

## Mr James E THOMPSON

Citation

Take an aeronautical engineering graduate from San Jose State University in the United States, add US\$1000 in personal savings, and a tiny cubicle in Yokohama, Japan, in 1965. What do you think will result? Few would imagine it could be this: revenue of US\$798 million, a presence in over 265 locations in almost 60 countries, 5,200 staff and a driving-seat role as Chairman and CEO of the world's largest privately owned international relocation business.

Yet this is exactly the start from which Mr James E Thompson, Founder of the Crown Worldwide Group, built his hugely successful global company that today serves as a flagship enterprise for Hong Kong Inc and a model for empathetic entrepreneurship worldwide. It is also why Mr Thompson firmly believes that, on graduation, no one knows what they are truly capable of doing, until they go out into the world and try.

In Mr Thompson's case, real life revealed an uncanny ability to capture today the markets of tomorrow. He wasn't a straight A student. He was an early world traveler, feeling a greater affinity for Asia than for engineering after taking time out as a student to travel the globe. After university, he based himself in Yokohama. He gained experience in the removals sector for 18 months and then set up on his own, just as Japan and the tiger economies were about to start roaring. Accounting

had appeared a realm of mystery at university. Yet he found everything crystal clear when sat in front of his own books.

As Mr Thompson got his business on the road, he lived frugally and diligently reinvested in his company. He set high standards as well as sales targets. He also accepted early the need to delegate to allow others to do what they did best and gain the time to look ahead himself. As more multinationals set up country offices in Asia, Mr Thompson was the man with the plan already in place to transport their executives' prized possessions there and back. In 1978, he moved his headquarters to Hong Kong and drawing on the city's drive and entrepreneurial outlook began to expand into related areas. As the age of information loomed, relocations and logistics were joined by document and records management, a division now handling 20 million record cartons. Wine storage and fine art logistics followed, brought into the fold as aspirational lifestyles burgeoned.

What was achieved was only part of the Crown success story. How it was achieved was just as essential to Mr Thompson. Excellence in service and operations in turn brought referrals and reputation, creating a virtuous circle of prosperity. Internally, a people-oriented corporate culture enabled potential to flourish and fostered appreciation and respect for others. Business

roadblocks were overcome by resilience and perseverance, qualities that every entrepreneur must possess, according to Mr Thompson. He also showed in spectacular fashion how “good guys” can indeed triumph in the business arena. In 2014, Mr Thompson received the DHL/SCMP Hong Kong Business Awards Lifetime Achievement Award, an honor given to just five people in the past 25 years.

Inspired throughout his life by his parents’ hard work, integrity, and generosity toward others, even though not wealthy themselves, Mr Thompson has always willingly contributed time and energy to the wider business sector and the community as a whole. He has served on numerous Hong Kong Trade Development Council trade missions, the Hong Kong-Japan Business Cooperation Committee, as Deputy Chairman of the Hong Kong Management Association, and as a two-term Chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, among many other activities. He has been a stalwart friend of HKUST, contributing as a member of the Business School Advisory Council, supporting the establishment of the Thompson Center for Business Case Studies, and sharing his experiences with students. Many charities, especially those with a focus on cancer, education, art and children, have also benefited from his public service and support. In 2003, Mr Thompson was awarded a Gold Bauhinia Star by the Hong Kong SAR Government.

We can now be inspired by Mr Thompson’s own example. The future beckons and if you strive hard, remain open to opportunity, go for platinum standards and nurture a giving spirit, you never know the amazing heights you might achieve.

Mr Council Chairman, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the high honor of presenting to you, Mr James E Thompson, GBS, Founder of the Crown Worldwide Group, for the award of Doctor of Business Administration *honoris causa*.