I was finally able to realize my dream, to become a higher income earner and travel the world, it was difficult, but I enjoyed it.”

Willie embarked on his next career step by joining one of the largest thermal spray equipment and consumable manufacturer in the world. He joined an industry that was related to his engineering background and aimed to learn as much as he could about his new industry. Traveling across the world as a Regional Manager, Willie continually learnt more about further elements of thermal spray technologies and other engineering services inclusive of aerospace and power generation industry. With an immense catalogue of knowledge on hand, Willie decided it was time to create his own destiny by starting the Frontken Company in 1996.

Taking all of the lessons, knowledge and exposure to international markets he had learnt from his equity venture thus far, Willie opened an integrated engineering solutions company that was to provide



engineering facilities, machinery and equipment, maintenance and support. He felt that he had found a niche in the market – to provide not just maintenance but restoration of machinery and equipment to become better than new. With this clear business idea in mind, slowly but surely Willie built an empire.

**“It’s important to provide the customer a service that is of the best quality available and by going that extra mile....”**

“It’s important to provide the customer a service that is of the best quality available and by going that extra mile. By refurbishing equipment so that it becomes ‘better’ than before, the customer will spend a fraction of the investment and have a product with an increased life-span.”

Willie decided that it was time to take his company to the next level and with this, he decided to float his business on the stock exchange – listing Frontken as public. The bold move to go public didn’t come without fear or hard work. Willie knew that to make an Initial Public Offering a company either made it, or didn’t. Despite the pre-existing interest in the market for Frontken, Willie placed all his energy into creating presentations, analyzing the market and establishing market forecasts and predictions to ensure people would buy his stock. It was a risk that paid off and in July 2006 Frontken became a listed company.

Willie became involved in several Mergers and Acquisitions, successfully acquiring Chinyee Engineering, Metall-Treat Industries and Ares Green Technology. Willie began to explore the possibilities of investing in emerging businesses and business ideas. Willie’s company grew at



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a rapid rate – Fonkten continued to gain a larger presence in markets across the Asian region and build their reputation.

With the determination to succeed, Frontken carved itself a solid place within the marketplace and grew to employ close to 1000 staff at 14 sites across the South East Asian region. This growth and success further encouraged Willie to take the next business leap.

## A change in direction . . .

The grueling yet exhilarating journey that Willie experienced in the process of making his company IPO, proved to be the achievement that inspired a change in his business direction forever. Achieving a business milestone, Willie realized that he no longer wanted to have a company that people invested in, instead he wanted to be the person investing in businesses.

“When I floated, I saw people investing in me and I thought... that has to be the goal. I need to invest in companies and expand.”

With a clear desire to steer his business journey in a new direction and gain a platform to share his experiences of starting a company with other enterprises, Willie decided it was time to make a serious change. Despite the success that Frontken had achieved, the company first listed in the Mesdaq Market of the Bursa Malaysia in 2006 and later





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migrating onto the Main Board of Bursa Malaysia in 2008, Willie realized it was time to re-create his business identity. Willie sold Fonkten after his milestone achievement and focused on his very own investment holdings company WillieWong Group Pte Ltd.

“All of the experience I had encountered everyday was forming a part of my future. Whatever I had experienced up to that point was enough for me, it was time to re-create my identity and put my name on something.”

Willie was driven by the opportunity he would now have as an investor - to impart the knowledge he had gained over his many years in business to promote the growth of promising small and medium enterprises.

## The Wow . . . The now.

Willie now faced his greatest challenge of all – creating a business formula for the WillieWong Group that would enable his company to build a strategy which would allow it’s portfolio to grow at a healthy rate whilst remaining profitable. With a vast number of years of experience, Willie did anticipate the ups and downs, however he made it a point to address each hurdle he faced with as much positivity and optimism as possible. His approach to times of challenge was to look for the lesson in each hurdle.

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Willie started to research the companies around him and tapped into the network of business individuals he had met whilst completing his Executive Masters of Business Administration at Nanyang Technology University. Willie wanted to expand his new business operations into new and diverse markets. The second step to his process was not only recognizing whom had prospective businesses for him to invest in, but also which businesses indeed had the most potential.

