



Born *to be the* Boss

How Six Entrepreneurs Made It Big in Hong Kong



**Jennifer Liu | Johanna Ho | Mei Ling Ng Liu
Paul Luciw | Nicole Wakley | Philip Morais**

**Janet E. Middlemiss
Bianca Zee-Geissler**

Jem
PUBLISHING

Praise for *Born to be the Boss*

“A wonderful book! Creativity and can-do spirit are what make these businessmen and businesswomen successful. I know this and also learn from their stories. I have no reservation in recommending this book and will put it on my bookshelf!”

DR ALLAN ZEMAN
Chairman, Lan Kwai Fong Group

“A must-read for all entrepreneurs and wannabe entrepreneurs. This book gives a good overview of each entrepreneur featured and the inspirations for their businesses. It delves into the mind of each person and accurately tells their journey in an interesting story-like fashion, making reading easy and the book hard to put down.”

ALEXANDRA YUNG
Chairwoman, The Entrepreneurs Club

“Inspiring stories inspire people. *Born to be the Boss* tells us the rewarding experiences of how six ‘ordinary’ people got into entrepreneurship. I say ordinary because they could be any one of us or friends around us. We learn from the stories that with heart and hard work, we can live a rewarding life and create a career of our own. A great book you cannot miss!”

PROFESSOR KEVIN YUK-FAI AU
Director, Center for Entrepreneurship
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

“Entrepreneurs are vital to every society. Their creativity and determination are the essence of new ideas that improve our lives. The stories of success in *Born to be the Boss* are inspirational. I am sure that after reading this book you will want to go out and start your own company.”

JIM THOMPSON

Chairman, Crown Worldwide Group

“*Born to be the Boss* offers practical advice for anyone wanting to start a business. The book is essential reading for those considering entrepreneurship in Hong Kong or elsewhere in the world. Whether you are an early-stage entrepreneur or have been in business for years, it is one of the best investments you can make. The stories will motivate you to tread your own path to success!”

SIMON SQUIBB

Founder and CEO, NEST

“Entrepreneurship is a much overused term and its true meaning often lost in the noise. In different locations and business sectors one requires particular conditions and traits to succeed as an entrepreneur. This book provides good insights into what it takes to succeed in the high pressure competitive business environment of an advanced economy like Hong Kong.”

CHANDRAN NAIR

Founder and CEO, Global Institute for Tomorrow
Creator of *The Other Hundred Entrepreneurs*

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**Janet E. Middlemiss
Bianca Zee-Geissler**



a division of JEM Group Limited

Suite 1903, 19th Floor
Chinachem Hollywood Centre
1-13 Hollywood Road
Central, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2857 3832
Fax: (852) 2840 1284
Email: info@thejemgroup.org
Website: www.thejemgroup.org

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*Dedicated to all the budding entrepreneurs in
Hong Kong who have the courage to take action and
turn their ideas into successful enterprises*

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Introduction

Every year in Hong Kong about 150,000 new businesses are registered. Translated, this means that around 12,500 enterprising people are starting their own venture in the territory every month. This is close to 3,000 new entrepreneurs each week.

Without a doubt, Hong Kong is an attractive location for entrepreneurs and investors alike. You simply need to speak with any discerning business owner with an enterprising presence in the territory to hear the many positives associated with starting up in Hong Kong.

For those wishing to start a business, one particular attraction is the ease with which it can be done. Setting up a company in the territory is straightforward and inexpensive, and you can literally incorporate a business entity in a matter of days and be up and running within a month.

Aside from its company formation procedures being simple and transparent, Hong Kong is a city which thrives on free trade. It is one of

the most open and stable economies in the world, boasting a world-class infrastructure, productive work culture and low corporate tax regime.

This is not forgetting the territory's enviable geographical location. Not only is the enclave in close proximity to mainland China, but with a state-of-the-art airport and shipping network, it offers fast and easy access to other markets in Asia making the Special Administrative Region a popular regional hub.

Today, it would be no understatement to say that small and medium-sized enterprises form the main bedrock of Hong Kong's local domestic economy. This is despite the fact that it is often the global corporations and multinationals who grab the headlines in the news.

If truth be told, the small business sector makes a huge contribution. The numbers say it all. Small and medium-sized firms are vital to the economic development of the region given that these companies employ nearly 1.3 million people and provide around 50 per cent of private sector jobs.

In spite of their size, small businesses can therefore make a big impact. With respect to this, numerous SMEs founded in Hong Kong have gone on to experience success of epic proportions. This is in a market where small and medium-sized enterprises make up over 98 per cent of the business establishments in the territory.

Which brings us to the purpose of this book. Given that a growing number of people in Hong Kong are today choosing to work for themselves, the stories of the remarkable entrepreneurs profiled in *Born to be the Boss* are presented to provide a unique understanding of what it takes to turn an idea for an enterprise into a multimillion-dollar business.

The book's content is timely since we are no longer living in a society where people believe in lifetime employment. Quite the opposite, changing attitudes within our communities are encouraging more people to seriously consider entrepreneurship as a career and to launch their own startups.

