

**HOW BLC AUTO SPORT MANAGED TO STAND STRONG
IN USED CAR BUSINESS FOR OVER THREE DECADES**



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Narapun Vasusinsuk



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ABSTRACT

Used car business is a fast growing industry. While Thailand's used car market is expected to continue growing, many big investors are hoping to come in and dominate the market. How about the medium and small size dealers? How are they going to survive in this highly competitive industry?

This paper aims to study the author's family business in ways of its missions, visions, corporate strategies, and human resource management. Also to discover how they managed to survive through numerous crises in Thailand for over three decades. The findings from interviews and study will be combined with the frameworks and academic knowledge to conclude and show the public the secret of maintaining the family business and how to become successful as an entrepreneur.

KEY WORDS: Used cars / Entrepreneurial Strategy / Tiered Commission Structure / Goal-Setting Theory / Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

20 pages

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

As the pandemic swept across the world making many businesses slow down and badly affected, the same does not go for the used car market. The market has enjoyed 10% growth on yearly average even before the pandemic, and was boosted to 20-30% during the pandemic. People who had never owned a private car before now start considering to purchase their own cars since taking public transportation is not the safest idea during this situation. Therefore, biggest than ever, the used car market is now on fire which means it is extremely competitive as well.

Used car business has always been a popular market in Thailand. Unlike our neighboring country like Singapore that the majority of people throw away their cars after 10 years because the Certificate of Entitlement (COE) renewal fee they have to pay is even more expensive than the price of the car itself. In Thailand, people keep their cars as long as they are drivable or until they feel like they want to change to the new ones. For people who do not want to spend huge amount of money on new cars, they turn to used cars instead. The average price of used cars in Thailand are hundreds of thousands baht lower than the new “red-plate” cars. These are the reasons why the used car market in Thailand has always been so popular.

For the company of research, it started around 30 years ago when the founder, Khun Boonchai who is also the author’s father was in his 20s. He started by buying and selling the cars one by one. He would buy used cars from the previous owners then reconditioned all those cars and sold them to the buyers. Since he had studied mechanics, he knew all about the car systems. A few years later he had his showroom for displaying all the cars in the stock. After that, he met the author’s mother so she got into the business as well. She started the same way, by selling the cars one by one. Buyers would contact her and came to the house to see and buy the cars. Then a few years later she also had her showroom. They both continued their businesses by relying on each other. For example, he would find new used cars and she would buy them from him and he would get his commissions. Then around 10 years ago, they

decided to form a Limited Partnership which each of them owns 50% of the stock. Now, BLC Auto Sport Limited Partnership (or Bunluechai Auto Sport in Thai) is a used car company based in Nonthaburi that has total of 4 branches nearby each other and each of them is managed by one of the family members. The company has around 20 employees and over 100 cars in stock.

Like other businesses, being in a used car business has never been easy. For over three decades the company has been in the industry, there were many events that affected the business. For example, Thai baht depreciation, Gulf War, Global Financial Crisis, Flooding, and Changes of Vat System. Even though all said events had happened and many businesses had failed and closed down, we were able to continue growing our business until today. Some buyers even come back for the second and third time because of the trust they have for our company.

Recently, there are many big investors who are interested in investing in the used car market. *Carsome*, a Malaysian first and largest tech unicorn founded by a group of Malaysian people with advertising background who are determined to reshape Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia's used car industry. They have raised over 600 million US dollars from total of 13 rounds. The company's mission is 'To provide our customers with peace of mind through the entire lifecycle of their pre-owned vehicle ownership experience' (Carsome). With these big investors entering the market, it definitely affects other used car dealers. How does a small family-owned company like ours still staying strong in this highly competitive business? This is what this research is trying to find out.

Motivation for the research:

The main motivation for this research is to unravel the secret of how to grow a one-person business into a company and maintain it for over 3 decades and also to share useful information to public, therefore, the new entrepreneurs and start-ups can use this information to adapt to their own businesses and get closer to their goals.

