

## **'Work is my passion so it's my life'**

The Sun (11 May 2015) – SunBiz



***"You don't become a star doing your job.  
You become a star making things happen."***

**Ismitz Matthew De Alwis**  
Executive Director & Chief Executive Officer,  
Kenanga Investors Berhad

**This week SunBiz gets the thoughts and views of Kenanga Investors ED/CEO Ismitz Matthew De Alwis. His advice to all is to do task really well, and everybody will notice and move you onto the next task. And when you do well, you'll move forward.**

---

### **How has your life experience made you the leader you are today?**

I do not think there are any one or two life experiences that I can pinpoint that have led to being a leader. I think being a leader comes from having the drive to succeed, working hard and earning people's trust and respect along the way. Experience plays into it as well.

My life experiences could be described as interesting, unconventional, happy, sad, challenging, incredibly fulfilling and at times unique.

This has given me many opportunities to meet people and experience situations and circumstances enabling me to empathise with others; to see things from different perspectives; to understand and appreciate the challenges people face in their lives and to work to create an environment, community and organisation that inspires people to achieve their potential – where there is integrity, respect, where we can safely challenge the status quo and work towards creating a more equal, safe, ambitious, successful, caring, passionate organisation and community.



## Kenanga Investors

### **What advice can you offer to budding entrepreneurs/youths who want to start their career/own business?**

You must be passionate about what you start. New ventures often face resistance to change, so without passion for your project, you will short change yourself and your company.

Secondly, visualise yourself being successful at each stage. You must be able to see the details.

Then, envision your future self and notice how much more comfortable you are having achieved your goals.

Finally, write out the details of each step, but be prepared to change everything as data and feedback come in.

### **How do you maintain work/life balance?**

Work is my passion and so it is my life. I've never been keen on the expression work/life balance. I believe all of it is life. It's a matter of perspective. Funny enough, I get just as excited about launching a products/campaign as I do about vacationing in Maldives.

As a leader, I am on call 24/7, but I choose this role and I have a strong team that supports me. Therefore, I prefer to mix work and life. It feels more natural. If I am running on empty, the team will be low on energy too. It is so much easier to see clearly when you are connected to the 'why' of what you do.

My life motto is: "make social change, and have fun doing it." This means that I am super intentional about making sure that my work is deeply fulfilling. When things get rough, I look for reasons 'why?' If I am pounding my head against a wall, I ask: 'What am I missing? Is there an opportunity or a threat that I need to readjust around?' I have found that the path often presents itself; we only need to see it clearly. This keeps me whole, motivated and on track.

### **How has mentorship made a difference in your professional and personal lives?**

My professional trajectory has been very non-traditional, and therefore, I've never had a real mentor for my career. In my personal life, many people have had an impact especially my family.

I was always willing to work long hours and I created my own path which I'm incredibly proud of. But it would've been nice to have someone guide me along the way or at least cheer me on.

One thing that I learned is the ability to meet adversity with respect and grace is a much underrated skill.

In my industry you have to continually educate yourself and stay abreast on the latest changes and news in the social media field.

I've have always been drawn to people who have a real entrepreneurial attitude and a depth of experience not only in my industry but every businesses.

There are too many to mention in a short list, but I'm thankful that every single one was influential in my development. Listening to them speak, reading up on them and analysing each of their actions has really help me put complex issues into perspective.



### **What do you want to accomplish in the next five years?**

Personally I intend to undertake a doctorate program to further enrich myself. I want to be moving with the times and focusing increasingly on web based interactions with clients.

I think that in time my face-to-face clients will be increasingly specialised although I don't think web based communications will take over completely – nothing can ever truly replace the connection and relationship that comes from being with someone face to face. I think you'll see significant improvements in customer experience over the next five years. For one thing, anyone who is still talking about "customer satisfaction" is likely to be completely irrelevant from a consumer standpoint. No customer, luxury or otherwise, places value on mediocrity. This shift to the extraordinary experience is going to be driven by customers and led by the companies who most value them.