Working in a smaller, growth enterprise is becoming an attractive proposition because of the feelings of excitement, freedom and sense of purpose that pursuing one's own business evokes. This is amplified by our own personal desires to make a positive impact on the world and have our ideas count.

There are certainly a myriad of reasons why more people today are deciding to work for themselves. Faced with unemployment or feeling unfulfilled in nine-to-five jobs, many are turning hobbies and interests into viable businesses. Some are motivated by a great idea whereas others believe they have spotted a potential gap in the market.

This is set against a backdrop where governments around the world are also encouraging growing fractions of people into entrepreneurship. In fact, there arguably has never been a better time to start a business given that globalisation and the increasing adoption of digital technologies is making it easier for would-be entrepreneurs to start up.

In any case, the fact that you have picked up a copy of this book most likely means you have been bitten by the entrepreneurial bug and are contemplating starting your own venture or have already branched out on your own. Either way, there is no denying that working for yourself will test you in unsuspecting and untold ways.

To put it simply, venturing out alone is not for the faint of heart. Those who have trodden this path often relay tales of late nights and long periods without being paid. This is not withstanding that as an entrepreneur you are likely to hear the word “no” more than anyone else in business.

That said, from the stories featured you will learn how entrepreneurs from not only different walks of life, but even the most unlikely of backgrounds, can achieve astonishing success. Behind the glory of these triumphs, however, are often tales of enterprising people who have had to navigate the choppy waters of startup to get their ventures off the ground.

In effect, this has shaped the material for this book, which is to offer inspiration by sharing the success stories and startup experiences of highly

successful men and women who have had to battle the day-to-day challenges that we all face in order to take our ideas and make them flourish.

Despite having built some of Hong Kong's most recognisable brands, none of the entrepreneurs featured has had a straightforward or easy journey. Though armed with a brilliant idea, each has had to overcome common problems inherent in starting a business, from lack of funding to issues surrounding sales, marketing, fear of failure and staffing.

Each has had disasters as well as victories. All the same, every business founder speaks candidly about the inspirations for their businesses, while generously sharing their tips for success and thoughts on how to avoid common pitfalls. These serve as a valuable insight for anyone in Hong Kong wishing to follow in their footsteps.

So why should you read *Born to be the Boss* and how can it help you? Well, perhaps you want to learn more about what working for yourself entails and how to get your venture off the ground. Likewise, this book might assist you if you have recently started a new business and are currently looking for entrepreneurial guidance, tips and know-how.

In no uncertain terms, it will illustrate how people who succeed as entrepreneurs have confidence in their own abilities. The individuals you will meet all possess overwhelming passion and an enterprising concept they wholeheartedly believe in, matched by the courage to take action and calculated risks even in the face of impediments.

The entrepreneurial personalities profiled are all clearly armed with the intrinsic qualities of self-belief, focus and determination. What is more, their stories illustrate that with hard work and a good dose of perseverance, it is possible to make a thriving and profitable living in Hong Kong doing what you love.

With this in mind, we hope that the thought-provoking stories you will read in the following pages will encourage you to consider becoming your own boss or provide you with valuable lessons that you can apply to your venture should you be in business already.

Introduction

To this end, we wish to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the remarkable business founders whose stories illuminate *Born to be the Boss* for their willingness to talk so freely and fervently and to share their personal accounts so that others can learn from their experiences. These extraordinary entrepreneurial achievers are:

- Jennifer Liu of Sir Hudson International
- Johanna Ho of the Johanna Ho Label
- Mei Ling Ng Liu of Hong Kong Matchmakers
- Paul Luciw of AsiaXPAT
- Nicole Wakley of TREE
- Philip Morais of CHI Residences

Ultimately, starting a business and becoming your own boss can be an exciting, rewarding and liberating experience. Besides, get it right, and you could build a rewarding career for life doing exactly what you love.

Source: Please note that statistics are quoted as averages based on figures published by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's Companies Registry and Support and Consultation Centre for SMEs (SUCCESS).

This book shares the inspirational stories of six extraordinary entrepreneurs in Hong Kong who have successfully turned their dream of owning and running their own business into a profitable reality.

Representing a variety of industries from real estate and fashion to hospitality and technology, *Born to be the Boss* reveals how these remarkable individuals have built highly successful enterprises from doing what they love.

Born to be the Boss takes you on their personal journeys, sharing the wisdom and insight of these admired business role models, and their lessons and tips for addressing common startup issues and concerns.

In doing so, it gives you a glimpse into the lives of these entrepreneurial achievers through a collection of meaningful conversations that serve as a source of encouragement to others wanting to start a business in Hong Kong.

Entrepreneurs featured:



 **SIR HUDSON**
INTERNATIONAL

Jennifer Liu



JOHANNA HO

Johanna Ho



Mei Ling Ng Liu



 **asiaXPAT**

Paul Luciw



TREE 

Nicole Wakley



Philip Morais

Jem
PUBLISHING

To support fledgling businesses, a proportion of the profits from the sale of this book will be donated to micro-lending site Kiva.

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