



## Legend of Gwo Lian Machinery Upon True Grit **Interviewing Iconic Successor, AHUNG CHEN**

With a history longer than half a century, Gwo Lian is known for metal wire drawing machines and equipment, offering smart machine products, turnkey projects and technical service to clients from 46 countries across 5 continents. Ahung Chen, President of Gwo Lian, is a successor to have unlocked the pinnacle of Gwo Lian in his generation. One of his formulas of success is to not be content with the status quo and not restrict himself to fastener business. He has been active in fetching know-how from other different industries. He is not only the honorary chairman of Chinese EMBA Union, but one of the top 100 MVP Managers in Taiwan. Gwo Lian was rated by the United States Chamber of Commerce as one of the Taiwanese companies with influences on global industries, received D&B Top 1,000 Elite SME Award twice, and was rated by Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) as a top brand in Taiwan. Now, he is the Vice Chairman to Taiwan Fastener Trading Association, working in tandem with Chairman Josh Chen on the grand future of Taiwan fastener industry. For these reasons, Fastener World invited President Ahung Chen in our interview with “Iconic Fastener Business Successor”, where you will get an in-depth view of the essence of his experiences in management.

### **Humble Start with a Suitcase & “Mobile Booth”; Fighting Spirit Brings About Sales to 46 Countries**

In 1992, Ahung—aged 23 back then—returned to Taiwan to take over the business from his father, but the company had only 5 people and was hardly known by Taiwanese people from places above Tainan City. He grabbed his luggage and a TIFI (Taiwan Industrial Fasteners Institute) member directory, starting to visit each and every member, alone by himself. He didn’t have enough people to work for him as well as enough capital to cover the cost. He couldn’t even afford a notebook computer, so he had to be frugal. He took the guerrilla fashion visiting international trade fairs outside Taiwan. “I didn’t even have my own booth when I attended the trade shows in Singapore and Germany, so I thought I’d just wing it and use myself as a ‘mobile booth’. My suitcase was all I had, containing a 5-inch-screen VCR, a notebook and my product category.” At the sight of Ahung’s perseverance,

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his friends introduced him to their Southeast Asian clients who he talked with at the coffee shops of the shows. Never forget “you” are the hope to survive even when it seems you have no fortune and resources. The concept of “mobile booth” is the best manifestation of turning yourself into invisible business opportunities. That is the first thing we learn from Ahung.



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However, it takes all sorts of suffering to become a man of greatness. On the path of building up his business, he was betrayed by his best friend who stole away his resources and inflicted a crisis on him that led to employee resignation, and like this wasn't enough, his father passed away. He had times of depression and doubt of his belief, even the guilt of walking into his office, but he thought there was hope as long as he managed to survive. He reflected on himself and turned to senior employees who offered support to do research with him. They finally came up with the next-generation eco-friendly and energy-saving Roller Cassette Wire Drawing Machines coupling with Steel-Brush Type Descalers to completely replace highly contaminating acid descaling. Through Gwo Lian's turnkey projects and its mindset to take full responsibility for any problems on the machines they sell out, the company achieved sales to benchmark clients from Germany, Italy, Japan, Switzerland and built smart wire drawing lines for them. Time moved on and all the dots started to fall in line and connect, forming the landscape of Gwo Lian that encompasses sales to 46 countries. "The situation where I was forged my will of steel. It turned my crisis into business opportunities through which I was able to make my heyday."

## Know-how Vs Corporate Spirit, Which One is More Important to Pass on?

Ahung has seen many people from inside and outside of the fastener industry who went through business succession. He noted a critical point that people tend to overlook: **"It isn't the know-how but the corporate spirit that is harder to pass on."** Know-how is something we can learn and acquire. Some successors may have zero know-how, but they have a team to work with. They just have to know how to choose the right person for the position. So what is Corporate Spirit? He explained that a leader mustn't deviate from the track in the face of problems. The leader has to find the "meaning of existence" for the company and "stick with it no matter what", and help everyone within the company recognize with a shared mission statement to forge and pass on the Corporate Spirit as such. "It helps to give employees a vocation. Let them feel that the things they do will improve the industry and themselves, and then passion will grow in them. Only a satisfied employee will bring satisfactory products and clients."

