

Following Your Passion During COVID-19

By Aricia Yee

She went from working in a bank to working in a restaurant. Ms Ivy Tan left an industry which sheltered her from tough times during SARS and chose to follow her passion instead during COVID-19.

Ms Ivy Tan, 47, who was working in DBS bank as a customer service officer, said “I was in a very protected environment during SARS. I was in my comfort zone and I had my job. I wasn’t aware of what was happening in the outside world except for what I see in the news.”

As a customer service officer, Ms Tan had to perform bank telling duties and handle requests from customers. There was a lot of paperwork to do, which made her dislike the job. After 18 years, she left the job which provided her financial stability.

“I don’t want to be stuck in something that I no longer enjoy. I decided to take the plunge and find another job,” said Ms Tan.

When Ms Tan left her job, she faced many challenges. There was no longer a source of income for her and finding a new job during COVID-19 was very difficult. She had to take up temporary jobs for a few months before finally getting a full-time job that she was passionate about.

Ms Tan hopes to pursue is a career in the Food and Beverage (F&B) industry. She said: “I have an interest in food at a young age. I thought of opening my food business before...” However, due to a lack of financial resources, she was unable to fulfil her dreams.

Before COVID-19 hit, she wanted to find a job in the F&B industry. Unfortunately, it was one of the industries that were badly affected by COVID-19. According to Tan Hsueh Yun from The Straits Times, in early 2020, 80 per cent of the restaurants reduced their staff to cut costs. Hence, there were hardly any job vacancies in the industry.

“It affected my choice of job. Many people lost their jobs during COVID-19. The only kind of jobs I could take up were essential service jobs, ” said Ms Tan. According to Rachel Phua from Channel News Asia, the total unemployment rate in Singapore rose to 3.6 per cent in September 2020.

Ms Tan took up temperature screening jobs at Singapore Pools and supermarkets as there were many vacancies available. According to Kenneth Cheng from TODAY, around 300 to 400 temperature screeners were needed, as posted by BGC Group, a recruitment firm in Singapore.

Ms Tan’s experience as a temperature screener was challenging. While working for Singapore Pools, she faced some disputes. Visitors were required to write down their information for contact tracing. Ms Tan said: “Some customers were angry and scolded us. They said that we were making them late in placing the bet.”

“They don’t understand that we have to help to facilitate the contact tracing in case there are any COVID-19 cases,” she added.

Despite the challenges of working as a temperature screener, Ms Tan persevered on. She worked as a temperature screener from February 2020 to October 2020.

After Phase 2 of COVID-19 began, she applied to be a waitress at Tanjong Hwaro, a Korean Barbeque restaurant. She was relieved that she could finally take up a job in the F&B industry. However, she had to adapt to safe-distancing measures enforced by the government. According to the Singapore Food Agency, all F&B establishments have to ensure one-metre spacing between queues and seated diners.

Apart from that, Ms Tan was glad that she could apply the skills of her previous jobs to her current job. These include communication skills, teamwork and patience as it is important in the F&B industry.

Although the journey was tough for Ms Tan, she overcame her odds. Despite a difference in her salary, she is still happy with her job. She said: “I would still leave the banking job if I could turn back time. The fear of being stuck in something I no longer enjoy is greater than the fear of not finding a job.”

“I realised I am happy as I am working on something I am passionate about.”

(695 words)