
BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR IN SHANGHAI

by David Chu

My name is David Chu, President of Financial Drivers Limited. I graduated with an MBA last year with the goal like many of my classmates to continue our paths as promising young managers. As the only employee of my newly launched company, things as you can imagine are incredibly busy, but also exciting as I am looking to make my first hire.

Recently, I came to campus to participate in an informal entrepreneur's roundtable held for CEIBS MBA exchange students. When I was initially asked to become one of the panel members, I was hesitant because I have only been involved in my venture for only half-a-year. Despite my limited

experience, however, I reasoned that I could still provide insights and encouragement to my fellow alumni, and thus decided to join.

But before I continue, let me tell you how I decided to come to China. I first visited Shanghai two years ago as part of an MBA job trek (and vacation!) and

came away with not only a love for the city, but also sensed a ripe business environment. Also, because both of my parents were born in China, there was a part of me that wanted to "get back to my roots," and learn and appreciate my heritage. Those experiences and feelings led me to search for an MBA



exchange program in Shanghai and ultimately CEIBS because of its reputation and a recommendation from a classmate who had attended the program a year earlier. Another key reason was that the curriculum was taught in English, and I had only a basic fluency in Chinese (I was a bad kid, and did not want to attend Chinese school growing up in the US—I'm kicking myself now!), this made my decision easy since I would be able to communicate more effectively with my professors and classmates. While an exchange student, I found the local Chinese students at CEIBS to be very analytical, friendly, and smart.

One of the highlights of my CEIBS experience was the 2004 Lantern Festival, which is viewed in Chinese tradition as the last day of the Spring Festival holidays. Together with some local classmates, we made rice dumplings from scratch. While my dumplings didn't turn out real pretty, I did learn the circular shape represents reunion of family, and that the festival is meant for all to focus on family and happiness, making a nice segue to my next topic, which is living apart from my family.



I always get asked the question, “Do you miss your family?”, and my natural response is yes. But in a certain way, I almost feel closer to them. That's because my mom never fails to call me every week, which is much more frequent than we used to talk when I lived just 50 kilometers away back in the States. She constantly worries about my poor (but vastly improved) Chinese, how my business is doing, what I was thinking in leaving a stable job to pursue my new venture, etc. You see, there is a Chinese saying that says one should always find a new and better opportunity, before leaving a current one. But after working at a Shanghai-based sports marketing firm for five months, I was ready to move on.

Most people are surprised to hear that I had no intentions of starting my own business. It's true. After leaving the sports marketing opportunity, I was asked to help prepare the investment materials for a new venture that the company was contemplating since they were aware of my prior background in finance and venture capital. Soon, through word of mouth, others began approaching me for projects, which led me to believe that what I was doing had legs, and this provided me with the confidence to launch my company.

My company's mission is to increase my clients' financial value by providing a range of services from capital raising, financial advisory, partnership development, to strategy. Typical projects for clients include building their financial model, writing their investor presentation, and securing investment. I have already helped one client secure financing and am deep in the fund raising process for another. I'm also in current discussions with

several potential clients (including another panelist on the roundtable which comes as a referral from a former CEIBS exchange student).

Six months into my venture, I have no regrets despite often working 7 days a week, and the added pressure of living invoice to invoice. Without question, I feel the experience and exposure I have already gained has made it worthwhile. For example, for me to lead investor discussions with top venture capitalists in the States would be difficult given the more competitive (more people with a comparable skill base) and mature landscape (lots of entrepreneurs in the US are serial entrepreneurs so they are already familiar with the capital raising process).

Another aspect I enjoy about being an entrepreneur is the feeling that I am using more parts of my brain. It's hard to explain, but I feel that I am constantly thinking of new possible business opportunities or brainstorming with others about building a new business together. I compare that to my past corporate work experiences, where often my day was so filled with execution details, that it left me little time to think about the broader business.

I'm really glad I made the decision to participate in the CEIBS roundtable as I learned some great insights from my fellow panel members. My company is still very new so it was great to hear the stories and learnings of others who have been entrepreneurs for some time. As for my own future plans, I'm going to see how far I can take this business. Regardless of the outcome, I forward to the challenge!

(David Chu is CEIBS MBA2003 exchange student.)