

› **“One of our LIXIL Behaviors is ‘Experiment and Learn’. This freedom to speak openly is crucial, especially when one is in a new role that inherently comes with challenges.”**

Ivan Choo

2019 – Present:

Leader,

Flagship Store & PCS Sales Singapore, LWT APAC





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Apr 2018 - Mar 2019

Business Development Manager,
Premium Customer Sales Singapore

Jul 2016 - Mar 2018

Assistant Manager,
Retail Distribution Sales Singapore

Aug 2014 - Jun 2016

Business Analyst

Education

University of London,
Bachelor of Science in Accounting
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Ngee Ann Polytechnic,
Diploma in Real Estate Business

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CAREER JOURNEY AND WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE TO JOIN LIXIL?

A fascinating aspect of my professional journey is that LIXIL has not just been a workspace for me; it's been my first and the only company I have been with throughout my career. Despite having pursued an accounting and finance degree, which typically leads to roles such as auditing or finance, I am glad I opted for an unconventional path.

After graduation, I did not follow the standard trajectory. I was keen to pursue a role in a commercial company vs. a typical auditing company. This led me to apply to what was known as GROHE back then, before we were acquired by LIXIL.

I was offered a business analyst role when I first started. I supported various regional markets, including Singapore, Philippines, Cambodia, and Taiwan, as a finance business partner to the commercial team. My responsibilities back then ranged from budgeting to business forecasting and management reporting. This gave me exposure to some core and foundational understanding of this business.

After two years, I felt that I wanted a change to the routine of endless Excel spreadsheets and reports. Fortunately enough, an opportunity emerged within the commercial team for our regional business in Singapore. I expressed my interest, and my manager then was supportive of my interest. As a result, I landed the role of Assistant Manager for Business Development in 2016.

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and on the development and growth of individuals. It is common to be given the opportunity to transition into a role so different from my educational background. It's not every day that a finance person is offered a sales position. There is a common stereotype that finance professionals are more introverted. I embraced the opportunity, and since then, I haven't looked back. Over time, I have taken on different roles including a role in business development. Currently, I serve as the leader for our flagship store and Premium Customer Sales business. It has been a fulfilling and dynamic career with LIXIL.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE THIS INDUSTRY AND WHAT WAS THE TRANSITION?

As a recent graduate, a job that aligned with my skills and the appeal of a global multinational firm was enticing. While there were definitely challenges when I moved into the commercial team, the support I've received from both the team and the company has supported my growth and development over the years.

Trust has been a key factor in my transition. LIXIL is a place where you can create value you can be proud of. I was encouraged to share my opinions and views freely and contribute towards how I envision the business growing.

The company, the team, my leader, have provided an environment where I feel comfortable expressing myself without fear of being dismissed. One of our LIXIL Behaviors is 'Experiment and Learn'. This freedom to speak openly is crucial, especially when one is in a new role that inherently comes with challenges. I was pushed out of my comfort zone, and I was given the opportunity to grow and really enjoy the challenges that came my way. The consistent support and encouragement has also been a key factor. It has played a significant role in building my confidence and assurance in the work I am doing.

Since joining what we were as GROHE back then and after getting to know LIXIL, I realized I was in a company that was able to give me substantial job satisfaction. The scale of the company LIXIL, with the range of brands and products, was simply vast. It is also truly heartening that the products we manufacture and supply are reaching billions of people globally. We are transforming bathrooms from merely functional spaces to something more – including the fact that LIXIL gives back to the communities that we operate in.

HOW HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE IN LIXIL BEEN SO FAR?

I must say that the overall experience has been incredibly positive. I consider myself blessed for the numerous opportunities LIXIL has provided. There is always considerable room for growth even within the small Singapore commercial business.

When I first joined the commercial team, it was a time when we, as a company, embarked on a significant transformation in our business model and new opportunities surfaced. One notable initiative was the establishment of our own retail store or showroom in Singapore, a project I was assigned to work on and develop.

This proved to be a fascinating experience. It was LIXIL's first showroom that was owned, designed, and developed in-house. We leveraged our team's years of rich experience working with different suppliers and distributors and customers. Most of our showrooms worldwide are typically managed by distributors. We ventured into uncharted territory and explored a new business model. Running the operation ourselves presented numerous challenges, and being at the forefront of such an initiative pushed me out of my comfort zone. It helped me to think out of the box, focus on being innovative, and what we commonly say, create value that we can be proud of.

Establishing the showroom was just the beginning, and one of many new and exciting things I could work on. The subsequent challenge was to make this business and showroom sustainable. This involved implementing various strategies and models, learning from experiences, working closely with others as a team, and fully embracing our LIXIL behaviors.



WERE THERE ANY CHALLENGES DURING THE PROCESS? HOW DID YOU NAVIGATE THESE CHALLENGES?

While overseeing this project, it was evident that we don't work as a one-man team. The main challenge back then was the collaborative nature of the project, and we may not have done this before. This means, we did not have all the experience we needed. We had to respond to the need and gather the collective effort, seek out the knowledge from our global teams and departments within LIXIL. Some core efforts include:

- Coordination with the IT team was essential to set up a system enabling transactions with end consumers, a departure from LIXIL's traditional B2B transactions.
- Close collaboration with the brand and product category team was necessary to align the design of the space with their perspectives.
- HR played a pivotal role, providing assistance in recruitment, especially since we were hiring retail executives for the first time. This support extended to understanding the correct channels and agencies to effectively source manpower, given the unique nature of our industry, which might not be as attractive to sales professionals compared to other sectors like technology or automotive.

