

Tech savvy

Dr King Owyang has spent his career developing groundbreaking new technology. Now he's using his expertise to transform Computime into a global leader in smart home devices.

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Growing up in Singapore as the youngest of seven children, Dr King Owyang had plenty of role models when it came to choosing a career path. While his two eldest brothers went into banking, the rest of his siblings went to work in engineering, science and medicine. So it's unsurprising that King ended up pursuing his passion for science and technology.

"I developed a liking of science and math in high school. I think that's what shaped some of my decisions," says King. "Of course, the other thing that impacted me is that my brothers had gone down the science and technology path. They gave me a lot of encouragement."

Straight out of high school, King left Singapore to study in the US. "In the 60s and 70s, the US was a clear leader, and has continued to be a leader, in science and technology. I always wanted to move there to advance my career. I thought the US would be a good starting point." He was right. After finishing his PhD at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), he went to work for General Electric (GE) in Upstate New York. Serendipitously, it so happened that his graduate thesis was in the same area of research that GE was working on. »



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“It was a good match. And GE is a very organised company. It laid a strong foundation for people to advance their careers,” says King, who started out as a member of the technical staff. He worked his way up through management positions over the next 15 years, ending up as the head of Research and Development of GE’s Semiconductor Division.

In 1987, King realised that the place to be to specialise in semiconductor and chip technology was Silicon Valley. At the time, Siliconix was looking for someone to head up its technology group. On paper, the company looked good but, just two years after King joined, Siliconix lost a lawsuit with a competitor, resulting in heavy penalties.

“They had to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. It came as a total surprise to me. I thought I had come into a very well-equipped company,” he says. Amazingly, this turn of events proved a golden opportunity for King to do the

LEADERSHIP STYLE

King takes a three-pronged approach to leadership at Computime.

1. Ownership & accountability.

“You have to lead by example in these areas. People tend to follow you if you can show your passion for the thing you are doing, in the ownership that you have.”

2. Respect people’s differences.

“You have to be able to make use of their strengths, and complement their weaknesses. Most of the time, people do not fully understand where their strengths and weaknesses lie. Leaders have to help them recognise that. If you can do that, that’s half the battle.”

3. Teamwork.

“As leaders, we have to bring the team together, and create that kind of culture in the organisation.”

work he wanted to do. “Its technology had fallen behind, so I was able to implement some changes in the company,” he notes. King set to work hiring the right people for the direction he wanted to take. Then he and his team wound up creating a groundbreaking new technology.

“Siliconix was the first company to come up with commercially viable ‘trench technology’. It revolutionised the industry because at that time the mobile industry was accelerating. Everything had to be smaller, but also have more performance capability, and trench technology was the solution.”

management, technology, and marketing. That’s the reason he recruited me.”

But there were other motivations for the move. “What attracted me was the potential to change the Computime landscape. The company was involved very heavily in electronic control technology manufacturing. And manufacturing in China, especially in Hong Kong, is not as profitable as it was about 10 or 20 years ago when there were much lower wages and less competition,” explains King.

With the growing popularity of smart home and Internet of Things (IoT) devices, King saw the potential for Computime to invest in wireless technology. “We needed to add value to our product so that we could achieve better margins. Computime used to be very hardware oriented, but a lot of IoT devices really depend on software. We invested, and hired

SMART MAN, SMART HOME

Although he’s been based in Hong Kong for the past seven years, King still calls the US home. He maintains a house and a beach house in California, and they are fully equipped with the latest smart technology. “Before I arrive, I can use my iPhone to control the temperature and environment for my vacation home. And when I leave, my phone can let me know if I’ve left something open, like a window or a door, so I can return home to close it. I don’t need to worry about whether I locked my door or not, because all of the information is available on my phone.”

The new technology had cutting-edge applications that turned a substantial profit for the business. And as King turned the company around, he was making his way through the ranks once more, being promoted to president and CEO in 1997. “I led the company for several years up until 2010, when Computime approached me.”


Leaving the States for the role in Hong Kong was a tough decision for King. “The US has become almost like a first home for me throughout my career and my life,” he explains. But there was a strong familial pull from Computime – King’s brother is the company’s founder and chairman. “He has a lot of passion for the work he’s doing, but he realised that he needed new blood in the company. I try to bring in new ideas in terms of

the right type of talent to extend our capability. We’re focused on home control, like heating, and also industrial control. This is how we’re adding value to the products we offer – going after applications that have a lot of market potential.”

King has no regrets about the career path he chose to follow all those years ago. While he admits that working in technology can be challenging, it’s also a rewarding field. “It’s like a treadmill. Once you get on, you cannot afford to get off. The technology continues to evolve. But the advantage is that it creates a lot of new opportunities and new applications.

“At Siliconix, we were able to create a paradigm shift in the industry. We changed the landscape of electronic devices and became an industry leader. I take pride in the fact that I was part of the birth of the so-called wearable device.

“For Computime, what I hope is that I can transform a manufacturing company into a technology company and ride the wave of these IoT industries. I always tell people that we need to aim to be global leaders, so I’m working towards making Computime one of the global leaders in the IoT space.” ■



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