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Creating meaning in work

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CREATING MEANING IN WORK

✦ *Eunyce Yap and Joanna Lam, Founders of fashion label, Love & Bravery, tell us why there should always be more to business than just the bottom line.*

Eunyce Yap and Joanna Lam, Founders of local label, Love & Bravery, made headlines for hitting the million dollar turnover mark before they turned 30 years old. The two have valuable synergies: Eunyce is a risk-taker and go-getter, Joanna tells us, while Joanna herself is a strategic planner. One is process-oriented; the other, design-focused. When we ask if they ever disagree, Joanna replies with a resounding, “of course!” while Eunyce chimes in: “All the time!”

The two are far too grounded to ever proclaim themselves progressive, but there is a clear pattern to their ambition. They first ventured into the e-commerce space back when it was still an unfamiliar concept locally. They later embraced automation at a time when other blogshop owners were sceptical of the heavy investment, and despite knowing their customers would be wary of change. This year, they're about to embark on their first community project — a vocational tie-up with a school that works with young adults with special needs.

When asked if this is their way of paying it forward, Joanna simply replies, “We just want to make it meaningful as we grow.”

Let's talk about how Love & Bravery got started. Love & Bravery began as a side business in university?

Eunyce (E): Yeah, I had friends who were teaching tuition to earn pocket money but I started an online store, which was a relatively new concept then. We started on a blog where we would upload photos of clothes and Joanna was my model.

You've come a long way since.

Joanna (J): We now manage a team of around 30 staff, including part-timers. There are 10 of us at the HQ.

E: You know, when we first started adding people to the team, I had a real fear that they would want to leave. As a boss, you have to manage people. You have to care about how they feel and whether they have career growth. It's not about managing the work anymore. Joanna is more nurturing than I am so she spends more time talking to the team and making the effort to explain certain processes to them.

J: It was a bit difficult when we first started hiring because things we had been doing on our own automatically



had to suddenly be broken down into steps. We also had to ensure these steps would be routine. Our brand of service is more towards the corporate side because we have a lot of employees.

E: It's necessary to have standard operating procedures in customer service because customers receive inconsistent service without them. And that affects customer expectations.

So you have a training process in place?

J: Yes. Everyone who comes in goes through rotation within the different departments. Rotation is about one to two weeks.

“
We have rules and policies that are shaped by our experience from running the business, but we always let our team know they should speak to us if they feel there's something that should be changed.
”

It doesn't matter which department you're from; the entire process is interlinked. Even if you're part of the creative team working on photos and eDMs, you need to know what the packing team is doing. There's a process behind everything, whether it's backend or frontend. Nobody is isolated.

We started training because we knew we had to be specific about things. It was a bit messy at first but the more we hire, the easier it gets, in a way. There are other challenges, of course, because the more we hire, the more we work with different people. And all of us have different temperaments, needs, and ways of working.

E: We try to push our staff to realise their potential, in that we don't always step in when the going gets tough. We sometimes leave them to sink a little. We try not to meddle. But we always look out for their welfare.

How so?

E: I think being an SME allows us to create that kind of working environment. My husband was working in an advertising company that worked him hard. He worked daily from 11am to 12 midnight for about two years without overtime pay — at that time, I was struggling with a young child, and that really shaped what I thought about working overtime. When new team members join us on their first day, we always tell them what we expect. One of those expectations is for them to not stay past six because we strongly feel work and personal life should be separate.

J: Yeah, we let them know it's okay if they leave on the dot. We don't create the impression that the longer you stay the better your appraisal will be.

E: We're also quite open; if there's anything they want to talk about, we usually talk over lunch because we eat lunch together every day.



J: That's actually our number one expectation: communication from both parties. We have rules and policies that are shaped by our experience from running the business, but we always let our team know they should speak to us if they feel there's something that should be changed. We try to show them what we mean by taking the first step. Sometimes I say things like, "I don't think I'm doing this right. What do you think?"

So it's not about hierarchy?

J: Well, we've actually realised that the more we hire, the more hierarchy has become necessary because we want each person to have career growth within the company. Some people are afraid to join smaller companies because they're afraid they can't grow. We don't want our employees to feel like they'll be stuck either.

And how do you want to grow the business then?

J: When you talk about business expansion, some people want to move into a big office or open two stores within a year, but we

want to make it meaningful as we grow. Sometimes we get a bit *sian* (jaded) working the day-to-day, so it's important to find joy in work. We're starting to focus on meaningful projects that we can do for the community.

I wouldn't say we're super famous, but we have significant branding within the local scene and four retail stores. What we hope to do is to work with special needs students and raise awareness among our customers to let them know that these kids can work just as well, if not better, than us.

E: She's been speaking to me for a while about this project and I was initially a bit apprehensive because portraying the right image is so important to a fashion brand. But I now find the project very meaningful and see how the company can create impact in our society.

J: I think as an employer you have more options, in a way, to balance the needs of the business with finding satisfaction in your work. It's not just about earning money to make you happier. It's about having heart. ♡

