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Entrepreneuring ahead while helping others

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Entrepreneuring ahead while helping others

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Anna Haotanto is a living example of what financial prudence and planning can create. In this month of celebrating women, her advice to women is to achieve financial freedom so that they too can finance their dreams

Anna Haotanto is a successful 36-year-old tech and finance entrepreneur, and a SMU alumna.

She is a two-time founder, starting financial platform The New Savvy and online pet product store Sploot Asia, and also a game changer in helping F&B entrepreneurs through Gourmet Food Holdings (GFH) and ABZD Capital to grow, scale and expand globally.

Haotanto made a bold move in 2015 when she pivoted from a successful and stellar career in wealth management, private equity, corporate and investment to becoming an entrepreneur.

Since embarking on her entrepreneurial journey, there have been two questions that have guided Haotanto's decisions: Does it excite you? Does it make you a better person?

PASSION FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

The New Savvy was founded to address a cause that Haotanto cares about: women's financial literacy. Despite advances in education and careers, 41 percent of women today still lack the confidence nor have the ability to invest or manage their finances.

Haotanto wants to change this statistic. In fact, she has vouched to help as many as 100 million women across the world to be financially literate. Coming from a family previously laden with debt and living from pay cheque to pay cheque, Haotanto knows exactly why it is important to have financial freedom and how to get it.

Achieving financial freedom at a young age of 30 has been a great equaliser for Haotanto. Not only was she able to purchase and pay in full for a HDB flat for her parents, she has been able to finance her dream of impacting lives and helping others.

Other than women, the other group of people that Haotanto cares about and wants to equalise opportunities for are F&B entrepreneurs who, due to a lack of finances, networks and know-how, have seen their dreams curtailed, fall short in meeting their goals or not able to expand internationally. Through GFH, with the backing of ABZD Capital, Haotanto has been able to make a difference to these entrepreneurs.

As the CMO of GFH, she is constantly looking for ways in which tech can be used to promote and enhance its F&B brand assets. For instance, she launched Upshop, a food delivery eCommerce platform to help Michelin-starred ramen restaurant Tsuta offer customers 'take-home' packs so that they can 'cook' its dishes in less than three minutes in the comfort of their homes.

Additionally, she is helping F&B brands share their values, stories and deliver consistent messaging on what they stand for on a wide range of digital assets so that regardless of the digital platform, the experience that the F&B brands provide is the same and consistent for their target customers.

In five years' time, her goal is to open at least 140 food outlets and achieving her aspiration of making gourmet food affordable, accessible and easily available for the masses.

When asked by *Perspectives@SMU*, "What makes a successful entrepreneur?" Haotanto explains that entrepreneurs need both passion and a systematic process to 'divvy up' the goal into actionable and executable steps.

"What has helped me throughout my journey was the fact that I was focused," she explains. "I knew what I wanted to achieve and what I wanted to reach. I had a definite goal and I worked backwards on how I can reach it.

"A lot of goals, especially financially, will be daunting at first. The trick is to always divide it into smaller milestones. Have a step by step plan. Make sure you focus on building a system that fits with your identity and life. In addition, create an environment where you can have the highest chance of success."

She concludes: "Make sure you are on track. Be conscientious and accountable. But remember to also have fun and celebrate your wins."

CONSTANT LEARNING AND MOVING FORWARD

Even though Haotanto has accomplished so much, she is not someone to sit on her laurels.

She wants to accomplish many more things – which is why she is constantly learning new things and acquiring new knowledge every year.

For example, she has just completed a three-month fellowship learning about mental health. She is learning about writing a book about finance for women and children. She is taking a SMU-SID course about directorship. And she has just completed a personal trainer certification at the American Council of Exercise (ACE).

Despite her intention of branching into the things and disciplines mentioned above, Haotanto is not losing sight of her biggest dream, which is to get into microfinance. According to the [World Bank, about 9.2 percent of the world's population or 689 million people still live on less than US\\$1.90 per day](#), and she wants to change this with microfinance and education.

HER ADVICE FOR OTHER WOMEN

With so many accomplishments under her belt, Haotanto uses financial freedom as a measure of success in light of the choice and security to live a life that is meaningful to her. As such, the

single piece of advice she has for women is to focus on planning their financial futures. She shares:

"Women today are earning more money, saving more but not investing and managing their money. And most women are still leaving it to their spouses to manage their money.

"In this era where uncertainty abounds, women need to make sure that they take care of themselves and be protected against unfortunate circumstances. What happens in the event of death? Or divorce? Or disability? Managing finances and Investing helps us to protect ourselves, insures against unfortunate incidents, provides for our loved ones and ensures that we have enough funds for retirement, divorce or death.

"On top of attaining financial freedom, this gives women more control of their lives, while boosting their self-esteem and confidence at the same time."

Anna Haotanto was a speaker at the panel dialogue "In conversation with SMU Women Alumni Leaders" that was held on 8 March, 2022 and organised by the SMU Office of Alumni Relations and SMU Libraries.