

TOP GLOVE: GAME ON

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Top Glove Corporation Bhd Executive Chairman and Founder Tan Sri Dr Lim Wee Chai

The Malaysian glove maker sees innovation, responsiveness and long-term planning as key to staying ahead.

It's never easy being on top of your game because, as the adage goes, there is only one way to go and that's down. But as daunting as this sounds, Tan Sri Dr Lim Wee Chai is unfazed by such a scenario.

The executive chairman and founder of Top Glove Corporation Bhd, believes constant innovation, listening to what customers want and immersive research and development (R&D), coupled with long-term succession planning, are what will keep the world's largest rubber glove maker afloat.

"As long as I am able to make a positive contribution, I will continue working," says the 58-year-old, soft-spoken, self-made multimillionaire.

Top Glove today has captured about 25% of the global rubber glove market and serves 2,000 customers across 195 countries. But there is still room to grow, it says, especially among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries.

Estimating that only about 13% of the world population—mainly in the United States, Europe and Japan—accounts for 68% of total global glove consumption, Lim believes there is plenty of room to expand the company's international market share.

Philosophy for Growth

His mantra for growth is simple. He plans to stick to his tried-and-tested, time-honored philosophy of producing consistently high-quality gloves at the lowest possible cost. "We have a balanced ratio of natural rubber gloves and nitrile (synthetic) gloves which enables us to meet the needs in both emerging markets and developed markets," Lim says. "Internally, we are also improving our operations to ensure we stay quality-minded, lean and efficient."

To aid its growth, Lim says Top Glove will be pursuing both organic expansion and merger and acquisition opportunities, potentially at one a year.

"That's the goal but the suitability of a target will, however, depend on how synergistic the company's business is with ours, whether it is profitable and able to contribute immediately to the group," Lim explains.

To support these efforts Top Glove debuted on the Singapore Exchange in June, its second listing after Bursa Malaysia, with a view to improving its brand awareness and the profile of the company on an international level.

"Our Singapore listing will open up an avenue for investors that prefer to deal there," says Lim. This will add and create value for our investors and shareholders, and as a result, they will have more confidence in us."

Despite the positive outlook however, Lim recognizes there are still challenges ahead, including the rising cost of raw materials and utility bills, fluctuations in foreign exchange and staying abreast of customer needs.

To hedge against uncertainties, the company is investing heavily in R&D, keeping costs and wastages to a minimum, increasing automation and establishing good talent recruitment and retention strategies, which include providing opportunities for employees to grow and contribute positively.

Down the Line

This brings him to the issue of succession.

“Although my son also works in Top Glove with me, I consider all employees of the company ‘the children of Top Glove,’” Lim says. “My approach to succession is simple: The best man runs the show.”

“We practice absolute meritocracy and everybody has an equal chance of advancing,” he says, adding this will ensure Top Glove remains on top for a long time to come.

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