

Business Talk with Soul Salad

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Business Talk is a series on the Little Big Red Dot YouTube Channel where we feature business owners. We talk to these business owners about how they started their entrepreneurial journey, their past and present experiences running the business and their plans moving forward. For the first episode of Business Talk, we are at Soul Salad with the owner of the business, Pastor Swee Geok.


SOUL SALAD
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Here is the video of the interview and below it is a transcribed version of the interview.

Daryl: Hi everyone, welcome to Business Talk with Little Big Red Dot. Today we are at Soul Salad with Pastor Swee Geok who is the business owner. Soul Salad sells healthy salad dishes and is located at Makan Place within Ngee Ann Polytechnic. Soul Salad has been operating since 2017. Hi Pastor Swee Geok!

Pastor Swee Geok: Hello Daryl!

Daryl: Thank you for taking time off your busy schedule for this interview. Can you share with our viewers what you were doing before you decided to become an entrepreneur and start Soul Salad?

Pastor Swee Geok: I was a pastor of a mega-church. Then it was time for retirement. I decided to do something different. And because I needed to do something different, I decided to become an entrepreneur. I always wanted to be a businesswoman since I was young. I never had a chance because of pastoring. However, now I have this opportunity to do so. Secondly, I also want to live a more active life as a retiree.

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Daryl: Can you share with our viewers what made you start the business?

Pastor Swee Geok: There were a few things that governed my decision to start the business. Apart from wanting to be more active as a retiree, I also felt that I wanted to come in touch with the young people in Singapore. I want to know what the young people are like. I happen to have a son who at that point in time was a teenager. I wanted to know more about how teenagers tick and how they think as well as some of the things that they as a teenager or young adult. So I decided that maybe I should start my business in an institute of higher learning. I actually wanted to start a cafe in an institute of higher learning but then I felt the Lord telling me to start a salad store. I thought, â??thatâ??s not a bad idea!â?•. After all, salad is very healthy food and Iâ??m very passionate about eating healthy food anyway so I started a salad store!

Daryl: So was this how you ended up in Ngee Ann Polytechnic?

Pastor Swee Geok: No I started in Singapore Institute of Technology. That was in 2017. I started in September. I was a rookie, completely green-horned, didnâ??t know what to do but then jumped in. I made lots of mistakes and learned lots of lessons. It has been five years. It has been a good time. I enjoyed it. I enjoy meeting up with the young people. I enjoy feeding them. I like the fact that theyâ??re happy whenever they eat my salad.

Daryl: Oh, OK! Yeah I see a lot of the Ngee Ann Polytechnic students patronizing your stall during their lunch hours

Pastor Swee Geok: Yeah today is not so busy!

Daryl: You must divert them away from all the fried food!

Pastor Swee Geok: Yes! In fact, when I first started, most of them didnâ??t know how to eat salad. Only a very few who eat salad will come and visit my stall. They loved the salad and they told their friends. It was by word of mouth that the business started picking up and now we have lots of people coming.

Therefore, my queue is very long doing normal days. Today is not a normal day as it is a Wednesday. This is because students donâ??t have lectures on Wednesdays so we have very few students who come to our stall.

Daryl: OK. So what would a typical day and typical week be like at Soul Salad?

Pastor Swee Geok: Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays are very busy days. Wednesdays are less busy because there are no lectures. Occasionally I have more students on Wednesdays but generally, I feed the staff on Wednesdays. On a typical day, I come in at about 7:00 am. I do a lot of prep work because I believe in giving fresh food. I donâ??t want to prepare the food the day before. Therefore, I have to come in early to do all the prep work. I try to open as early as possible. My official opening is at 10:00 am. However, some students come in as early as 830 am or 9 oâ??clock. I try my very best to serve them as long as they come. During the peak hours, we are constantly serving. We finish at about 2:00 pm. That is the end of lunch and the start of our rest period. Then we begin working again to prepare for tomorrow. Thatâ??s how it is. We replenish our stock on weekends.

Daryl: OK, so how many staff does it take to run your business?

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Pastor Swee Geok: Generally, 2 staff. 2 competent staff would work. However, I have three of us. I have two staff plus myself which makes three of us working during term time. During term break time, 1 person is sufficient to run the business.

Daryl: So during term break Soul Salad still operates?

Pastor Swee Geok: Yes.

Daryl: So maybe when the students come back for extra-curricular activities they will come to your store?

Pastor Swee Geok: We have to feed the staff.

Daryl: Oh sorry I forgot about the staff! I was focused on the students!

Pastor Swee Geok: Yes we need to take care of the staff too!

Daryl: So are there any plans to expand your business?

