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ONE STOP SHOP

HOW ACCESS WORLD MANAGING
DIRECTOR GAN WAN PIN THRIVES IN THE
CHAOS OF THE COMMODITY INDUSTRY.

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From family-owned and Italian to fast-paced and global, Singapore-based Access World Asia Pacific, a specialised commodities logistics service provider, has come a long way since its humble start in 1933.

Originally known as Pacorini, the company was as traditional as they come. It wasn't until commodity giant Glencore acquired the small company as Pacorini Metals in 2010, and later rebranding it as Access World in 2016, that things really started to change.

Its first order of business? Modernisation. And that's where infrastructure expert – and current Access World Managing Director – Gan Wan Pin came into play.

“At the time, I was living in Shanghai with my family and had no desire to return to Singapore,” he explains. “But when the opportunity came calling, I found it quite interesting. I had the chance to shape Access World. I would be able to put my stamp on it.”

Making his mark was all the persuasion he needed to come aboard. Even though Gan was reluctant to uproot his family and leave Shanghai's excitingly chaotic environment, he knew it would be the best next step for his career. “I've always been in the infrastructure business, and that's what Access World does.

“It's something quite unique. We are half a leg in the finance world and half a leg in the logistics world,” he says. “When I signed on, I knew I'd be able to change it to suit a more international setting in terms of the way it does business from all sorts of new angles. I also liked that I'd be learning more about a different segment – getting to know more about commodity trading. It was another attractive factor.”

Joining the fast-paced, international commodity world meant Gan would have sleepless nights, unpredictable days and be constantly challenged – but he wouldn't have it any other way. “It's energising for me,” he shares. “I can't be in a fixed environment for

very long because I get bored easily. The ups and downs of the commodity industry excite me. I wake up looking forward to what's going to happen each day.”

For many, that unpredictability could be a challenge. But for Gan, it's just another day at the office. For him, the real challenge lies in balance. “The main challenge my team and I face is how to keep pace with what's going on outside and, at the same time, create stability so our staff has a steady environment to deliver what they have to deliver,” Gan says. “It's always been the most difficult thing we have to do on a very consistent basis.”

This careful equilibrium trickles down to how the Access World team relates to its customers as well. While the company tries to find a customised solution for each of them, bending the rules while providing consistent service is tricky. “We want our staff to be flexible because, when the banks and traders come to us, we don't want to give the impression that we are rigid or overly process-oriented,” he says. “At the same time, if we don't have sufficient processes and engagement, then it's hard for us to deliver consistent service. A customer wants the best of both worlds. We need to know how to manage this expectation.”

In order to weather the volatile storm of the commodities industry, Gan revamped the business and operating model. “I'm really proud to have created a sustainable commercial and operating platform for the business, especially in a relatively short period of time,” he says.

“Commodity is unpredictable, and that's the only constant we have as we move forward. We now think about the market and business with a different perspective, the operation is much more scalable, and we're better able to withstand changes that come our way. Being a service provider, we have to accommodate the market. Now we are better able to handle, internalise and react to these changes and then move on, and have the creativity to push new things out into the market.” »

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This creative thinking hasn't come easy. "Singaporeans are trained to be good corporate citizens, but it's not always second nature for them to think innovatively. We don't have a lot of entrepreneurs around in Singapore," he explains. "That's where my 11 years in China served me well. That environment shaped a lot of my thinking today. If I'd never left Singapore, I'm sure I'd be a different person."

In the commodities industry, non-linear thinking and innovation are key. Access World often finds itself treading new waters. "We need to keep a sharp mind. We quickly come together as a team to find solutions for our customers' needs," he shares. "It's important we find a solution that is legal and deliverable based

one gets back up after a fall that matters most. "We empower people," he says. "Our team is encouraged to be fast decision-makers; we don't always make perfect decisions, but that's okay. I'd rather have somebody in a senior position who has made a few bad decisions along the way and learned from them than somebody who's had a smooth ride to the top. Making decisions is part of leadership and failure is also a part of leadership."

It's this line of thinking that makes Access World a great player in the industry. When it comes to partnerships, this end-to-end logistics service provider is in it for the long haul. "It's about the long-term. Commodities will be here forever. What we need

a risk, but we protected ourselves properly, and they were able to stabilise the situation and survive. We don't do this indiscriminately, of course. But there are occasions where we really step up to help our service providers."

Vice versa, Access World also benefits from its relationships with partners like Shui Xing Ventures and Taewoong Global. "We are literally a one-stop shop for commodity players in the world. We are the commodity specialists," he says. "And we couldn't do it without our partners."

Just recently, Gan says Taewoong Global in Korea was able to help them out in a pinch. The Southern port city where the company is located has always

been notoriously slow and quiet. Then, suddenly, it became a strategic location for Access World, who needed a large amount of space to hold a lot of material arriving in a short period of time for one of its customers.

"Taewoong Global worked very closely with us to make this happen. You could see they were putting heart and soul into going out of their way to help us," Gan says. "I'm forever grateful they helped us pull it off. We had a happy customer, Taewoong Global made money, we made money and everybody was happy."

It may be surprising, but Gan says that the



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“LEADERSHIP IS A VERY LONELY JOURNEY,” GAN SAYS.

For this, he turns to the Young Presidents Organisation, or YPO for short – a global leadership organisation comprised of nearly 30,000 chief executives in over 130 countries, which provides a global platform for its members to engage, learn and grow.

"In this group, we get to share our leadership journey. Being part of this forum composed of leaders from many different industries, sharing experiences, helping each other and simply talking at a friendship level has been a very powerful experience for me in shaping the way I perceive and consider things. Joining YPO has really recharged me."

on what the customer wants financially. That's where innovation plays a huge part in what we do.

"We search for out-of-the-box thinkers to join our team," he continues. "But they also have to know logistics. There's a balance we have to gauge and then groom very carefully. We have a pretty young team now at senior- and mid-management levels who are super enthusiastic and energetic. They're not afraid to try new things."

It's all part of the culture Gan has helped create at Access World. He values leadership and the journey it takes to get there – he knows it's all about how

to do is adapt to this fast-changing business; every two to three years, it's changing. And we need our partners to come along with us and continue working with us."

For Gan, there's more to the industry than simply getting the lowest price and best level of service. It's about building relationships. "Sometimes this means we help our vendors out as well. One time, we were working with this Singapore business that was in trouble," Gan remembers. "Other companies probably would have pulled out to escape the situation. What we did, though, was give them more business. It was

commodities industry is incredibly reliant on relationships. "The human touch can be felt throughout Access World and its different locations. This is critical to the industry because our customers are quite relationship based," he explains. "We try to create a global community accessible internally and externally. There's a lot we can do for customers on a global basis, and we are willing to discuss partnerships with our customers to develop new ideas, solutions, services and trip flows. The more we build our organisation and the more we invest in our people, the closer and stronger we will become." ■