Another motivation is to prove that the theories from the textbooks are practical by showing the examples from real life experience through the business

process of the company. From the founder's way to operate the business, how he motivates employees in the company, how to set goals, and so on.

The last motivation is quite personal to the author as we are talking about the author's family business which the author's father is the founder. It is undeniable that the author has come this far thanks to her family and this family business. That's why the author decided to write the story to show appreciation to her father for being the most incredible business founder, owner, and father that she could have asked for.

Industry value of the research:

This paper is useful for entrepreneurs and also aspiring entrepreneurs of every business. It will be an example of how to create, maintain, and be successful in your industry of choice. As the markets are getting more competitive, it is vital to know what you are doing and what your plans are. Not only to survive but also to be the one that customers trust and always want to support. Therefore, I believe this paper will be very valuable to all the business owners who are seeking ways to develop their business to another level.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Goal-Setting Theory:

The goal-setting theory was first invented by researcher Edwin Locke. He found that people who set more specific and difficult goals tend to perform better than those with basic and easy goals. The theory has five key principles that support the creation of motivating and effective goals which will be talked about in the details below.

Goal setting theory is widely used and accepted. The theory is seen as “one of the most influential frameworks in motivational psychology” (Nebel et al., 2017, p. 102). In academics, setting goals was shown to have a significant influence on students’ learning performance (Gardner et al, 2016; Locke & Latham, 1990; Locke & Latham, 2002). Also in sports, “Setting goals can help athletes prioritize what is the most important to them in their sport and subsequently guide daily practices by knowing what to work on (Weinberg and Butt, 2014).

Here are the five important key principles of the theory:

1. **Clarity:** the goals need to be clear enough to be effective. Simply means that when one sets and describes the goals, there shall be no room for misunderstandings. The goals should clearly specify the measurements and their desired outcomes.

2. **Challenge:** There should be the right degree of challenge in the goals. Goals that are too easy will decrease performance. Goals that are too difficult will negatively affects the motivation. So there should be the right balance between easy and difficult when setting the goals.

3. **Commitment:** People will likely to work harder if they had contributed in the process of setting the goals. When their aspirations are involved, there should be no problem keeping them motivated until the end.

4. **Feedback:** the pursuers should listen to feedback as it determines how well they are doing. Feedback allows them to adjust their approaches and the goals in

order to reach them successfully. Feedback does not have to come from others, it can come from self-judgment as well.

5. Task Complexity: A goal should not be too complex as it can impact motivation and productivity. Goals which are too complicated can be overwhelming. For these kinds of goal, sufficient time needs to be provided so the pursuers can learn and improve to successfully reach the goal. If necessary, reassess the difficulty and break the goal into smaller sub-goals to decrease its difficulty.

The goal-setting theory provides several advantages when used in the workplace. For example, increasing overall employee engagements within the workplace, improving employee performances by increasing their motivations, and providing sense of accomplishment for the employees as well as their overall job satisfaction.

In contrast, there are also disadvantages of using the theory. Just like mentioned above, each goal should have balanced complexity. Goals that are too hard to achieve might lead to poor motivation and poor performance. Goals that are too complex might indirectly force the pursuers to accomplish them in rush which likely leads to poor results.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation:

Intrinsic motivation is driven by internal rewards which means the motivation arises from within for a person to engage in a behavior because it naturally satisfies them. Robert W. White was one of the first intrinsic motivation theorists. He stated in Schunk, Meece, and Pintrich's *Motivation in Education: Theory, Research, and Applications* as “Fitness or ability, and the suggested synonyms capability, efficiency, proficiency, and skill. It is therefore a suitable word to describe such things as grasping and exploring, crawling and walking, attention and perception, language and thinking, manipulating and changing the surroundings, all of which promote an effective-competent-interaction with the environment. The behavior is directed, selective, and persistent, and is continued not because it serves primary drives but because it satisfies an intrinsic need to deal with the environment.”