Pastor Swee Geok: Definitely! Iâ??m looking out and sourcing for two other places. I have my sights on another institute of higher learning with a busy location. The second location I am looking for is probably one of the hospitals. I hope to go into these places so that I can employ more people

Daryl: So typically for a normal salad stall in say a hospital you would similarly employ two to three staff?

Pastor Swee Geok: Yes, two to three.

Daryl: OK, we will keep a look out and if we see anything good, we will inform you.

Pastor Swee Geok: Thank you.

Daryl: Was there a particularly challenging time or period when running Soul Salad?

Pastor Swee Geok: Of course! It was during the COVID period. During the circuit breaker, we could not work so we have to close the store. However, even with the store closed, I have to pay my staff. Imagine, no income but still have to pay staff. That was very toughâ?¦ really very tough. When there was a short reprieve and allowed the students to come back, there were still very few students because the students did online and hybrid learning. They only allowed about 3000 students for the whole Polytechnic to come back to campus. Back then, I was at Nanyang Polytechnic. There were 5 canteens and there were only 3000 students shared among these 5 canteens. I told myself that as I was making less than $50 a day, it was not worth working. I closed down and pulled out of Nanyang Polytechnic.

Daryl: Oh but now everyone is back on campus already right?

Pastor Swee Geok: Yes but they still have hybrid learning.

Daryl: I think maybe the pandemic accelerated this hybrid learning thing which eventually became a norm.

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Pastor Swee Geok: Correct!

Daryl: Can you share with our viewers some of the more popular items on your menu?

Pastor Swee Geok: OK the most popular item on my menu is create your salad. My customers like it very much because they have the option to create their own salad, choose whatever they like, and choose their dressing. Most like that. For those who donâ??t want to bother about creating their salad, they will just order one of the standard options. I have 5 or 6 standard options. A large proportion of these customers love chicken salad. This is why my chicken salad is the most popular among all the standard options.

Daryl: I tried the food just now and it is very nice. I eat salad very often. I think my colleagues can testify that I patronize the salad stalls near our office on a weekly and almost daily basis. Your salad is nice and fresh. Especially the mushrooms.

Pastor Swee Geok: Yes, it is fresh and then the other unique aspect of my store is that the dressings are all my creation. I have 13 different types of dressing. Three of them are bought commercially the rest are all created by me. The whole recipe!

Daryl: Oh! No wonder it tasted so different. If I go to a place like Stuffâ??d and I buy a veggie bowl with honey mustard, their honey mustard tastes very different from yours.

Pastor Swee Geok: Yes!

Daryl: Ok. Now I understand. To our viewers, youâ??ve got to try the dressing. It is really very good. This is coming from me, a salad expert! Last but not least, if any of our viewers would like to try your food, when and where exactly can they find your store?

Pastor Swee Geok: For now, you have to come to Ngee Ann Polytechnic. Block 51. Soul Salad is located in a food court called Makan Place. My store is the first store in Makan Place. We open officially at 10:00 am and close at 5:00 pm. However, if you come a bit earlier like 9 or 930 am we can still serve

you. Donâ??t come after two or three in the afternoon because sometimes we sell out. On normal days we sell out very early. On Fridays, we sell out at like 2 pm and that is the norm because I donâ??t like to have leftovers so I make just enough for the day. Many people come so we sell out often.

Daryl: So on the other side, itâ??s SIM and SUSS and they can easily cross over to come to Makan Place right?

Pastor Swee Geok: Yes, many of them do come over. There is also SIT which is just around the corner as well on top of SUSS and SIM.

Daryl: And the car park is just behind. So if anyone viewing wants to come and try the food at Soul Salad, you can just park next to Makan Place. If you are at SIM and SUSS, you can just walk across. If any one of our viewers would like to try the food as Soul Salad, we will leave the exact location, contact details and social media links in the description down below! Thatâ??s all we have for today. Thank you Pastor Swee Geok for sharing about Soul Salad and all the best in your business! It was very nice having you on our channel.

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Pastor Swee Geok: Thank you, Daryl. Thank you for having me!

Daryl: Youâ??re welcome. So thank you everyone for tuning in.

If you enjoyed the video, donâ??t forget to hit the thumbs-up button and do remember to subscribe to the Little Big Red Dot YouTube channel. We will see you in the next video! Bye!

If you know of any business owner who would be keen to be featured on the Little Big Red Dot YouTube channel, you can contact info@littlebigreddot.com.

Yours sincerely,

Daryl

p.s. Daryl is the CEO of Raffles Corporate Services Pte Ltd of which Soul Salad is a client of.

Here are some photos!





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