

Azan Tengku, CEO of Kalms Singapore

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Everything is negotiable – Azan’s mantra in business and life! What’s your story?

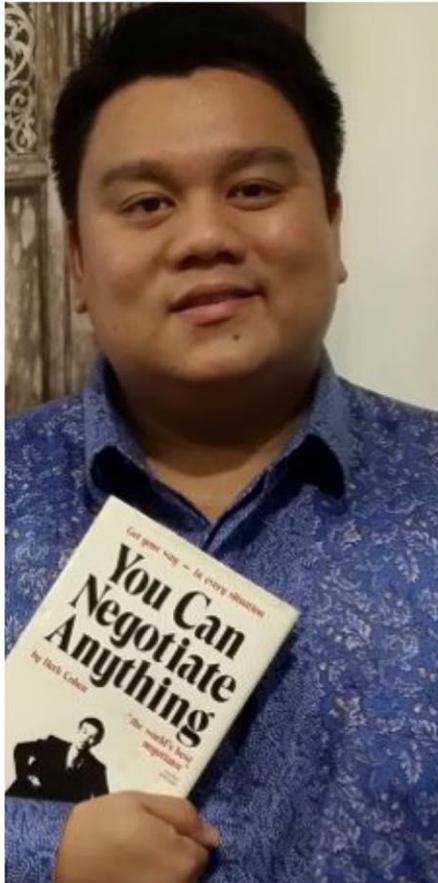
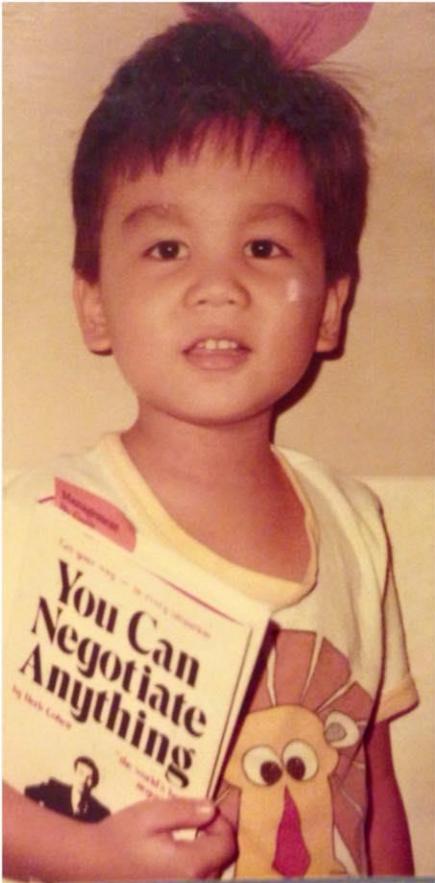
I started my career on Wall Street, writing equity research reports for the buy – side. I then moved to fintech at Bloomberg and 5 years ago moved back to Singapore to manage their Southeast Asian research team. I left Bloomberg, 3 years ago and now I’m revolutionising the retail industry through automation. The retail industry in Singapore is challenged by rising rental costs and lack of qualified manpower. Kalms is currently leading this revolution by using vending machines that is deployed all around Singapore at strategic high traffic areas. We currently have 30 machines island wide and we aim to have 100 machines by the end of the year.

What excites you most about your industry?

We pride ourselves on providing premium luxury gift items to our customers. We have a tribe of 10,000 die hard followers to our Me2U teddy bear. What excites me the most is to see that smile and glitter in people’s eyes when they see our items. We pride ourselves in curating the best product offerings for our clients.

What’s your connection to Asia?

Although I spent a good portion of my adult life in the US, particularly Michigan and NYC, I’m still very much Asian to the core. I was born in Singapore but grew up in Jakarta, Indonesia. There is a term for us kids, they call us 3rd culture kids. We grew up in a culture that is not our parent’s culture.



Favourite city in Asia for business and why?

Jakarta is my favourite city for business and, in general. Jakarta has a vibrancy that rivals no other Asian city. It has the best of both worlds; fancy restaurants or street food, state of the art malls or night markets, the contrasting environment in Jakarta makes it unique and sexy.

What's the best piece of advice you ever received?

Everything is negotiable. Even at a young age my dad has always instilled in me that everything is negotiable. I remember he would always get me to ask for the bill when we dined out. He would then ask me to negotiate for a discount, at a young age my dad has groomed and mentored me to be a negotiator. I feel that this is a skillset that has helped me through my corporate career and entrepreneur life.

Who inspires you?

My dad, he has always mentored and coached me throughout my career.

What have you just learnt recently that blew you away?

I've learnt that there is no way you can please everyone. There will always be pockets of consumers that you will not be able to please. Especially in today's digital environment the loud minority voice is always overshadowing the silent majority, hence I've learnt to take things with a pinch of salt, not dwell on the negative and always focus on the positive and majority view.

If you had your time again, what would you do differently?

If I had time my again I would have left Wall Street after 2 years instead of staying on for 10 years. It's such a toxic environment that rewards all the wrong values.

How do you unwind?

I'm an advocate for crypto currencies. I was one of the first few to write a book on bitcon; Bitcoin: The Digital Gold Rush. This was when I was running a small fund focusing on Bitcoin Arbitrage right after leaving Bloomberg.

Favourite Asian destination for relaxation? Why?

Bali, most definitely. There is something magical about the place.

Everyone in business should read this book:

'You Can Negotiate Anything' by Herb Cohen.

Shameless plug for your business:

No plugs for my business, but I'm offering a FREE 60 minute session for individuals who feel their good ideas are hijacked by type A personalities or feel that their voice is suppressed by their dominating boss. I want to mentor these individuals to bring out their alpha qualities. The program is called Turning Alpha and I would like to offer it to anyone who wants to change their current situation and be more ASSERTIVE.

How can people connect with you?

Whatsapp me: [+6581131253](https://wa.me/6581131253) that's the best way. Or email me: atengku@kalms.com.sg

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This interview was part of the Callum Connect's column found on The Asian Entrepreneur:

<http://www.asianentrepreneur.org/azan-tengku-kalms/>