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Consultant firm out to capture market share

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COMPARED with other big players in the conferencing industry, S.F.R. Consultants Sdn Bhd may just be one of the small fishes in the ocean. Nevertheless, don't underestimate its potential as S.F.R. Consultants will go all out to capture the biggest market share in the industry.

S.F.R. Consultants, with an aspiring entrepreneur who is a strong believer in strategic management at its helm, is set to take on the challenges in the international arena by organising conferences abroad.

Its managing director, Sheikh Faleigh Sheikh Mansor, has no fears to tread the ocean tide to achieve his dream.

"To be successful, one cannot be afraid to act on one's dream.

"An idea is actually a dream. When you dream of something, you should go after it," said the young entrepreneur in an interview with Business Times in Kuala Lumpur.

Twenty-four year old Sheikh has his own story about going after his dream.

He started his company when he was 18, having worked with a couple of companies after sitting for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination.

He was a telemarketeer in an event management firm, where he learned management and marketing from A to Z.

"I worked hard. I did everything from research and development, meeting with clients, talked to speakers, market the conference, designed the brochures and doing the marketing," he said, adding that he put in 15 hours a day to organise the firm's conference.

When Sheikh Faleigh reached 18, the minimum age that qualified a person to register a company with the Registrar of Companies, he opened up his own firm, called Powermind Consultancy in November 1994.

"My first project was in May 1995 and the conference turned out well.

"From there, I never look back," he said.

Recalling the moment for going against the odds when other youngsters at his age were adjusting to early adulthood and the college life, Sheikh Faleigh said many people, including his parents thought he was going out of his mind by establishing a company at that age.

"I only had little savings at that time but I have secured credit to finance the first conference.

"I've got only RM200 in my own account, but my debt was RM40,000," he said, adding that he managed to secure loans because the creditors had known and trusted him as he had dealt with them before while working with the event management firm.

The first conference was a success that he was not only able to settle all his debts but also bought himself a Proton Satria from profits of the conference.

Initially, Powermind Consultancy organised conferences for the construction industry but now, the company concentrates on organising motivational courses.

Another company was later set up, called S.F.R. Consultants to organise seminars and conferences.

According to Sheikh Faleigh, the year 1996 and 1997 were the most successful years where business was very good.

His company also was bruised with the economic slowdown as most firms would reduce training expenses as the first cost-cutting measure.

"But we survived the economic downturn and now we are back in full

swing, looking at international conferences," he said, confidently.

The company, which has already penetrated Brunei market two years ago, is now eyeing other countries such as the neighbouring Asian countries before moving on to the American and European markets.

Sheikh Faleigh believes in bringing the best consultants to the conferences that he organises.

He said the company gathers the best consultants in the industry such as professionals and scholars, to speak at such conferences.

"We have management consultants and management gurus with us ... all of them are our associate consultants," he said, adding that the company has a pool of more than 50 consultants and associate consultants in various industries.

For the in-house training, the company will supply academically and professionally qualified consultants.

"The participants will gain knowledge from the best people that we bring.

"I have lots of clients thanking me for bringing in the best consultants," he said.

He said S.F.R Consultants also organises training courses for workers under the Human Resources Development Fund, but the company's main activity is still in organising conferences and seminars.

He said the economic slowdown has made him more cautious and improve the company's internal organisation.

"It gave us time to think globally ... I believe it is time for us to look at the business globally and not only concentrate in Malaysian market," he added.

Sheikh Faleigh's determination and achievements have earned him recognition by the Malaysia Book of Records in 1997 as the youngest entrepreneur.

He now has a diploma from his part-time study and is planning to pursue a higher academic qualification.

His business philosophy?

"Let nothing stop you. First, find an idea on the type of business you want to do.

"Second, find the resources to do it. Sometimes, it is not the money but it could be other people's trust as it can support your good idea.

"After building the trust, then think of where to go from there and ask for advice," he said.

His personal principle?

Sheikh Faleigh said he always tries to look at different points of view so as not to hurt other people's feeling.

It is also important, he added, to get the views of others and evaluate them before making any conclusion or decision.

"If you do this, you'll be a likeable person and you will make good decisions either in business or personal life," he said.

It is also important to adopt a three-dimensional view when dealing with people, he said.

Asked on his management style, he said he is a very open person and does not practice hierarchy within the company.

"They (the staff) call me Faleigh and most of my clients call me Shake and some addressed me as Tuan Sheikh," he said.

According to Sheikh Faleigh, he will always be frank and truthful when dealing with his staff, clients and business associates because he does not believe in hiding any information as the truth will come out eventually.

"If you want to do something, I will open my cards and put them on the table ... tell them that these are my terms and I want to know their terms

too, to see whether there is a possibility for us to work together," he said, adding that it is easier to build trust that way.

Sheikh Faleigh, who talked about management principles with passion and great enthusiasm, sees Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as his mentor.

The young man of slight build who is seen as a role model for today's teenagers, revealed that he has a personal dream to become the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Although he is interested in politics, he does not want to be actively involved in it yet - not before he builds his businesses first.

"I don't want people to think that my business achievements later have got to do with political connection," he reasoned.

When asked whether he would take public speaking seriously in the future, Sheikh Faleigh, who has been featured in television programmes, newspapers and magazine as a young and successful entrepreneur, said: "May be in five years time".

Currently, he is giving motivational talks to university students and students who are taking the SPM examination. He has also been invited by companies such as Motorola to give talks to their employees.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Faleigh's mother, Che Embon Abbas, said her son's enterprising ability can be seen during his childhood.

When met at a recent S.F.R. Consultants-organised management conference at Genting Highland, Che Embon said Sheikh Faleigh's late grandfather had recognised his industrious spirit since the grandson was in primary school.

"When Faleigh was in Standard Two or Three, his late grandfather, who at that time rented a bungalow in Banting, had asked him whether he wanted to make some money.

"He had asked Faleigh to paint the house, which Faleigh did. The grandfather wanted to give him RM1,000 but Faleigh only took RM500 as he said RM1,000 is a lot to him," she said.

Since then, Che Embon said whenever his uncles came to the house, Sheikh Faleigh would ask them if they wanted their cars washed for RM5.

Sheikh Faleigh is a second child of three sons of Che Embon and Sheikh Mansor.

His mother is now managing a publishing house which was set up together with his father.

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