“I need to be able to see business prospects. It doesn’t matter whether it’s big or small – every business is ‘do-able’ – whatever the business and whatever the environment.”

Willie looked to identify a business potential, based upon a number of key factors. He firstly looked at the business sustainability, its potential to grow and one of great importance; the entrepreneurial spirit of its founder. The WillieWong Group established itself as a mentor of sorts that would provide advice on enhancing the operations processes, optimizing marketing strategies and driving a good management team. Willie wanted to create a private investment firm that would provide his clients insights to the ever-changing business climate that could confidently identify market trends and seek out potential opportunities for expansion and diversification. Willie wanted to ensure he provided sufficient funding and support to all Small and Medium sized Enterprises regardless of what stage of business they were in.

Willie diversified his business operations by not only providing investment to promising Small and Medium sized Enterprises with a long term goal of Initial Public Offering, but by also offering a range of services ranging from a purely advisory role to providing partial or total financial support. Regardless of how large his commitment to his businesses, Willie views himself as part of every company that he invests his time in.

## Never settling for less . . .

From rural Sarawak, running a mini-market to floating a company on the stock market to today, Willie has continually shot for the stars by the perseverance he exudes and passion he has to constantly strive for more. Throughout his career, he has remained as dedicated as the year before at moving forward and creating a brighter future for himself. The defining characteristic, which has been integral in shaping Willie's success, has been the relentless passion he has demonstrated throughout his entire career.

“You really need to know what you do well and you really, really, really need to like it – you must be passionate.”

Willie believes that in order to gain success, one must be willing to work hard and face the challenges they would otherwise shy away from. He believes that his first job as a Junior Engineer taught him the importance of hard-work and perseverance.

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**“... the person doing nothing is not going to become the master, they will become the follower.”**

“At the beginning of my career there were lots of things that I didn’t want to do and nobody else wanted to do them either. But I forced myself to just do it! I picked up these things and did them. The person doing nothing is not going to become the master, they will become the follower.”

It is this continual passion and perseverance to face difficult tasks head on, which has enabled Willie to confidently take the plunge at running his own investment company bearing his name. It is the continual learning process and drive Willie receives from assisting others that he found so fulfilling.

“It is incredibly difficult for me to not do anything - I can’t just sit back. Instead I have become more of an interested person, interested in my business, in my potential businesses and the people that are running them.”

## **I have been blessed . . .**

The most important lesson that Willie has learnt along his journey thus far, is to not take anything for granted. He believes adamantly in the importance of putting in effort with all people, regardless of the relationship he has with them. It is this varied pool of people that Willie has met along the way that he credits to helping him succeed today.

“There isn’t just one mentor or person that has greatly influenced my life, it is all the people along the way that I have been lucky enough to meet. Regardless of their relationship to me – I can learn something from each of these people.”

Willie lives his daily life by the motto 'Love what you do. These four simple words have been a continual driving force behind the success he has achieved to date and the way he encounters business challenges. He is passionate about his job and his family and believes that happiness isn't about money but is about finding a balance between your family, your leisure time and your work.

**“.....the most important moment is the 'now.'”**

Willie has built an investment company that holds a diverse portfolio of companies across all industries. Ranging from Infocomm Technology Solutions, Oil and Gas Engineering, Manufacturing and Hospitality and Tourism, Willie is continually on the look out for the next opportunity. With a presence across seven countries in South East Asia and Australia the future looks even brighter than the current day for Willie.

**“Love what you do....”**

Willie's outlook is bright. His company continues to stay competitive in a challenging marketplace by remaining tuned in to the trends and focused on building strong relationships with both customers and employees. His dream is to seize more opportunities within the market and make both people and companies successful whilst also benefiting from this success. In his current role he is now able to take a back seat and an advisory role whilst the CEO of his invested companies take the steering wheel, and this is a responsibility he is enjoying.

Willie is a true example of how far sheer hard work can take you. With the dedication to continually better himself, building his skills, knowledge and continually looking upwards and onwards in his career, Willie has built a reputation as an expert in his field. Willie believes that the most important moment is the 'now.' He doesn't think about the legacy he will leave behind but is focused on the mark he can make today.

“I treasure the time that I have now, I am alive and it's very, very important for me to do the best that I can today.”

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