There are five factors that could increase Intrinsic motivation:

1. Challenge: People tend to be more motivated when they are pursuing goals that are possible to attain but not necessarily certain.
2. Control: People want control over themselves as well as their environment. They also want to determine what they are pursuing.
3. Cooperation and Competition: Intrinsic motivation can be increased when people are helping others. It also increases when they compare their performance as favorably to that of others.
4. Curiosity: Intrinsic motivation is increased when something in the environment activates the sensory curiosity (grabs attention). It also occurs when something stimulates the cognitive curiosity of the person and makes them want to learn more.
5. Recognition: People enjoy being recognized for their accomplishments which increases their intrinsic motivation.

“Extrinsic motivation is typically defined as the desire to perform an activity with the intention to attain positive consequences such as an incentive or to avoid negative consequences such as a punishment” (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Extrinsic motivation is a behavior driven by rewards. Rewards will increase the likelihood for specific actions to occur. Incentives like money, fame, and praise which are all external factors, are used to motivate specific activities. Extrinsic motivation is not always tangible. It can also be abstract, like praise, fame, and attention. Here are examples of extrinsic motivations:

External rewards include: competing in sports for medals, work for a salary, member discounts, and buy-one-get-one sales.

Psychological rewards include: helping people for praise, doing something for attention, studying for grades, and doing tasks for fame.

There is also a limitation when using extrinsic motivation. It is called The Over Justification Effect. This happens when the reward is given too much, therefore, the value decreases.

For some people, extrinsic motivation might be more effective than for others. Specific situations might also suit this form of motivation better. External

rewards are enough to motivate some people to do high-quality work. For some others, benefits with value are more attractive.

“Thus, although intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can operate simultaneously, extant research also suggests that either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation is predominant” (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Weibel, Rost, & Osterloh, 2010).



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The author found that the qualitative research techniques would be a good fit for this paper as the research is about the nature of the business process, strategies, and human resource management. Based on open-ended questions, the qualitative data were produced from all four interviews. The open-ended interviews allowed the interviewees to tell their stories using their own words which also helped the author understand the answers better along without overlooking the interviewees' emotions. The author had also added her own insights from working and observing at the company for a few years.

The author has interviewed total of four people which are; the founder, the co-founder (who is also a branch manager), the head of sales, and a mechanic which most of them have been with the company since the very start in a one-on-one basis. The author had talked on the phone briefly with the founder and the co-founder asking few questions and also to schedule the in-person meetings. The first interview with the founder was conducted through a video call on a weekday of the forth week of June 2022. The interview lasted for almost an hour. The second interview with him was conducted at our house in Bangkok on a weekday of the first week of July. For the rest, all interviews were conducted at one of the branches located in Bangbuathong, Nonthaburi during the weekdays on the forth of June 2022. Each interview lasted for roughly half an hour to one hour.

The first interviewee was Khun Boonchai. He is both the founder and the CEO of the company, and also the author's father. He usually likes to show discreet image at work but at home he is a sweet and loving father.

The second interviewee was the co-founder who is also a branch manager, Khun Veranuch, who also has a close relationship with the author as she is the author's mother. She usually works separately from Khun Boonchai as she is managing one of

the branches. At work, she gets along well with the team. At home, she is one devoting mother.

The third interviewee was Khun Thanawat, the head of sales. He has been working with the company from the very start, even before the author was born. Therefore, he knows every nook and cranny of the company and also knows his bosses very well. He now reports to Khun Veranuch but before that, he has been working directly with Khun Boonchai for almost 20 years.

The last interviewee was Khun Udom, a mechanic. He has been working with the company for more than 10 years and he also maintain friendly relationships with many other employees from all the branches.

The interviewees were all Thai citizens in the age group of 30 to 60 years. All of them has more than 10 years experience with the company so the author was sure that they know the company culture and insights very well. With these backgrounds, the author believed that they would be able to provide high quality information for this research.

