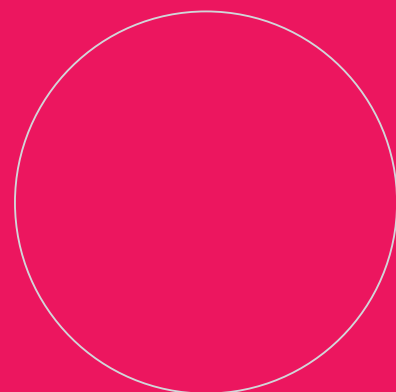


10



A GREENPRICE -  
HON CHUN HIM TERENCE

# PRECOCIOUS ENTREPRENEUR



“ Many university students spend their days playing video games and mah-jong late into the night, squandering their youth without a thought. Terrence was the same when he first entered university; but now, two years later, he has transformed into a precocious entrepreneur, living a very different university life. ”

“I get calls every day and none of my WhatsApp messages are from my friends. I’m approached by over ten suppliers every morning,” he said with a wry smile. Terrence is one of the founders of GreenPrice Supermarket, an organisation launched less than two years ago that has already opened physical retail outlets in Kwun Tong and Sham Shui Po; its sales team consists of more than 10 people and its business is steadily growing. Today, he brought me to GreenPrice’s warehouse in Kwun Tong for photos and the interview. The large warehouse was filled with countless stacks of packaged food that they had “rescued”.



## RESCUING “EXPIRED” PACKAGED FOOD

That’s right. GreenPrice’s mission is to salvage packaged food that is about to or has just “expired”, and sell it at a lower price or donate it to the needy. In this case, “expired” food does not refer to food that is past the “used by” date, but the “best before” date, also known as “short-dated food”. Many Hong Kong people are still unaware that just because it is past its “best before” date does not mean it is no longer edible. Terence pointed out that some supermarket chains even refuse to sell packaged food that is still six months away from its best before date to protect their brand image, returning it to the supplier. As a result, suppliers are sometimes left with a lot of edible packaged food that no one wants. The aim of GreenPrice is to help these suppliers reduce loss and reduce wastage.

The four core members of GreenPrice are all “post-90s”, but their entrepreneurial experience has made them more mature than university students their age, and they often have to hire people older than themselves. Calling them entrepreneurs

would not be an overstatement — they had the courage to launch a business and managed to break even with the high rents of physical retail outlets and warehouses in Hong Kong, where “a square foot of land is worth a square inch of gold”. So how did it all start?

Terence studies business at the University of Hong Kong. In his first year, he lived the hall life of “playing mahjong until 3 am to 4 am”. After that, he started wanting to learn more about the outside world and do something more meaningful, so he actively participated in various volunteering activities. On one of his visits to Food Angel, he discovered that society was wasting a lot of short-dated packaged food. Along with the business knowledge acquired in the classroom, Terence started thinking about how to solve this problem in a commercial way.

