

Just try it!

Michael Lok, Da Vinci, Class of 2008, is a committed professional and he has studied at the best academic institutions in the world. But he credits his Island School teachers for helping him to understand it is ok to try new ideas and learn from experience.



Michael Lok

Which teachers had an influence on you?

I think the list would be endless if I were to name every teacher who had a positive impact on my time at the school. However were it not for Matthew Smith, (Year 7 – 9 form tutor) and Paul Wheatley (Head of Da Vinci House for most of my time at school), I probably would not have survived: particularly given some of the naughty things I did back then with my friends, but that is a story for another day!

Did Island School introduce you to anything that you didn't know you enjoyed?

I suppose it would be debating and public speaking. The debating and Model United Nations (MUN) largely shaped my passion for advocacy and my present career as a barrister. For instance, I gave my first public speech as a Year 7 student in the middle of a whole school assembly at the encouragement of then Principal, David James and Vice Principal, Chris Forse. I have no idea how I managed it, and I'd probably think twice if you were to ask me to do it now!

Did you do any community projects, advocacy or campaigning at school?

I was one of the founders of "WANBO Warriors" as part of the then 'ruling' Students' Union group. Starting something from scratch was one of the things that the school would encourage us to do – or at least it wasn't especially discouraged. No one ever said "it can't be done" and I truly hope that this sort of spirit persists in Island School. I think that mentality certainly shaped who I am and the fact that I could give things a go had a long-lasting effect on my growth. However silly or reckless some of our [the students] ideas may have sounded at first, we learnt from their eventual success or the lack thereof.

Did you take on any leadership roles?

From time to time I was involved in different parts of the school community and assumed various roles at different times. There was however less of a 'student voice' back then, which certainly evolved over time. Now you have student reps on the School Council, but back then students had a very distant relationship, if any, with the Council. I think in terms of student leadership and structures, they were not as well-built or sophisticated as they are today, but (in addition to the 'prefects' system and the students' union) there were still ample opportunities to take up leadership roles in terms of leading a particular team or spearheading a particular project.

Do you remember any important projects that you were really satisfied with or ones that are unforgettable?

One of the projects I distinctly recall is a House charity event. We worked with a Thai restaurant from the Soho area, and we basically set up a buffet outside the

staff room. It was clearly a change from the usual tuck shop fare. Pad Thai and the likes were served on professional hot plates and we were amazed by the long queues throughout the week – despite the somewhat inflated price tags! That said, we managed to secure a very good deal, and the revenue was donated to our House charity.

What did you study and do after leaving Island School?

After Island School, I read Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science. I decided to do this after attending an inspiring career lecture in the Lower Drama Studio. After LSE, I came back to do the PCLL at HKU, before completing my master's degree at Oxford. Then I returned to Hong Kong, and since then I have practised law at the local Bar.

No one ever said it can't be done

How well do you think Island School prepared you for university and further studies?

Quite well, not least because History Teacher Jez Rowson led a "Cooking at Uni" crash course towards the end of Year 13 – which proved to be rather handy.

I'm sure the academic education was likewise important, but I suppose that also depended on the subjects you picked. One of the perks of graduating from Island School is that you are part of the larger ESF community. And that becomes rather obvious when you study in a place like London. During Freshers Week, I remember meeting others from

Hong Kong who had graduated from another ESF base; though I had never met them before, they immediately ceased to be strangers and somehow, I felt connected with them in some way.

What is your current role like, do you have a routine of seeing clients and court appearances?

My role is to be an advocate in court to present a client's case, and also to advise clients on the law. I mainly work on commercial and public law disputes, and disputes involving the government. I would say my professional life is certainly very diverse and there is definitely no 'regular' daily routine.

What does a good day look like for you?

It very much depends on my schedule, e.g. whether I have to go to court or attend a meeting. There isn't really a "good day" or "bad day" exactly. That said, speaking in court always seems to me to be the most exciting part of my work. Though very different no doubt, it does remind me from time to time of the good old days of school debates and MUN.

Why do you think it is important to invest in education?

Cliché as it is, I think it is always important to invest in education because that is obviously how you train up the next generation, who will ensure that our world is always becoming better and that we as a humanity are always achieving greater and better things.

Michael Lok is a Lifelong Friend of the School, a former Head Boy, and a former Alumni Association President and a former School Council Chair.