

The Singaporean who became famous with his sandcastles is back with a book – to encourage others to follow their dreams. GREGORY LEOW reports

Bury head in sand?

Not him

ALVIN Lee became famous in the late 1990s for building spectacular castles out of sand and creating a sandcastle building kit called Beachworks.

Now, having conquered Toys R Us – the kit sells here and in the US – the builder is back to tell people how they can build their own castles in the air.

Castles Can Fly is Mr Lee's book that he hopes will inspire people to make creativity and innovation a part of their lives.

He said in an interview with Streets: "Many Singaporeans do nothing but focus on the 5Cs. The only 5Cs I know that Singaporeans do is to complain, complain, complain, complain and complain.

But he said: "Admit the fact that it is a bad economy and we have bad times. Stop all the bitching and complaining about it and do something about it."

According to him, it is okay to complain but it cannot be the only thing that a person does.

He has targeted the book at people over 40, who, like him, grew up in pre-Independence Singapore.

But as National Day approaches, he finds it ironic that what Singapore has achieved in the past 38 years will have no relevance with what Singapore will have to do in the next 38 years.

He explained: "Back then, it was clear what Singapore had to do. We had nothing, so we built houses, roads and invited companies to build factories.

"But today, with technology, physical labour is not so important and fewer people are needed in the workforce."

With reports of SIA, PSA and HDB retrenching, those aged over 40 are realising that the future is not so easy to predict and that the concept of an iron ricebowl is no longer valid.

"A lot of my peers are complaining about the economy and wishing for unrealistic, and not practical, goals that existed once upon a time.

"Hopefully my book will show them that this is one way forward," said Mr Lee, who is married with a son, Tom, aged 16.

By relating his own "Chicken

action among Singaporeans.

He also talks about how to develop creativity and innovation, and includes a "toolkit" to help people to develop ideas.

And the book is a gift from him to Singaporeans – it was not written with profit in mind and he put up his own money to publish the 2,000 copies.

Selling every copy would, at most, enable him to cover the cost.

Having worked overseas for close to 20 years as a structural engineer has given him an international perspective.

Amazingly, this book is but one of Mr Lee's projects.

His main work now is running corporate training courses for companies and schools in

Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. He conducts a two-day workshop called Thinking Out Of The Box. But he has not neglected the Beachworks concept, and says that he is close to closing a deal to further expand the range. For now though, he is not revealing any details, saying only that "it is in the works".

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