Interview Questions:

As the topic of this paper is ‘How BLC Auto Sport Managed to Stand Strong in Used Car Business for Over Three Decades’, open-ended questions were used to interview the interviewees. Therefore, they can freely share their opinions and perspectives they have on each of the questions. The questions listed below in the figure were used as a guideline for the interviews.

Table 3.1 Interview Questions

Interviewee	Question
Founder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What made you decide to create this business? 2. What were your mission and vision when you first started the business? Have that changed at all?

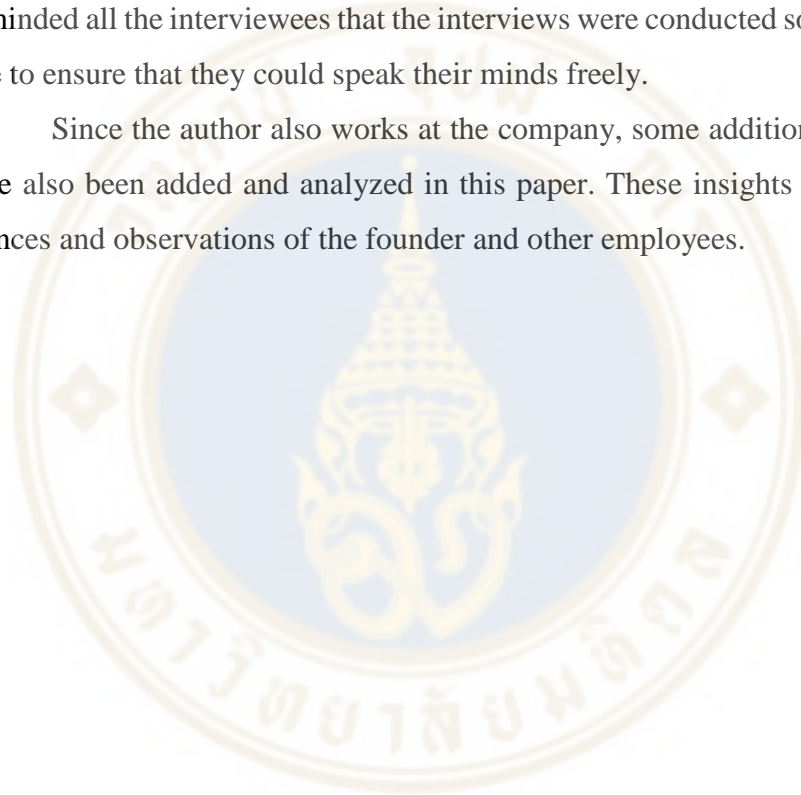
Table 3.1 Interview Questions (cont.)

Interviewee	Question
<p style="text-align: center;">Founder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. What makes your company different from other used car companies? 4. What have changed during the three decades? How did you adapt to those changes? 5. What has been the biggest struggle you had to overcome? How did you manage to overcome it? 6. What do you do when you feel like you get stuck? 7. What advice would you give to someone who is trying to start their own business? 8. How do you give out work to the employees in the company? 9. How do you motivate employees to produce and reach the target of each month? 10. What do you do when your employees do not reach the target?
<p style="text-align: center;">Other employees</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did you decide to join this company? What makes you stay for this long (10-30 years)? 2. How do you manage the human resource? (for the co-founder and the head of sales) 3. How does the boss give out work? How does he communicate with you? 4. Have you ever felt like you get stuck? If yes, how did the boss or the company had helped in motivating you?

The data obtained from the interviews reflected the opinions and insights of each individuals. Analyzing the data required interpreting the transcripts and recordings, grouping similarities, identifying differences, finding themes, and presenting the organized data in an appropriate manner.

It may be noted that to be able to conduct the interviews and gather all the datas required successfully, it is essential to build some relationships and trust with the interviewees first. Luckily, all the interviewees and the author are already maintaining close relationships, therefore, all the interviews went on smoothly. However, the author also reminded all the interviewees that the interviews were conducted solely for research purpose to ensure that they could speak their minds freely.

