

BUILDING DREAMS AND MEGASTRUCTURES

Mr Sonny Bensily, Managing Director of Prime Structures Engineering, shares his journey of entrepreneurship and gives advice on how to turn dreams into reality.

Among the many iconic structures to grace our island's cityscape, the Marina Bay Sands (MBS) is arguably the most remarkable. Standing nearly two hundred metres tall, the MBS' three towers and ship-like Skypark are world renowned for their unique design and impressive engineering.

As Mr Sonny Bensily (CEE/1985) strolls along the Marina Bay area, he is wont to feel a sense of pride surging up within him. After all, it was his company, Prime Structures Engineering Pte Ltd (Prime Structures), that built several of the distinctive features of the MBS.

"Prime Structures was established 22 years ago on 23rd March 1995 as a subcontracting firm that performed structural steel work," Mr Bensily told *NTULink*. "It has since grown into a multimillion dollar construction company with a focus in four geographies—Singapore, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and recently, Dubai."

A RUNNING START

It was the height of Singapore's post-independence recession when Mr Bensily graduated from NTU in 1985 with a degree in civil and environmental engineering. Jobs were scarce, yet he received three offers and eventually chose to kickstart his working life at the construction arm of the Wah Chang Group of companies.

"That was where I had completed my industrial attachment. Initially, I was reluctant to go back there because my uncle, Giam, was working there. My colleagues didn't call me Sonny during my attachment—I was always Giam's nephew," Mr Bensily recalled with a smile. But the lure of working for a big company—and the chance to learn how it operated—proved too tantalising to resist.

"At a big company, you observe how they operate and you learn about systems," he said. "The right systems are what keep a company going in the long run."

A FATHER'S WISDOM

Even as he toiled at his first job, Mr Bensily knew at the back of his mind this was only a stepping stone for his greater ambitions. Since he was a young boy, his father had advised him to be his own boss rather than work for someone else.

"I give credit to my dad who influenced me to become a businessman," said Mr Bensily. "He himself was in the construction business, but unfortunately, his business folded and we were quite poor. Still, he told me that as an employee, I would be trading time for money, whereas having my own business would let me secure a better future."

Mr Bensily carried the wisdom of his father's words with him through the years. He gave himself a decade to learn the ropes of how to manage a large company, picking up mentors and a diploma in marketing along the way. In 1995, exactly ten years after his graduation, he took the leap of faith and incorporated Prime Structures.

"I knew that business has its risks, but I learnt from my father that failure is not permanent. I saw that we grew up poor, but we still survived, so I was willing to take the risk."

A TRAINED MIND

While his family and upbringing gave him the heart to start his business, it was his engineering training that gave him the mind to excel at it.

"I am a civil engineer by training, and engineers are ingrained with an analytical and practical thought process," said Mr Bensily. "We don't make decisions based on emotion—we rely on facts and figures. This is essential in business."

All this training was brought to bear when Prime Structures bid for the MBS project.

"At the time, Prime Structures' turnover was only S\$17 million. Compared to our competitors, we were tiny! Yet, we were fighting for contracts worth over S\$60 million!" Mr Bensily quipped. "But I live by a saying: the only way to eat an elephant is to chop it up into smaller pieces. So, we did the math, came up with a plan and faced down with the competition."

This calculated risk paid off exponentially. Not only did his company win contracts for the Skypark, the Ned Khan Art Wall, the podium and the canopy of the MBS, Mr Bensily also gained an international network and reputation which became a springboard for Prime Structures to venture overseas on a full-time basis.

A GLIMPSE OF GREATNESS

As impressive as Mr Bensily's achievements are, he maintains that there are no secrets or shortcuts to success, and he freely shared with *NTULink* how he got to where he is today.

"First and foremost, you must have a dream," he said. "Next, you must have a goal with a timeline attached to it. Then you make a plan and you act on it."

Another key ingredient: perseverance. "Business is not easy, and there will most certainly be challenges, but if you cling on to all your dreams and goals, you will find a way through those difficulties," said Mr Bensily.

Saving the best for last, he advised alumni not to neglect family in the pursuit of greatness.

"Most importantly, keep in mind that success is nothing if you have no one to share it with. So, even as you chase your dreams, don't ignore your family—your parents, your wife, your children. You must balance all these aspects of life. Otherwise, success becomes hollow." ●

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