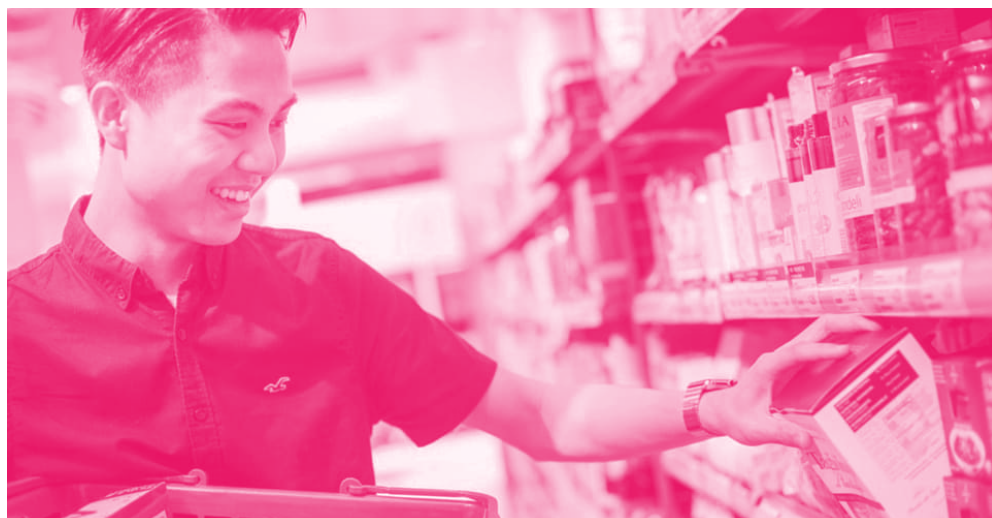
He said,

**“Business schools these days teach you to help society apart from making money, so there are many courses on social enterprises that teach you how to work in a value driven way.”**

With awareness of the problem, Terence signed up for the Good Seed programme in the same year. “I entered on my own. GoodSeed put participants into groups that deal with different issues, some dealing with environmental issues and some serving people with disabilities,

so I chose the environmental group and met my current partners. We didn’t know each other at the start.” Initially, they only wanted to design an app to create a platform to match suppliers and consumers over short-dated food, but they soon discovered that it was difficult to get both sides involved. “One night at the Good Seed camp, one of the instructors suggested that we can collect short-dated food and sell it ourselves, so we tried out the model to see if it would work,” Terence recalled. Since then, they have worked hard to build a complete supply chain step by step, and it has not been easy.





## QUESTIONED BY PEERS: WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

To start selling short-dated packaged food, they naturally needed to find a source of supply. It was difficult at the start. Around October 2016, they started actively working on the project, initially with just one source of supply. It was a health food wholesaler introduced to Terrence's business partner by their professor. The wholesaler had dozens of boxes of short-dated tea leaves that they "couldn't even finish in their office", so they passed the tea leaves on to GreenPrice. For the first time, GreenPrice set up a stall at a bazaar and faced the public's reactions to short-dated food. "Many customers had negative comments and asked us: 'Are you scamming me?' We tried our best to explain, but the message

probably didn't get across. Some people said, 'Kids, these have expired. Take them away.'" Terrence recalled, laughing bitterly. It was only Terrence's first time as a salesman, and he had to sell short-dated products that were not widely accepted in society. He admitted that it took courage to overcome the problem:

**"It was really hard to get over the psychological hurdle. A lot of people would question me, and some of my classmates asked: 'Are you crazy? What on earth are you doing?' It was very stressful."**

Although their first bazaar experience was not as successful as they would have liked, they were featured by a major media outlet and the seeds of success were sown. "At the end of December 2016, a supplier approached us after reading the coverage. It was a re-exporter who re-exported goods to Mainland China and had a lot of stock on hand." They got a large amount of Almond Roca chocolate from the re-exporter that would pass its best before date in January 2017; it was their first batch of goods that had "not yet expired". They sold the chocolate for \$10 to \$20 a tub, and the chocolate sold very well. "The re-exporter has since supplied us with other goods in addition to Almond Roca and the income started to match the rent." The partnership not only turned the tide for GreenPrice, but also confirmed the existence of the problem that suppliers are stuck with short-dated food.

Since then, Terrence's team has found more and more suppliers to work with, who supply them with a wide range of short-dated products, such as ketchup, chips, and chocolates. After solving the supply problem, other technical problems were also solved gradually.

Within a year, they had rented the warehouse in Kwun Tong where this interview took place and opened a branch in Sham Shui Po, and the company can now support 5 full-time employees. Terrence credited Good Seed for everything, because he could not have saved \$100,000 on his own, nor would he have known what it meant to start a business. He admitted, "Without Good Seed, I don't know what I would be doing now."

However, Terrence is not complacent with himself or with GreenPrice. On the one hand, he believes that customers buy GreenPrice's short-dated food mostly for the bargain, not for environmental reasons, so he hopes to raise customers' environmental awareness in the future. On the other hand, he does not want to be a mere product trader — he is considering studying a master's degree in food and nutrition, so that he can learn more about the subject and share it with his customers readily.