

GOING FROM GOOD TO GREAT

Retail consultancy
Bootstrap believes in
people development

By CASSANDRA CHEW

RETAIL consultant Lynda Wee sets a high benchmark for companies that seek the services of a new business venture she has just co-founded.

"Being very good is not good enough. We must be remarkable to survive," says Dr Wee, 45.

Together with former colleague Velisa Leong, Dr Wee set up business management consultancy Bootstrap in May, driven by a belief that businesses can be helped to soar "from good to great".

Bootstrap, a team of eight consultants, considers itself a growth catalyst that helps companies cut out the fat to achieve their goals – a timely service as businesses prepare for the upturn.

Dr Wee, who has a doctorate in marketing, has extensive experience in retail consulting. A member of the Retail Industry Skills and Training Council, she has held several appointments, among them principal consultant for a survey on the Go-Extra-Mile Service Initiative in 2006.

Dr Wee met her partner Ms Leong, 28, when they were working at Republic Polytechnic's Centre of Innovation and Enterprise in 2004.

Back then, Dr Wee had the task of developing the centre's curriculum for problem-based learning. There, she also did consultancy work on the side.

In 2006, she started up property developer CapitaLand's Institute of Management and Business for adult learners and invited Ms Leong to join her for the ride two years later.

These experiences became foundational learning blocks for the duo, who left in May to start Bootstrap with \$100,000, taking with them an established reputation in the adult education and consulting scene that is already reaping rewards.

Although Bootstrap is still in its infancy, it has already secured consultancy deals with 10 companies, local and international, including a leading shopping



(From left) Dr Lynda Wee and Ms Velisa Leong with their team Mr David Schubach, Ms Jean Scott, Mr Richard Harn, Ms Grace Leong, Ms Chee Mellin and Ms Nora Tien. Bootstrap believes its clients should have clarity of vision and invest in people development to align everyone to this vision. ST PHOTO: BRYAN WAN DER BEEK

mall in Malaysia and a British-based university.

Each consultancy project is priced on a case-by-case basis, but a training programme stretched over six months can cost \$120,000, while a four-month project to improve the customer experience of a firm can cost \$200,000.

Bootstrap, however, is selective about its clients. It believes clients should have clarity of vision and invest in people development to align everyone to this vision. But not everyone values this approach.

Bootstrap has turned down potential

clients who were more interested in a cheap deal for a quick fix than they were in attaining excellence.

Chief operating officer Ms Leong explains: "We felt we could not add value to these clients because they were only expecting marginal differences, or did not share our core values."

Meanwhile, the Bootstrap team is hard at work with the clients they do take on. They are working with a home-grown international wellness product firm to improve the quality of its customer service with training.

Bootstrap takes its problem-based

learning experience and incorporates it into training sessions.

"When we walk into the classroom, we say we are 'on show'," explained Dr Wee, who aims to engage the participants to help them find their own solutions.

"We ask them about the different types of customers they encounter, and ask them how best to handle different situations."

Dr Wee is confident that Bootstrap's approach will achieve a breakthrough, and is looking forward to visible differences when they complete their training at the end of the year.

In the meantime, Bootstrap is also leading the way to develop the retail sector, with a four-part book series on customer service and a new course on retail in integrated resorts.

The first book, entitled Selling Products And Services, will be available at all major bookstores this week, while the retail course "Playing to Win" begins next month.

Dr Wee said: "We have two integrated resorts coming up and Orchard Road just got a revamp. There will be many customer service-oriented jobs available, so people development must be the way to go." casschew@sph.com.sg