

Degrees of success

Way Kuo argues that a college qualification doesn't guarantee success in the work place

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Hong Kong is a small place. Everyone seems to know everyone, especially if you're in business or government. But the case of Mr Yeung Kin-man bucks the trend. His name is not so well known in the local community, and yet he has just donated HK\$200 million on September 8, 2015 to City University of Hong Kong.

This is among the largest private donations made by a single individual to a Hong Kong institution to support higher education and academic research. Mr Yeung has attached no conditions to his generous gift.

Born and bred in Hong Kong, Mr Yeung is an outstanding yet low-key entrepreneur who significantly breaks with commonly held perceptions of successful elites and billionaires. His unassuming, down-to-earth and pragmatic attitude distinguishes him as a rare model in a society that places a high premium on fame and external attributes.

Mr Yeung is a top-ranking specialist in high-tech optical technology. He set up his business in Shenzhen and Huizhou in mainland China and built his success on the foundations of entrepreneurship in science and engineering. Employing his exceptional foresight and innovation to great effect, he has far surpassed his peers. Biel Crystal, the company he founded, is worth HK\$110 billion, and it made HK\$30 billion in 2014.

What is also noteworthy is that Mr Yeung doesn't need to brag about glamorous degrees from coveted universities, yet he has achieved levels of success far beyond what college degrees offer. He is living proof that you don't always need a degree to aim high in life or to prop you up in society.

Hong Kong places a huge amount of pressure on young people to enter university. The assumption is that getting the degree is what really counts, rather than the usefulness of the curricula content. Of course, this is a wrong-headed way of looking at tertiary education. A college degree serves primarily as proof of a certain level of qualification, and gets you a job interview. But the degree will never guarantee a satisfactory job or a fruitful life.

I believe that achievement stems from determination, passion, perseverance and persistence. These qualities are deeply embedded in the DNA of people such as Mr Yeung and countless other successful leaders in society who don't have a coveted college degree to fall back on.

Crucially, at a time when the government is highlighting the need for innovation, Mr Yeung Kin-man's story showcases how we should be re-examining our tertiary education curricula. We should align academic pursuits directly with cutting-edge thinking and creativity in order to develop innovative solutions to real-world problems.

As we usher in the new academic year, I would like to call on Hong Kong society to re-invigorate the pragmatic and highly diligent spirit traditionally found among Hong Kong people. As Mr Yeung has demonstrated, such a rare spirit lives on in our city.

And we certainly should do our best to create an environment that can truly support innovation and creativity. We don't want to see more home-grown talent flow out of Hong Kong.