

Determination is the Formula to Success: NBS Alumna Nisha Abu Bakar Maricair

Warm, personable, and equally at ease with Chief Executive Officers and cleaners, Nanyang MBA alumna Nisha Abu Bakar Maricair (MBA, 2001) is one of the top coaches in Singapore's tourism industry. A self-professed 'people person', she is the owner and director of her own training firm. The 43-year-old possesses an ability to connect well with people from all walks of life, a skill which has helped her thrive in her job, even winning the government's Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) Outstanding Tourism Trainer award in 2010.

Yet Nisha did not always envision a career in training. After her undergraduate studies, she started work as a social worker with the Community Chest, a division of the National Council of Social Services. The work there was meaningful, but three years of service to the disadvantaged eventually drained her emotionally, prompting her to re-evaluate her career options and leave the organization in the early 1992.

A boom in the tourism industry drew Nisha to the sector. A love for travel and a willingness to start from scratch further strengthened the case for the career switch. The move proved to be a good decision she soon carved out a niche out for herself in tourism marketing. She admits that it was hard to put away her ego and start from the bottom, but a learning attitude helped. Besides, her mid-career switch now helps her better understand the perspective of her trainees.

Looking to augment her skills and knowledge, Nisha enrolled for Nanyang Business School's (NBS') full-time MBA programme in 2000. An understanding boss allowed her to continue contributing on a freelance basis, although that meant having to juggle the demands of work, study and family. She was heavily pregnant with her second son in the last few months of her graduate studies, and had to take one month's leave to give birth. Still, the able multi-tasker graduated on schedule with the rest of the class in 2001.

In 2003, the SARS epidemic thrust the tourism industry into a crisis, but this turned out to be a career opportunity for Nisha. With workers in the industry freed up from work, employers were encouraged, by the Singapore Tourism Board, to train their staff during the downturn. This proved to be a "blessing in disguise" for her, who saw the opportunity and started running training courses for SPRING Singapore, then the Productivity and Standards Board, and James Cook University's Singapore arm.



Armed with both theoretical expertise and practical experience, Nisha became highly sought after as a trainer – and not just in the tourism sector. In the past seven years, she notes that demand for training services has been on the rise as Singapore's economy shifts towards the service sector. As one of the pioneers in this area, she has been engaged by a wide variety of organizations to train their staff in areas of customer service and customer relationship management. Her clients range from retailers and hospitals to the armed forces and the police.

Today, training is as a big part of Nisha's life as ever. More than a job that pays the bills, she is highly dedicated and passionate about her profession. While the WSQ award is something she is proud of, she is grateful to her trainees, colleagues and clients for the opportunities to make positive changes in the lives of others.

Nisha's high regard for human relationships is borne out in enduring friendships forged at NBS. Names of Professors Russell Smith, John Beck and Roger Marshall roll off her tongue frequently, as she recalls the academic support they provided. More than teachers, she saw them as friends who went the extra mile in keeping materials for her when she was absent and responding to her emails late in the night. She also fondly remembers her fellow MBA students, a diverse mix of various nationalities, who nonetheless bonded and grew in friendship, many of whom remain dear to her today.

Apart from relating well to people, Nisha attributes her success to an innate desire for achievement, a perfectionist streak, a supportive family and luck. Counting her blessings, she says her family has been behind her all the way, sacrificing time spent with her. Her mother helps to take care of the home, freeing her time to pursue her career and personal goals, while her sons are disciplined enough to take charge of their own studies. Her elder son did extremely well in 2010 for his PSLE and is in Anglo Chinese School's International Baccalaureate programme. Her younger son is lining up for PSLE this year.

While one may marvel at her ability to juggle her myriad commitments, Nisha abides by a simple formula: "Psychological barriers are the greatest distance. While work will never end, it's amazing how far a little determination can go."

Indeed, Nisha latest ambition is to attain a PhD, an endeavour she will embark on after her younger son is done with PSLE. "When your heart is there, you will make everything else work for you."

- Write-up contributed by Ms Tan Kexin, Student Writer



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