

# LIFE LESSONS

Seventy years on, homegrown jewellery company On Cheong is still going strong, thanks to good old values, **Suhana Ab.** discovers

Putting one's pursuits on hold to run a family business might be too huge a sacrifice for some but not for Charles Ho. The managing director of On Cheong Jewellery once even went overseas as he thought running a business was not his cup of tea. "My mom and brother checked to check on my interest in joining the company. I decided that it didn't suit me and decided to enroll in postgraduate studies in the United Kingdom as an

attempt to get out of it," he recalled.

Trained as an accountant, he returned to Singapore and forty days later, his mother passed away. "It was a tough period. I knew then that for the business to keep going, I had to step up."

Ho learned from scratch. As a counter salesman, he obtained firsthand experience in handling customers as well as staff who were more senior than he was. "It was challenging initially as I was dealing with people who were recruited by my dad decades ago. They saw me grow up and that is the difficult part when it comes to commanding them," he explained. "The only way to overcome it was to remain humble and prove to them that you are sincere. You make changes because there is a need to change and relay this to them clearly but in a respectful manner," he added.

His formula seems to have worked well and On Cheong continues to be a formidable name in the industry. "Our winning formula is still the same. It is all about trust. We say it as it is and we deliver what we promise," he stressed. Success is also attributed to the expanded range of products that include jade, south sea pearls, diamonds, gold and other precious stones. Most pieces from the store are unique ensuring exclusivity.

Ho is now heading a branding exercise of the company and is putting together a new team to head this new movement. "We want to reach out to the new generation of customers and tell them about our exquisite range of products other than gold. With this diversity we not only cater to their needs but also provide them with a whole new experience," he said with a smile. ■



## TALKING BUSINESS

**DRIVEN BY** Family values

**IMPORTANT TRAITS** Your feel of the market, sense that something is happening then you go into it

**WHEN HANDLING A DIFFICULT CUSTOMER** I don't agree a customer is always right. The key is to convince them to perceive things the same way as you

**BEST BUSINESS ADVICE** Go into a sector that you are familiar with and be sure to build on your knowledge before venturing into business

## INSPIRATIONS

**FAVE PASTIME** Table tennis

**INSPIRED BY** Being involved in things at a macro level. I am in the grassroots movement and am involved in business associations. I believe that my business will do well if my industry is doing well. I have to play my part to ensure that it happens

**MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE** Nothing is more important than your family

## PRECIOUS TALK

**FAVE STONE** Jade because no single piece is ever the same, making it truly special

**MY FAVE POSSESSION** The 12 animals from the Chinese calendar made out of jade from Burma but beautifully crafted in Hong Kong

**WHEN BUYING JEWELLERY, REMEMBER** Look for something unique, understand its design and be sure of the quality of the stones. Spend on diamonds which are of a better grade in terms of colour and clarity