

Interview:

**Vincent**

Owner

Recycling Centre

**SC:** How do I address you?

**V:** My name is Vincent.

**SC:** How old are you this year?

**V:** I am 58 years old this year.

**SC:** how long have you been in this industry (Recycling) ?

**V:** About 9 years.

**SC:** So how long have you been in the company? or do you own the company?

**V:** Yes I own the company and the company has been open for 9 years.

**SC:** So what are you in charge of doing?

**V:** We are in charge of collecting all these recycled waste.

**SC:** So where do these recyclables come from?

**V:** Some comes from Condominiums, some come from Coffee shops. (Kopitiam)

**SC:** Then where do all these aluminum cans come from?

**V:** These drink cans? Some comes from recycle waste collectors who collect these and sell it to us. Some also comes from Coffeeshops and some comes from residential areas.

**SC:** So there are some people that collects the recyclables and passes them to you?

**V:** Yes they will collect a certain amount and come over and sell them to me.

**SC:** Do you know who they are?

**V:** Most of them are cleaners and sweepers. Like Condo cleaners mostly. Whenever they see empty cans they will collect them.

**SC:** So to you, in the recent years are there any changes to the price of aluminum cans?

**V:** There is a huge difference.

**SC:** Could you elaborate on the difference?

**V:** 5 years ago, you get \$3.50 for 1kg, now it's just \$1.20.

**SC:** Do you know why?

**V:** Maybe it's because of the global economy slow down and prices for copper, paper and other materials have been falling.

**SC:** So you said that its 1.20 per kg now, do you buy them at this price?

**V:** We buy the cans for \$1 per kg and sell them for \$1.20.

**SC:** Oh I get it. How many cans are there in a kg?

**V:** 65 cans.

**SC:** so, if I collect 65 cans I can change it for \$1?

**V:** yes, 65 cans is approximately 1kg.

**SC:** so according to you the price has fallen about 3 times in the past 5 years.

**V:** Ya, it fell 3 times its value.

**SC:** So what is the next step for these cans?

**V:** We collect these cans and sell them to a larger collection company who exports these recycled cans.

**SC:** Oh so it's for export?

**V:** From what I know, it is for export where they will then melt it down and make new cans again.

**SC:** I understand now. Now besides these cans what other trash has value too?

**V:** the most valuable besides these cans would be copper. Gold, Silver, Precious Stones, Copper.

**SC:** Oh, so where would these copper come from?

**V:** Copper, they would usually come from the tearing down of buildings.

**SC:** from building tear downs, do you mean the wires?

**V:** Yes, from the electrical wiring.

**SC:** How about Gold? Where would you get gold?

**V:** Very little gold I haven't seen any yet. Maybe sometimes you get some small things that might have a little gold.

**SC:** How about cardboards, newspapers? Are these worth money?

**V:** The prices for these now is really cheap.

**SC:** So you mean even 5 years ago it was cheap?

**V:** Paper 5 years ago was \$0.28 per kg, now it's is about \$.10+ per kg.

**SC:** So the price for paper as compared to cans really differs a lot.

**V:** Yes. Paper is about \$0.14 per kg but cans you get \$1 per kg. we buy them at this price.

**SC:** So how does this affect your business, now that the prices have fallen so much.

**V:** We earn much lesser. In the past, when it was \$3.50 per kg we could have earn \$0.50, when we buy them at \$3.00. now we can only buy them at \$1.00 and sell them at \$1.20. So we have to earn lesser. If I want to earn more I have to buy the cans at \$0.80 per kg and at this price, the trash collectors might find that it is not economic to collect and they will stop collecting cans. Including cardboards, newspapers, the prices have dropped by a lot. The business now is really hard to do, many companies have closed down. It's hard to find employees too and the wages have risen.

**SC:** how much do your workers earn then?

**V:** For my foreign Chinese workers, they earn \$1600 per month. Plus, the taxes that I have to pay for my employees it's about 600 to 700, total about \$2000 plus. So that why now the earning is very low. Low is still ok, but the quota gets higher and higher. By quota I mean, the quota of Singaporean to Foreign workers set by the government. In the past you can have 3 Singaporean workers to 1 foreign worker but now you need 12 Singaporean workers before you can hire a foreigner.

**SC:** So, in the past there are many companies around here doing recycling collection?

**V:** In the past, this area use to have 5 or 6 recycling companies around. Now we have only 2. So it's not easy now. At least we have older clients, that help keep us around. But I also feel like quitting, I feel old and I don't have enough workers to help out. So I feel like retiring soon too. I have been doing this for so long, so I want to keep this company alive as we have a lot of old workers that has been with us for a long time. If I don't do this business, you see one of my workers, he is 70 over years old, what else can he do? He is already 75 or 76 years old and can still do some light work. It's not easy but he is very hardworking. I also have another worker that just retired over the Chinese New Year.

**SC:** It looks like light work to us but to him it's probably very tiring.

**V:** (Laughs) Yes, I think I wouldn't work until I am 75!