Since the author also works at the company, some additional insights from her have also been added and analyzed in this paper. These insights include personal experiences and observations of the founder and other employees.



CHAPTER IV

FINDING ANALYSIS

This chapter consists of the in-depth analysis of the interviews from the previous chapter which will help identify factors that contributed in the success of the company of research. My personal insights and observations from working at the company have also been added to provide additional details. Below are the analyses of the findings which have been organized in appropriate manner.

Tiered Commission Structure and Intrinsic Motivation:

There are many ways to motivate and incentivize the salespeople. After years of trials and errors, the company has found that the most successful way to incentivize their salespeople is to use the *Tiered Commission Structure*.

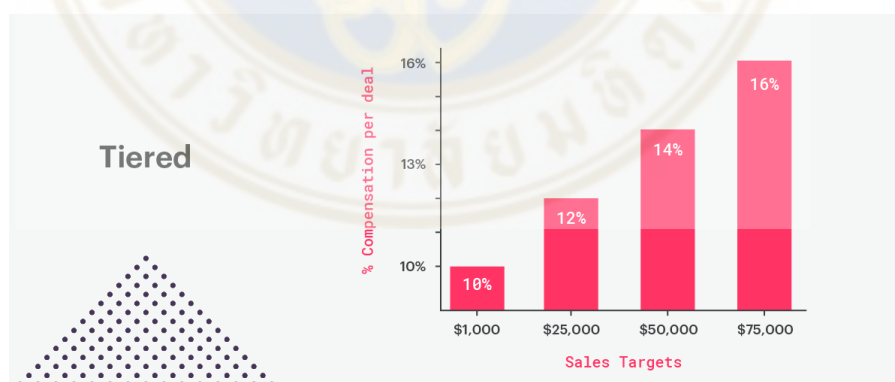


Figure 4.1: Tiered Commission Structure

Many years before, the company was using the flat commission plans. Even though it provided more than enough for the salespeople to pay for their living expenses, it was not enough to keep them motivated throughout the whole month. Then a few years ago, Khun Boonchai decided to change the structure to Tiered Commission.

Turned out that the sales were boosted immediately after the change. For some particular month, one branch was able to approximately sold a car per day. If compared to the total number of cars in stock (100+ cars), this was a huge number and success.

The Tiered Commission Structure is very simple, easy to understand, and very easy to use. The commission increases as the seller's performance increases accordingly. For example, sales A receives 5,000 baht for the first car he sold, receives 6,000 baht for the second, and receives 7,000 baht for the third. The last car he sold that month will provide him the highest commission. Then the structure restarts again at the beginning of the new month.

There were times when one branch started adapting the structure first, while other branches still used the flat commission structure. The difference in sales number was very obvious. The third branch which was managed by Khun Pornthip, Khun Boonchai's youngest sister, was the first one to adapt. Their sellers base wages were x,xxx baht but they received their commissions in Tiered Structure. That month, each sellers were able to sell 5-6 cars each at least. While in the other branches, sellers base wages were xx,xxx baht but they received flat commission. They were only able to sell 2-3 cars each. In the end, even though their base wages were higher, the total income they received were lower than the sellers who received the Tiered Structure Commission because the other team was able to reach higher number of targets.

Even though the commission is money, it also impacts intrinsic motivation. "Commission compensation represents a performance contingent reward for a salesperson. It is the perceptions of the rewards that ultimately impact intrinsic motivation" (Mallin, M. L., & Pullins, E. B., 2009). That explains why the salespeople were able to stay motivated until the end of the month.

Right Team, Right People:

BLC Auto Sport consists of total four branches. Each branch has 4-10 employees depending on the numbers and types of cars in stock. Some branches only need one salesperson with a charismatic image to operate, some need as much as five salespersons with various characteristics.

