



## INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT TAN

In this special segment of Tuesday Times, IFPAS Member Delphine Pung interviews Senior Financial Consultant Mr. Albert Tan from NTUC Income who also serves for IFPAS Executive Council.

**Delphine Pung :** Today's interview is with Mr. Albert Tan, a senior financial consultant from NTUC INCOME.

**Albert Tan:** I am very grateful to have found a career that touches people's lives and making a difference. Prior to becoming an adviser, I worked as a postman and going around on a scooter delivering mails. The working life was very tough because I had to deal with the hot sun and rain. And oftentimes, I am being chased and bitten by dogs.

**DP:** Was these during the kampong days?

**AT:** Yes. This happened in a terrace house, during the kampong days. The gate was open and I was soon surrounded by some fierce looking dogs. I was so frightened that I fell off my scooter and defended myself against the dogs. The owner later complained to the postmaster but it was proven that I acted out of self-defence

**DP :** How old were you when you were a postman and how long had you been as a postman?

**AT:** This was many years ago, in my early 20s. I was in this job for less than 2 years as I realised, after some accidents, that this job was not suitable for me. So, I decided to upgrade myself by taking up night classes and found an accounting position in a shipping company. After more than 15 years, my work became so mundane and I lost my drive and passion. I wanted to step out of my comfort zone and do something different and more fulfilling in life. And that was how I came into the insurance industry in 2002. When I switched into the insurance industry, it was at midlife and also at a time where I just got married. The new added responsibility was very stressful and I constantly worry of unstable income.

**DP:** So, when you told your wife that you are switching from a stable career in accounting to an insurance career, what was her reaction?

**AT:** My wife was very supportive of my intention and in fact she sacrificed for me as well. My first year in my insurance career was extremely tough and I did not have a mentor to guide me. Everything was on my own and I did not know how and where to start. Due to my childhood operation, it was very difficult to approach and engage people for discussion. The only way I learned was through mistakes and perseverance.

**DP:** That's very admirable! I am a financial advisor myself and hearing that from you, further inspires me to continue what I am doing. From what I know, you have many achievements and accolades in your 17-year career as an advisor. Maybe you can share with us a bit more of how you achieved them along the way.

**AT:** Since I was new to the insurance industry, I participated in many roadshows every week. But then again, because of my medical condition, it was very difficult to get people to stop for me. In order to improve my skills, I actually attended various workshops and seminars to gain better skill set, knowledge and in time management. My perseverance and determination helped me to overcome all my setbacks.

**DP:** How did you feel when you hit your first MDRT?

**AT:** To be honest, I didn't know what MDRT was until I did some research. After knowing that MDRT is a mark of excellence and holds a high emphasis on the code of ethics, I wanted to use this as leverage to show professionalism and earn trust and confidence from my clients.

**DP:** Based on our response, you feel that MDRT is meant for your client to have confidence in you? Despite the challenges in your initial years, how does it feel that you have attained this accomplishment and does that equate as a mark of achievement for the hard work that you have gone through?

**AT:** Yes, definitely! Because when you qualify for MDRT, you need to put in a certain amount of hard work, and it's about going your normal work and dishing out to that level. MDRT enhances the position of an insurance advisor, because it shows your commitment to the industry and that you hold a high code of ethics to your company, clients and self.



**DP:** Have achieved MDRT every single year? From 2003 to 2012, that makes you a life time MDRT member doesn't it?

**AT:** Yes.

**DP:** You are such an inspiration! If there is one quote that you would like to use every single year, that spurs you on for the next MDRT, what would be?

**AT:** **Keep on trying and never give up!**





**DP:** Actually, it's as simple as that really - don't give up, keep on trying. That's wonderful! Speaking of this quote, may I know how you are related to Dr. William Tan?

**AT:** Dr. William Tan is the eldest in a family of seven siblings. It was very unfortunate that at the age of two, he was diagnosed with polio. Although he is physically disabled from waist down, he is unstoppable. Growing up with him as his second brother, I tried to give him as much help as I could because he was physically affected. He wanted to do a lot of things but was faced with many physical challenges, like going up and down a staircase, moving around the house with his crutches and leg braces. The neighbourhood kids were very unkind to him, called him nicknames and bullied him. At some point, they used catapults and red coloured seeds to shoot at him. Whenever he falls down and cry, I would be the first to console and give him a hug. I remembered one incident very clearly when William gathered all of us to prove something to the bullies. William, the king of the gang, instructed my younger brother David and myself to chase the neighbourhood kids away and scold them of protecting our brother.



**DP:** Do you consider Dr. William Tan as your mentor and inspiration?

**AT:** Yes, definitely. I also learnt something from him that **nothing is impossible as long as you have the desire and determination to pursue your goal.** Most important thing is that you must dream big and when you have the dream, you must have the determination to make it happen.

**DP:** I understand that you are also a **two-time cancer survivor.** Could you share with us a little about this experience?

**AT:** At the age of 5, I had cancer and there was a lump on my neck. The surgeon just cut it off like a butcher. I thought the surgeon could have done a more customised job and provide some care for me so that when I grow up, my neck would have looked nicer. Just like what my brother William experience, I too was bullied and my classmates called me nicknames. In kindergarten, the teacher singled me out, made fun of me and humiliated me in front of everyone. Growing up, I not only had to manage this physical scar but also the emotional ones as well.

**DP:** It must have been traumatic and I am very sure that your parents at that point of time, were not familiar with cancer, unaware and at a loss.

**AT:** They were at a loss, not knowing what to do so they relied on the doctor to treat me.

**DP:** Did that help you to assist your clients in situations such as this?

**AT:** With what I had gone through, I had developed a better understanding about cancer survivors. I am able to relate to my clients the importance of life insurance, especially on how a life insurance can avert a financial crisis if something happens to a family member.





**DP:** You had another cancer in the year 2016, would you like to share about that?

**AT:** I had a lump on my throat and the GP referred me to a specialist. After all the tests were done, it was confirmed as thyroid cancer.

**DP:** What were your thoughts when you were diagnosed with thyroid cancer?

**AT:** I was very puzzled because I lead an active lifestyle. I don't drink and I don't smoke. I exercise regularly and participate in marathons. Having thyroid cancer was the last thing in my mind.

**DP:** I believe that any cancer survivor feels same way, especially when they believe that they live a healthy lifestyle. After being diagnosed with thyroid cancer, how does this affect or help you in dealing with your clients?

**AT:** **Life is unpredictable** and I have always advised my clients to have adequate protection because you never know what will happen tomorrow. I realised that I am the walk of the talk. I have to show my clients that I have the coverage and the importance of getting protected.

**DP:** Does that bring more meaning to your career?

**AT:** Definitely, because this is a matter of financial security.

**DP:** So, this is more than work for you?

**AT:** **Life is so fragile and we really need protection for our family.** As a financial consultant, this role creates impact and makes a difference in people's lives and they may not know it now. Whatever we see is the present and the future is always unpredictable. That is why insurance is not bought, but is sold.

**DP:** What would be your advice to encourage all the industry practitioners out there?

**AT:** My advice is when you encounter any challenges, don't give up. Review your processes, **check your shortcomings** and improve on it. I never expected to achieve 10x MDRT in 10 consecutive years and COT in 2007. Success is about challenging yourself and doing what you thought was not possible.

**DP:** Albert, this is indeed a very inspiring interview and I hope that all that you have shared today will serve as an inspiration to many. Thank you!

