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Different paths
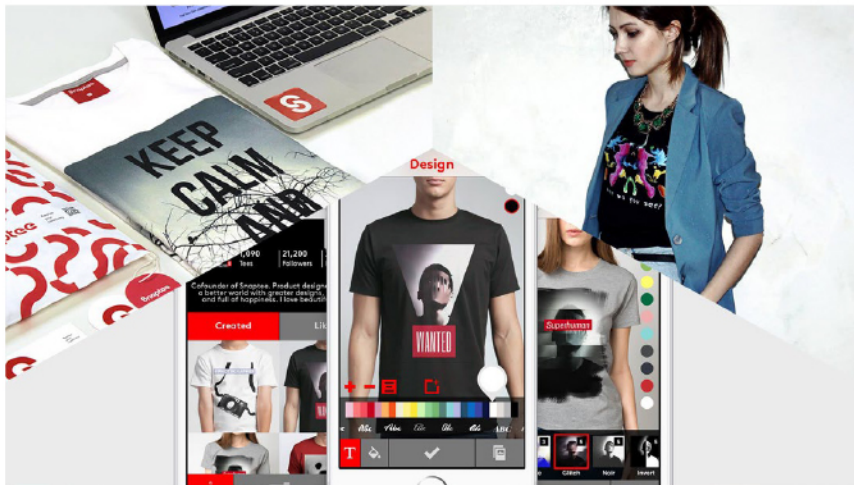
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DIFFERENT PATHS

HKDI Alumni Gary Lee and Chak Yun Hei have both been quick to carve out promising careers in design, but each has had to discover their own path to success

Gary Lee

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Design thinking is one of the 'go to' skillsets to found any startup

HKDI alumnus Gary Lee always knew he wanted to build something, "When I was a kid I used to tell my parents I was going to be an inventor. I think working on my own product and working on problems I like to solve as a full time job was always wired in my mind. So, starting a company was a natural step for me." Having like-minded peers was a big benefit, "I grew up with a group of friends whose share a similar mindset, we always chatted about new technology, product ideas and business ideas." As well as expanding his group of peers, HKDI helped Lee to apply his enthusiasm to a formal design process, he explains, "Design thinking is one of the 'go to' skillsets to found any startup. Research, defining the problem and developing ideas are all fundamental to a startup." Lee founded Snaptee, a mobile app that enables you to create your own custom T-shirts with just a few taps on a smartphone, around five years ago. An advantage of working with a small R&D team, is that Lee is still directly involved in the development of his product. He goes on to say, "First of all I don't consider Snaptee a success yet, we still have a long way to go. And, let's face it, it's not easy and most of the time it's not fun." However Lee says it's important to "Do something you love, and which you are willing to do even without a paycheque because you will need your passion to overcome the problems you're going to face. Having a good product is a requirement, but that alone will not automatically make your company success."

Chak Yun Hei

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Technology moves and changes so fast, before I moved jobs I asked myself 'am I part of that change, am I doing new things?

After graduating with a Higher Diploma in Product Design and Technology in 2001, Chak Yun Hei led a team at Canon Electronics Business Machines (H.K.) Co., Ltd. The role put Yun Hei at the heart of a huge corporation, where solving design problems was just one stage in a process that ended only when a product was packaged and shipped to meet a strict production deadline. At Canon, Yun Hei designed the X Mark II Calculator, winner of the Red Dot: Best of the Best 2013 award. Later, Yun Hei moved to TCL Corporate Research (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd as the Head of Design. "Now I have more freedom to pursue ideas," he explains, "But increased freedom requires increased control." He is a fan of Tesla's tightly controlled but innovative design ethos, which he explains as "Design from first principles, focus on core values and functions." Yun Hei's change of jobs has been a turning point in his career which allowed him to reflect on why design and technology are important to him. "Technology moves and changes so fast, before I moved jobs I asked myself 'am i part of that change, am I doing new things?' Students should bear in mind that technological development is cumulative, in the next ten years, tech will develop exponentially. It's important not to be left behind as what is designed today will be the basis of the designs of the future. Students need to be alert, pay attention to change."