When deciding which person belongs to which team, there are many factors to consider. Most of the time, Khun Boonchai is the one who decided at first but after some time passed, each salesperson will naturally realize which team they fit best. “Team members with moderate difference in ability from other members demonstrate *Performance Gain*” (Garrett, J., & Gopalakrishna, S., 2017). Which means when a team has members with moderate difference of abilities, they will be able to create higher performance for the company.

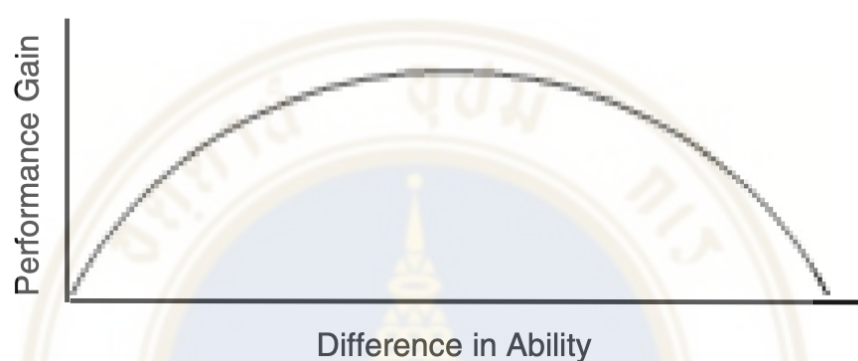


Figure 2.2 Performance gain for individuals

In the case of the company, the first two branches which mainly sell transportation trucks only need one or two salespeople each, in which both of them are a middle aged man with a charismatic image. Why? As the author have interviewed Khun Thanawat, one of the people mentioned, the author found that most of the customers that come to buy cars in these two branches are business owners, freelancers, and individuals who are determined to use the cars for their businesses. So a salesperson with a trustworthy image is necessary to deal with these groups of customers.

Unlike the first two, the other two branches mainly sell cars for private use. Which means the customers are normal people who are looking for a reasonable quality and price. Some of the customers are teenagers, some come together as a family. The salespersons in these two branches work in teams to help generate sales. They mostly have friendly characteristics to suit the types of customers they have to serve. They also have moderate difference in backgrounds and abilities which allow them to demonstrate Performance Gain. Some of these salespersons had worked in other branches before, but

in the end they found that the atmosphere which there are people with moderate similarity and difference suits them the most which that helps them work better as well.

Setting the Right Goals:

According to the goal-setting theory, the goals need to be clear, challenging, and have the right level of complexity. At the company, not only the management levels are the ones who set prices for the cars in stock, but the salespeople also contribute a big part to the process. As the CEO or managers do not usually get to have direct contact with customers, they do not have as much knowledge as the salespeople have on which price range is the best and how much at maximum the customers are willing to pay for each type of cars. So they decided that when new cars are added to the stock, the management level and the salespeople will have a meeting to discuss and set the price together. What they take into consideration are two big parts which are the costs and the market price. The management level, as the ones who purchased the cars know best about the costs, and the salespeople as sellers know best about the market price. So they combine this information and decide on the appropriate price. Therefore, as the salespeople have big contributions in setting the price, or we might consider them as 'goals' in this case, they will feel more responsible and committed to selling those cars. Also, by letting them set the appropriate price for each car, the goals they have to pursue will not be too hard to achieve as they decided by themselves. Still, the goals will be challenging enough as the managers had considered the costs and profits as well.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurial firms are different from other traditional ones in terms of innovation, risk taking, and pro-action (Miller, 1983; Miller and Friesen, 1983). The foundations of entrepreneurial strategy states that to create an entrepreneurial business, the entrepreneurs have to make choices for four important things which are: choosing their competition, customers, technology, and identity.