I think you'll also see more and more companies taking a holistic view of the customer experience and realising that a "check the box" approach won't cut it. You have to walk the talk and be prepared to make significant change — and significant investment — in your people, culture, and leadership.

In that way, you create a workforce and a network of people who love what they do, value what they do, and want customers to feel that same engagement and enthusiasm. That is what successful companies will accomplish. That is the lightning in a bottle that the best companies capture.

In a nutshell, we need to be able to build the growing pathway together with our clients and business partners from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, Kenanga Investors will focus on building the architecture to meet the business needs of tomorrow.

### **Best piece of advice you ever got on your career?**

You don't become a star doing your job. You become a star making things happen.

I always remind myself that I am not going to do this forever. There's a finite amount of time I am going to be doing this. So, do this really, really well.

My advice to all is that, "You need to do your task really, really well, everybody will notice, and they'll move you onto the next task". And when you do well, you'll move forward.

### **Most admired business leader? Why?**

Jeff Bezos the CEO of Amazon.com. Bezos is an extremely rare combination of visionary and master builder -- 20 years ago seeing something no one else could see and then turning it into great success (today we have many new e-commerce companies). Prospective employees are still drawn to his vision; though he's highly demanding, thousands aspire to work for him. That's one way to know a great leader when you see one.

### **How do you stay abreast of issues affecting your industry?**

Many ways. The three main channels are firstly I read voraciously. I read all I can about my industry, market and the world in general. Regularly keep up with industry trade publications and websites; national, regional and global publications; influential bloggers and business thought leaders.

Secondly I get involved in industry roundtable and meetings. I actively join industry associations, attend their events, take trainings and participate in online communities. Last but not least, staying grounded and close to my business partners and customers is also vital.



## Kenanga Investors

### **If you could have an hour with any thought leader in the world, who would it be and why?**

Al Gore as I am intrigued with his Global Marshall Plan.

The former American Vice-President Al Gore in his bestselling book *Earth in the Balance*, devised a plan which gives specific ideas on how to save the global environment.

### **Blue or red ocean strategy? Or neither? Why?**

Basically the difference between the two concepts, where red is more conservative and cost-cutting and blue is creative and differentiating. If you look clearly we need both in my industry.

The idea behind the blue ocean strategic perspective is that competing in a red ocean (an already established market place, likely with companies with economies of scale), is not a rational option for investment. Instead, companies need to go beyond competing.

Identifying ways to create a new market, new niche or new differentiated strategy that creates more pie (as opposed to competing over an existing one) is a superior approach.





Source: *The Sun* (11 May 2015) - SunBiz

**16 | SUNBIZ**  
theSun ON MONDAY | MAY 11, 2015

**Get the Latest Breaking News via Sun SMS Alert**  
Celcom users (Key in SUN send to 22008)  
\* SMS Alert service is RM5/month or RM1.50/week + Min. 3 alerts - weekdays (except public holidays)  
+ For more info please go to www.thesunbiz.com

# 'Work is my passion so it's my life'

**How has your life experience made you the leader you are today?**

I do not think there are any one or two life experiences that I can pinpoint that have led to being a leader. I think being a leader comes from having the drive to succeed, working hard and earning people's trust and respect along the way. Experience plays into it as well.

My life experiences could be described as interesting, unconventional, happy, sad, challenging, incredibly fulfilling and at times unique.

This has given me many opportunities to meet people and experience situations and circumstances enabling me to empathise with others; to see things from different perspectives; to understand and appreciate the challenges people face in their lives and to work to create an environment, community and organisation that inspires people to achieve their potential - where there is integrity, respect, where we can safely challenge the status quo and work towards creating a more equal, safe, ambitious, successful, caring, passionate organisation and community.

**What advice can you offer to budding entrepreneurs/youths who want to start their career/own business?**

You must be passionate about what you start. New ventures often face resistance to change, so without passion for your project, you will short change yourself and your company.

Secondly, visualise yourself being successful at each stage. You must be able to see the details.

Then, envision your future self and notice how much more comfortable you are having achieved your goals.

Finally, write out the details of each step, but be prepared to



You don't become a star doing your job. You become a star making things happen."

change everything as data and feedback come in.