I was given a task that was new, but I was given the trust to do the job. I too had to do extensive research and embark on self-learning to manage the project effectively. Despite the relatively small team, I received substantial support from my direct boss. He provided the guidance and feedback that made the project possible and eventually successful. Planning also played a pivotal role, involving the establishment of milestones to ensure timely and budget-friendly project delivery.

CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT COLLABORATION ACROSS DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS OR DEPARTMENTS AND HOW LIXIL'S CULTURE ENCOURAGES IT?

Collaboration across different functions or departments can be challenging due to differing priorities and objectives. However, LIXIL excels as it encourages all to embrace its behaviors of 'Do the Right Thing' and 'Work with Respect.' This creates a culture where everyone, regardless of their role or level, feels comfortable sharing their views and opinions.

To illustrate, the current process in place for our flagship store is a good example. Many ideas originate from the ground, from the daily experiences of the showroom team. If something isn't working optimally, they express their opinions freely. These insights are taken seriously by the management team – regardless of their experience or role.

Take the first showroom for instance – like many other global manufacturers, the traditional business model adopted for the retail channel is to establish a partnership with local distributors for cost-effective go to market approach and leverage on distributors' network of dealers in the country.

However, back in 2016, we decided to challenge this norm and pursue a different business strategy – adopting the role of a traditional distributor due to our knowledge of the market and establishing our own local dealers' networks in Singapore. And this was something that the management team took into consideration and eventually, we successfully executed this new retail strategy over the next two years, acquiring more than 50 dealerships

that contributed to a significant growth for the retail business in Singapore between 2016-2018. With a direct-to-consumer approach, the team is able to scale up the retail business further with the setup of our E-commerce operations in 2020 and development of LIXIL Experience Center in 2023.

By listening to the people, we are able to direct efforts and sufficient resources to address these concerns and bridge any gaps. This approach ensures that the perspectives of every team member contribute to the betterment of our processes.

HOW HAS THE 'EXPERIMENT AND LEARN' PROCESS PAID OFF?

Currently, we're in the process of developing our new luxury experience center in Singapore. Since the establishment of our first store, we have gone through an exciting journey of 'Experiment and Learn'.

We have had to pick up and learn on the go, but the lessons have been valuable. We have had to think of the right strategy for the upcoming launch of our second store. We have to understand the market, study the changes and needs of key stakeholders like designers and architects and regular customers, and think of the changes or updates needed.

LIXIL places its trust in its people. The company is not hesitant to make significant investment to ensure we are equipped to bring about success with our endeavors. This new store will be similar to an experience center.

It is a milestone for us as a business, but also an amazing learning experience to be cherished.

One of my greatest achievements has been contributing to the expansion of the Singapore commercial business. When I joined the team, it was relatively small, but now it stands as the market leader among international brands in Singapore for our industry. The team has grown to around 30 people, and being part of its significant growth is indeed a remarkable achievement. These experiences, challenges, and achievements make my job rewarding, and the company's willingness to invest and innovate keeps it exciting.





HOW HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE IN LIXIL SHAPED YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE?

I would say that my leadership style greatly aligns with my leader. He is a true role model as he places a significant level of trust in our team. He gives us the autonomy to efficiently manage our day-to-day responsibilities too. This means there is no micromanagement and a strong sense of ownership. I have seen the value of such an approach and I have carried this forward with my own team.

As a leader myself, I believe in focusing on the growth and development of the team. For example, I had a high-performing retail executive who expressed her aspiration to become a trainer.

I seized this opportunity to appoint her as the trainer for the Singapore team. She was responsible for training new team members. After a year, a regional opportunity opened up, and she was well-prepared to take on another role.

Having regular communication and connection with the team is something I value. Having experienced challenging situations such as the pandemic, I realized it is important to understand what your team is going through. What are some problems and how can we support each other as a team. Having open channels of communication and being present on the ground is key. Let this be a priority, and by managing wellness and morale, you will get strong and reliable performance.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE WHO IS CONSIDERING A CAREER AT LIXIL?

I believe what has kept me with the company for so long is the opportunities it has offered me. I can confidently say that I have not been doing the same tasks for more than three years. New challenges continually arise, and this dynamic aspect of my job keeps me motivated. Nobody wants to do the same thing for an extended period. Thankfully, the company has consistently provided me with various opportunities, which has given me a strong sense of job satisfaction and fulfillment.

One thing that is particularly important to me is sustainability. This topic is currently a significant focus, much like diversity and inclusion. Climate change has become an undeniable reality, with extreme weather events occurring in the past year that we've never witnessed before. Sustainability is now a real concern, and many companies, including those outside our industry, are actively discussing and working towards sustainable practices. I am proud of the initiatives taken within our company, LIXIL, to make a positive impact. We're dedicated to providing basic sanitation to people in less developed countries, among other efforts. All these initiatives resonate with me deeply. Being part of a company that prioritizes such meaningful work makes me feel that my contributions are more significant.

LIXIL offers a truly meaningful career experience. I believe one's attitude and dedication directly influence the heights you can reach in your career. In my own journey at LIXIL, I've discovered a wealth of opportunities. This is something I truly value. It may be available in other companies, but LIXIL has shown how things can happen if you are willing to invest in yourself and the effort to grow. Remember that you are in control of shaping your own career, and LIXIL is a place that makes it happen.

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