From all the interviews conducted for this research and my observations from working at the company, I have learned that the company has done all of them and had done well for the most part. I have concluded that the answers to the research question of 'How BLC Auto Sport Managed to Stand Strong in Used Car Business for Over Three Decades' are because they know themselves and their competitors well, they know what they are doing and which way they are heading to, they have sufficient people and technology to work with, and lastly, they also have their own unique identity.

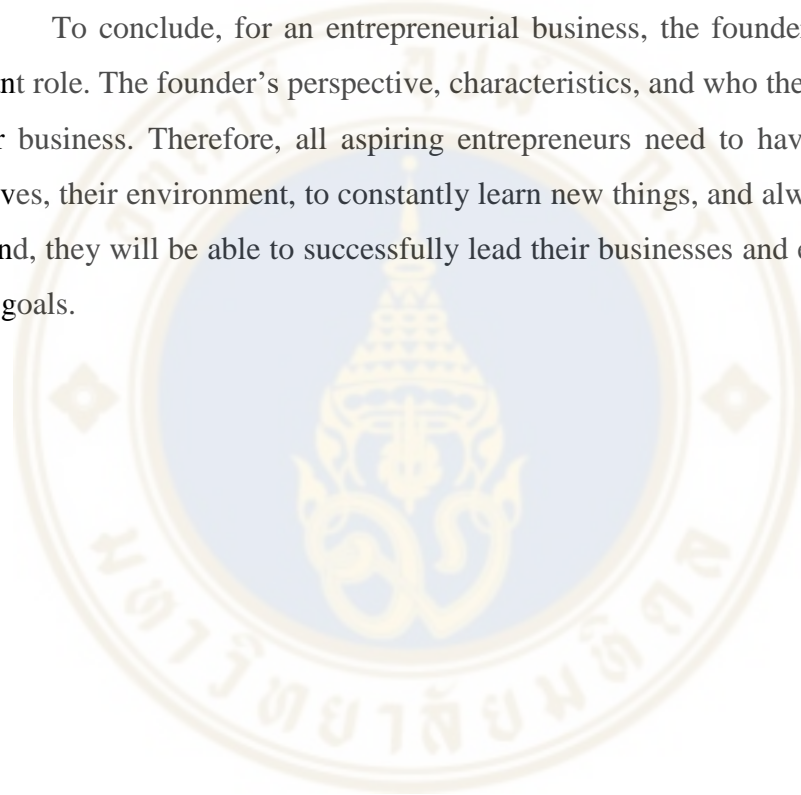
Based on the interviews with Khun Boonchai, it was found that he knows his competitors very well to the point they are almost like close friends rather than competitors. He said that they always share useful information about things like market trends and the market price at the gatherings. There is this National Used Car Association where all the dealers come together and share the techniques and tactics of their businesses. From what I have seen, Khun Boonchai has always maintained good relationships with all other used car dealers that he knows. Just like the saying 'keep your friends close and your enemies closer'.

Another key point I found important to this research is that Khun Boonchai is always learning something new and trying to stay active and up-to-date. I think that this characteristic is vital for every entrepreneur because as a founder of the business, you have to always be eager to improve and be better. This makes people around him feel like they want to stay active and do something too. So that is why they constantly have discussions with each other (people in the company) about how to do certain things

better. Khun Boonchai has said to me several times as we were working that we always have to keep on moving and know what is going on around us.

I would say that this company has a lot of Khun Boonchai's color and identity in it. The obvious example would be him giving the company a unique Thai name 'Bunluechai: บันลือชัย'. As a child and company employee myself, I used to ask why we did not have a trendy English name like others. Which he answered 'We have to be unique. You cannot remember the company name if it's just a typical English name like A.B. Auto, but you will surely remember Bunluechai'.

To conclude, for an entrepreneurial business, the founder plays the most important role. The founder's perspective, characteristics, and who they are will reflect on their business. Therefore, all aspiring entrepreneurs need to have awareness of themselves, their environment, to constantly learn new things, and always improve. So in the end, they will be able to successfully lead their businesses and employees to the desired goals.



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