

Creating precious milestones

The family behind Royal Insignia marks history with bespoke mementoes. BY MEGAN TAN

NOT many people can say that they have a close relationship with their bosses. After all, once the day is done, most employees are happy to leave their work in the workplace unless necessary.

However, that is not the case for every company. Ivan Hoe and his daughter, Rachel, run Royal Insignia, a small and medium enterprise that creates bespoke medals, luxury gifts and jewellery. Some of the more notable events they have been involved in include the 50th Golden Jubilee for the Sultan of Johor.

Most of their revenue comes from bespoke projects, such as the above, which they take on for royal families in South-east Asia, the Middle East and Bhutan.

Mr Hoe's first foray into the business came after finishing his National Service. He joined a company that supplied medals and metallic badges to schools and other associations in Singapore.

Wanting to pursue the business, he travelled to Saudi Arabia. On his second trip there, he met a British gentleman who became his mentor.

After learning more about the medal business, Mr Hoe travelled to other places in Asia to show the quality of his goods. The medals impressed the royal families and soon, Mr Hoe was asked to create diplomatic gifts and jewellery.

Following that, he set up his boutique in the Grand Hyatt, and opened another one in Bali.

Eventually, his eldest daughter joined the company in 2013. She is now the product development manager while he is managing director.

Though diplomatic gift-giving may be tricky, the company has prospered by offering confidential and personalised services.

Miss Hoe said they plan to turn Royal Insignia into a "destination for luxury gifts. She wants to design a col-

lection of Singapore-inspired luxury items, which would target affluent tourists "looking for a slice of local craftsmanship".

They intend to open another boutique in Kuala Lumpur and one more in Dubai.

Marking history

When Miss Hoe first joined the company, most of its employees saw themselves as working for a manufacturing company. She set out to change this mentality with her father.

These products created by Royal Insignia are used to commemorate important moments in history. In future, these moments would be remembered by the medals, diplomatic gifts or jewellery created.

"I like to tell people that I'm marking their present moments by creating products or medals that commemorate those milestones," Miss Hoe said.

The company has also started to publish coffee table books and offer restoration services. Miss Hoe says that by doing so, she is also "marking the present" and preserving heritage.

They hope to further develop their own restoration and conservation department. Miss Hoe said that it allows her to merge her interest in history with the work she does in Royal Insignia.

Mr Hoe also applies this to the family business. He said: "It's not about sustaining this business, it's about preserving the legacy of this business."

And it seems to be working. Growing up, Miss Hoe and her siblings were often told stories of royalty by Mr Hoe. Her father's constant emphasis on "marking history" for clients also enticed her to join the business.

She was also inspired by the process of creating these products. She said: "To be part of that process, it's so painstaking, it's so detail-orient-



Royal Insignia's Rachel Hoe, product development manager, and Ivan Hoe, MD, talk about work 24/7 – at the dinner table or on holiday, they're constantly on the lookout for ideas. The family creates decorations and medals for clients, including royal families.

PHOTO: YEN MENG JIN

ated, but at the end of the day you end up with something so beautiful."

When she first started, Miss Hoe, who was not trained in the medal business, learnt by networking with others.

For Mr Hoe, the challenge was different. When the company first started, he often had to convince royal families that the quality of his wares were just as good as those created in Europe.

In today's day and age, however, Singapore's prestige helps the business.

A shared dream

Besides Rachel, Mr Hoe's other children have also joined Royal Insignia. Her brother is business development executive while her sister is a master enamellist.

With almost all family members on board, arguments are inevitable.

During such times, Mr Hoe would tell his children to look through albums their mother had kept since their first birthdays.

He said: "I will tell them: Check out the old albums, and after you go through all the photos you took with your brother and sister, ask yourself again – can you still be angry with them?"

In Miss Hoe's and Mr Hoe's relationship, there is "no line" between the personal and professional.

Miss Hoe said: "We talk about work 24/7. Even when we go home, over the dinner table or on holiday, we're constantly on the lookout for ideas."

Miss Hoe said her father is able to

accept criticism, and though they fight at times, they are quick to forgive. The core of their relationship enables them to work well together. Miss Hoe describes it as "constant and consistent".

She also mentioned that there is no "one person say all" model in the company. Together with her siblings, each head up a department they have strengths in. For Miss Hoe, those strengths lie in marketing and design.

Thus, while everyone can debate about a point, Miss Hoe will have the final say in the product development department.

The family business has a unique dynamic. Mr Hoe is invested in innovation and social media marketing, while Miss Hoe and her siblings are

heavily involved in the tradition of the business.

She said: "It's this juxtaposition with old invested in new, and the young invested in old, that really makes the business work."

The best benefit of her father being her boss? Miss Hoe said that while most children's dreams will eventually diverge from their parents', this is not the case for her or her family.

"For my dad and I, and the family, we share a common dream, and everything that we do goes into building this common dream."

I think having this common motivation and goal to work towards brings us a lot closer. We're in sync and we know what we're doing. We will never have divergence in objective."
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