**How do you maintain work/life balance?**

Work is my passion and so it is my life. I've never been keen on the expression work/life balance. I believe all of it is life. It's a matter of perspective. Funny enough, I get just as excited about launching a products/campaign as I do about vacationing in Maldives.

As a leader, I am on call 24/7, but I choose this role and I have a strong team that supports me. Therefore, I prefer to mix work and life. It feels more natural. If I am running on empty, the team will be low on energy too. It is so much easier to see clearly when you are connected to the 'why' of what you do.

My life motto is: "make social change, and have fun doing it." This means that I am super intentional about making sure that my work is deeply fulfilling. When things get rough, I look for reasons why. If I am pounding my head against a wall, I ask: 'What am I missing? Is there an opportunity or a threat that I need to readjust around? I have found that the path often presents itself; we only need to see it clearly. This keeps me whole, motivated and on track.

**How has mentorship made a difference in your professional and personal lives?**

My professional trajectory has been very non-traditional, and therefore, I've never had a mentor for my career. In my personal life, many people have had an impact especially my family.

I was always willing to work long hours and I created my own path which I'm incredibly proud of. But it would've been nice to have someone guide me along the way or at least cheer me on.

One thing that I learned is the ability to meet adversity with respect and grace is a much underrated skill.

In my industry you have to

think you'll see significant improvements in customer experience over the next five years. For one thing, anyone who is still talking about "customer satisfaction" is likely to be completely irrelevant from a consumer standpoint. No customer, luxury or otherwise, places value on mediocrity. This shift to the extraordinary experience is going to be driven by customers and led by the companies who most value them.

I think you'll also see more and more companies taking a holistic view of the customer experience and realising that a "check the box" approach won't cut it. You have to walk the talk and be prepared to make significant change - and significant investment - in your people, culture, and leadership.

In that way, you create a workforce and a network of people who love what they do, value what they do, and want customers to feel that same engagement and enthusiasm. That is what successful companies will accomplish. That is the lightning in a bottle that the best companies capture.

In a nutshell, we need to be able to build the growing pathway together with our clients and business partners from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, Kenanga Investors will focus on building the architecture to meet the business needs of tomorrow.

**Best piece of advice you ever got on your career?**

You don't become a star doing your job. You become a star making things happen.

I always remind myself that I am not going to do this forever. There's a finite amount of time I am going to be doing this. So, do this really, really well.

My advice to all is that, "You need to do your task really, really well, everybody will notice, and they'll move you onto the next task". And when you do well, you'll move forward.

**Most admired business leader? Why?**

Jeff Bezos the CEO of Amazon.com. Bezos is an extremely rare combination of visionary and master builder - 20 years ago seeing something no one else could

see and then turning it into great success (today we have many new e-commerce companies). Prospective employees are still drawn to his vision; though he's highly demanding, thousands aspire to work for him. That's one way to know a great leader when you see one.

**How do you stay abreast of issues affecting your industry?**

Many ways. The three main channels are firstly I read voraciously. I read all I can about my industry, market and the world in general. Regularly keep up with industry trade publications and websites; national, regional and global publications; influential bloggers and business thought leaders.

Secondly I get involved in industry roundtable and meetings. I actively join industry associations, attend their events, take trainings and participate in online communities. Last but not least, staying grounded and close to my business partners and customers is also vital.

**If you could have an hour with any thought leader in the world, who would it be and why?**

Al Gore as I am intrigued with his Global Marshall Plan.

The former American Vice-President Al Gore in his bestselling book *Earth in the Balance*, devised a plan which gives specific ideas on how to save the global environment.

**Blue or red ocean strategy? Or neither? Why?**

Basically the difference between the two concepts, where red is more conservative and cost-cutting and blue is creative and differentiating. If you look clearly we need both in my industry.

The idea behind the blue ocean strategic perspective is that competing in a red ocean (an already established market place, likely with companies with economies of scale), is not a rational option for investment. Instead, companies need to go beyond competing.

Identifying ways to create a new market, new niche or new differentiated strategy that creates more pie (as opposed to competing over an existing one) is a superior approach.

