



**FAMILY FIRST:**  
 Mr Kevin Primalani, 52, with his nephew, Mr Mahesh Primalani, 34.

TNP PICTURE:  
 CHOO CHWEE HUA

*These two young people are choosing to enter their family business despite the financial sacrifice*

# He wanted to return to his roots

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**When Mr Mahesh Primalani graduated from university in 2004, the plan was to work for a consulting firm, out of a posh Raffles Place office.**

But the itch to return to his roots was “too much to tahan (withstand in Malay)”, says the 34-year-old with a chuckle.

Six months into his first job as a human resources consultant, he quit to join Parisilk, a consumer electronics firm set up by his grandfather in 1952.

“Every time I spoke to someone about something in my job, or read about something, I found myself thinking about Parisilk, and how I could apply what I learnt to the business.

“I realised that my heart was still back at the family business,” says the Singapore Management University graduate, who majored in business management.

While there are no official numbers on the number of family-run businesses here, experts say they are thriving not only here but abroad.

The best family businesses have the potential to outperform their competition, says Professor Randel Carlock, the founding director of the Wendal International Centre for Family Enterprise at Insead.

“They plan and govern based on logic, but lead based on passion, which is a great human motivator,” he adds.

Most family businesses tend to operate within relationship-based industries like distribution, service, and manufacturing, he says.

Two trends characterise local family businesses here, say experts: Successful sibling teams and the effective use of innovation and technology.

“Some of the emerging generations are expanding into new markets and diversifying into new lines of business,” comments Ms Elaine Tan, director at the Business Families Institute, at Singapore Management University.

Mr Primalani, who handles the business-to-business side of Parisilk, is one such example.

“We’ve always done corporate sales, but on an ad-hoc basis, until I found my way in the business and decided to make that my focus,” he says, adding he grew the corporate sales arm about 400 per cent since he joined in late 2004.

The business that was started by his grandparents – Indian immigrants who sold textiles and bedsheets from a shop on Circuit Road – now has a total of four branches.

It is also responsible for outfitting condominiums and hotels with television sets, refrigerators, and washing machines, among other equipment.

The best part of working for your family is the sense of ownership and satisfaction that comes with it, he says.

There are 10 family members including Mr Primalani working in Parisilk. They take charge of aspects like retail, logistics, export, and marketing

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— Mr Mahesh Primalani

and events, among others.

Says Mr Primalani, who is married to a fitness instructor: “Experiencing the family togetherness is quite unique.

“Everyone wants the same eventual goal, which is for the betterment of the business and the family. Everyone is putting in the hours and the blood and sweat... There is definitely a lot of unity.”

Working for a multinational corporation does not give the same sense of pride.

“At the end of the day, you’re working for an entity. It was there before you, it will be there after you, this is the difference you make,” he adds.

But the emotional investment of working in a family business can be tricky.

**Leaving work-related squabbles at the office and keeping them away from the dining table has been especially difficult, he confesses.**

“We talk about work all the time. It’s in our blood, we can’t stop it. It comes naturally, we talk about other things too also, but something will come on in the news and we will discuss about what our competitors are doing, and so on,” says the elder of two sons.

That he has a strong stake in the business rings clear. After all, some of his childhood memories entail cleaning toilets and dusting the shop, as well as playing handheld games that his father sold.

What’s the one piece of advice he would give to aspiring youngsters who want to work for their family businesses?

“Make sure you enjoy what you do, and believe that you can make a difference.

“Don’t join just because you’re the son of the boss, or come in expected to be treated like it. It will lead to your downfall. Which is why I started washing toilets,” he jokes.