

# TRIAL AND ERROR TRY AND GROW



## CARMEN KA MAN LEE

BSc (major in Chemistry and minor in Global Studies)

### Profile

- Bronze Award, the International Genetically Engineered Machine Competition (iGEM) 2017, Boston, USA.
- Guest Speaker and Student Representative at the HKU External Prize Award, CEDARS.

“iGEM is about a product — from R&D to marketing, running a 15-member team and presenting in Boston. It has inspired me to go on a startup path.”

I joined iGEM in my third year of study. My friend, Ravneet, who was a really good Biological Sciences student, contacted me and said that our common friend Yash was growing a team for iGEM. I met Ravneet through the student organisation AIESEC and we had done pretty impressive things in there together. She explained that this competition was a great opportunity because it was not just about research,

it was also about community work and developing a research into a product. I bought the idea and I joined.



In our 5-day final presentation in Boston, a lot of exciting things happened. Apart from the hardships that arose from some team members, we got the chance to see a bigger world - Harvard students doing much more with the project that we could, UN officers coming from a science background shared how scientists could truly impact education in the world, FBI officers telling us that they need Science and why they need it. This bigger world was fascinating, and humbling. Our team was incredibly grateful to have the chance to present in front of such an amazing audience.

I like how enabling iGEM was. This competition was pushing us to learn new things - raising sponsorship, mentoring high school team, drawing our own DNA strand structure and actualising it. It challenged us and told us that we are capable of so much more. This sense of trust in our ability enabled us to achieve bigger things. And it was not nearly possible without the help of the Faculty's staff members' support, shout out to Simon!

Now I was working with a personal branding consultancy startup. Everyday our company was meeting entrepreneurs, SME business owners, corporate executives and CEOs. When I met technology companies that came for our service, it reminded me of how clumsy the iGEM team and I were when we started iGEM — we used a lot of time to figure out how to present our team's product and how to make sponsors believe it. The iGEM experience helped me to sympathise with these ingenious people, who lacked the

opportunity to present and ended up losing pitching competition and investments.

Our company was helping numerous startup gaining their investments. We saw potential in these startups just like how I believed in my iGEM team. My colleagues and I coached them to success. It was from iGEM that I knew how I wanted to do what my soul was born to do.

Back at school, I was always pretty much lost — the Chemistry programme offered me a lot of chances to work in the laboratory and develop products. However, from so many experience in event management and joint-school/ joint-faculty activity, it dawned on me that research is not my path — I had set myself to a path that my programme did not offer.

As soon as I knew that I cannot rely on the conventional path of my programme, I kept looking for opportunities, despite still being lost. My third year in HKU was the process of endless networking and conversations, whether it was the HKU mentorship programme, Science Faculty, or CEDARS, I had worked with them and tried out different pathways.



It was a painful period of my university journey, because no one could guide me to a career path other than myself, the uncertainty made me sad and angry. However, it was from iGEM that I started to get my career path back on track. So if you are as lost as me, just make sure you go out to the world and try. Then you will make realisation and grow!

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