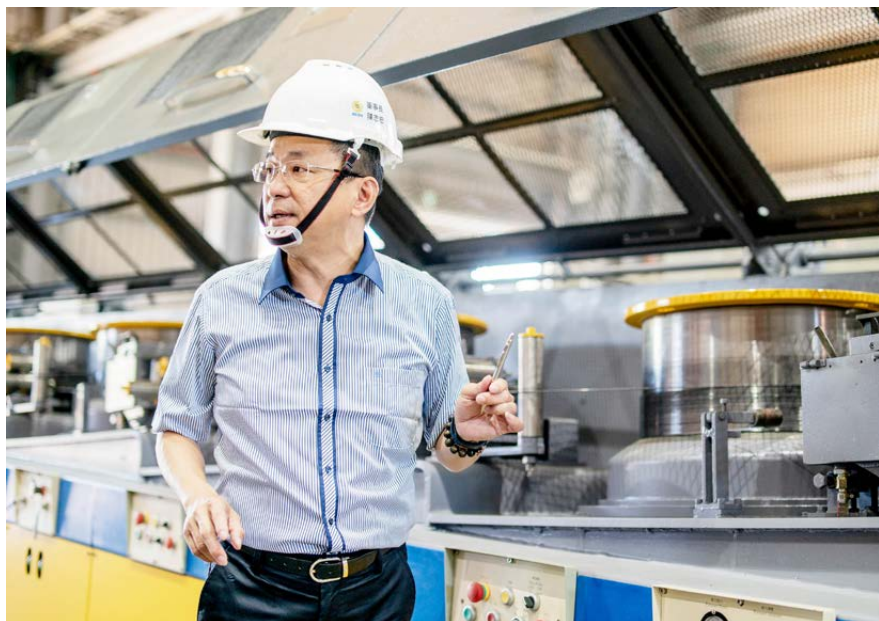
## Where are You in the 5 Phases to Success?

From his experience, he listed 5 phases in running a company which he observed from others—"knowing", "understanding", "being capable", "doing it", and "sticking with it". "Knowing" is a different realm from "understanding". You only just "know" by hearing or reading about information, but to "understand" requires endeavors to study and integrate the information. You will need the willpower to get back up from falling and the spirit to not quit. You won't succeed in anything if you don't stick to it. "Middle-aged people like us have

worked hard and built for the next generation a corporate culture with vision and a work environment that is positive. Unlike the middle aged who lived a hard life, the future successors won't have to pay as much sweat and tears, but it will require them find their own meaning of existence, mission statement and passion to make it to the 5th phase."

## Is Hi-tech Industry Taking Away Talents from the Fastener Industry? Ahung: "Use Hi-tech to Your Advantage and Benefits."

Lately in Taiwan there has been a boom of high-tech industry led by the semi-conductor and electronics industries, spurring concerns from the fastener industry that talents are opting for hi-tech companies which puts a hurdle on recruiting them in and enlarges the talents gap in the fastener industry. Ahung proposed to think about it the other





way around: **“Hi-tech is no threat to us because it also helps, depending on how you look at it.”** He was saying to not see it as an impact, but absorb it and make use of it by introducing it into the fastener industry. A high-tech fastener industry takes a variety of forms, including going smart, going digital, and making an unmanned factory. The present and future enterprises can no longer rely too much on human workforce. **They must start with management and create profit margins via smart management.** For example, a senior technician’s experience and knowledge can be written into computer codes or an ERP system to optimize production lines, cut costs and reduce human errors. “Don’t look down on yourself or constrain yourself to conventional manufacturing. Meet people from high-tech industries and absorb knowledge from them. You will learn things that will surprise you.”

## Interdisciplinary Learning; “You Need to Acquire ‘Perspectives’ ”

Ahung is very much actively involved in various associations outside of the fastener industry. When asked about why his passion

for the associations, “I seek to learn the ‘perspectives’ and ‘tactics’ from different industries,” said Ahung. The international market today is undergoing a drastic change. I’m afraid it won’t work out for fastener business owners who solely specialize in fasteners. They have to help themselves with the resource platforms, technical know-how, connections and strategies from other industries, and integrate what they have learned into their own businesses.

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He thinks the fastener industry can join forces with other industries, and it is never a conflict to integrate resources. “If we do so, we can even create another chance to survive, exist, develop and thrive together!” He recommends that fastener business owners should get in touch with associations and organizations of different realms to learn from them, grow, and share experiences in success and failure which will be passed on to the next generation for a better environment.

## “The Next Generation Holds the Key to the Future Taiwan Fastener Industry”

“I’d never let go if I don’t reach a point of breakthrough,” said Ahung recalling his personal traits as a leader. **“I found those professional business managers who never let go and never quit are the ones that have built corporations that are the mainstay of the industry today.”** With a prospect for more future successors joining the fastener industry and Taiwan Fastener Trading Association, he hopes to use his own experience as a stepping stone for the successors. He wants to utilize the industry’s connections, training courses and tours to companies of other industries to help the younger generation become the mainstay of the new era. ■

by Dean Tseng, Fastener World