

EXPERIENCE—PAUL LIM, LOS ANGELES FINDING THE INSPIRATION TO WIN

While struggling with finances and strife at home, Paul Lim determines to win and use his victory to inspire other young people.

Since I graduated from college, I have always worked for graphic arts companies. I have been fortunate in that I have always worked with great people, and my creative responsibilities and pay always increased each year. But deep down, I always felt the desire to run my own graphic design business.

In January 2000, after much deliberation and discussion with my wife, I decided to go out on my own and start my own business. With two young sons, a mortgage and other expenses, I was taking a risk. However, I had been freelancing off and on for a few years and had developed a roster of clients, so I felt confident in my decision.

The first eight months of business were great. Every single day I was working on different projects and even though I was working harder than before, I was able to set my own schedule and do SGI activities freely. Around September, things changed.

Projects began tapering off, and one by one, clients were giving me less work. One client was hit hard by the failure of Internet stocks, while another decided to cut back on their advertising budget and do all of their work in-house. Another had gone through four different production managers in four weeks. All of this occurred within a month. It was a bizarre time.

My suffering was not just professional. My wife and I were constantly arguing. It usually began with our finances and would spiral out of control to my other shortcomings. For the first time in our marriage, we were accumulating debt at a fast rate; my wife provided the only source of consistent income.

One night after a major blowup, I left the house and wound up staying overnight at a friend's house. During this dry spell at work and the conflicts at home, which lasted nine painful months, I continued to do organizational activities and support my chapter as a young men's leader. Along with *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, I never failed to read SGI President Ikeda's guidance for encouragement. Every night, after everyone went to sleep, I would stay up to read *The New Human Revolution*. The history of the pioneer members and President Ikeda's daily struggles to fight for the members' happiness made my problems seem small. After studying each night, I determined silently to myself that I was going to win and show actual proof as a disciple of President Ikeda.

In mid-June, right around the time of the NBA finals, I was watching game four of the championship series between the Los Angeles Lakers and Philadelphia 76'ers. Being a big Lakers fan, I never missed a single game. That night, something came over me and I told my wife that I was going to work with the Lakers. She rolled her eyes and said, "Yeah right, just about everyone wants to work with the Lakers right now." And given the fact that just a month before, I was going from business to business passing out promo flyers with zero result, my statement seemed pretty far-fetched.

That night I chanted in front of the Gohonzon with a powerful conviction. And for the first time since I started my business, I determined to create value. It occurred to me that my wanting to start my business was simply to fulfill my small ego. I had lost my sense of purpose.

I pledged that when — not if — I worked with the Lakers, I would use my experience to

encourage as many people as possible and to inspire the next generation of youth during the upcoming family youth festival. In the past it would have seemed like just mental lip service, but that night I was sincerely determined to win.

An idea came to me as I was chanting. As a side venture, I also do graphic design images for large event cakes and since it seemed inevitable that the Lakers were going to win and have a celebration party, having a cake there only made sense.

On Friday morning, I called the Lakers' office and pitched the idea. I was routed to three different people before I connected with the right person. She told me that if the Lakers won that night, they would need a cake the following Monday. The Lakers won the championship that night, and the next morning I was asked to come to the Lakers' office to choose the pictures I needed to design the image for the cake.

After much work over the weekend on the design, with not even an hour to spare, I finished the graphics and the cake was delivered. At the party, the cake was placed in a room exclusive to the players, their wives and the organization. Just about everyone was amazed at the image and size of the cake and anyone who had a camera took pictures that included it.

The following day, the cake was the talk of the Lakers' organization. A few days later, I was asked to come in for a meeting in the office of Jerry Buss, owner of the Lakers. I was asked if the cake image could be used on their official 2002 calendar cover and if I would be interested in designing the entire 36-page calendar. I said yes, and the calendar has since been published.

As I looked around the office and saw all the championship trophies, the pictures of Jerry West, Magic Johnson, Kareem Abdul-Jabaar, Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant, it dawned on me—I had won.

Soon, the NBA Headquarters called from New York and asked about a cake for their championship video release party. Then the director of marketing requested a cake for next season's NBA All-Star Game in Philadelphia. Within a very short period of time, New Line Cinema, USA Films and Sony Pictures all requested that I do work for them. What was once a side business had now gained exponential exposure.

Not long after this, I helped arrange for five of the Laker Girls to come and encourage the youth performers and support groups preparing for the family youth festival in Los Angeles. Initially they came to encourage the youth who were practicing so hard, which they did. But by the time the Laker Girls left, they were just as encouraged. They were inspired by the united efforts of such a diverse group of youth and promised to share their experience with the entire Laker organization. My goal to encourage others and inspire the next generation of youth was coming together in a way I had never imagined.

I am so appreciative of my wife for always pushing me to improve—whether I wanted to or not. I realize now that had I experienced these events prior to my suffering, I could not have made such a strong determination to change poison into medicine. But I also have to say, as great as my experience has been, working with the Lakers is not an end.

My goals and determination for the 21st century have grown. I want to expand my business to include a team of creative artists who can create value for society. And I will continue to do what I can to share Nichiren Daishonin's philosophy with others.

And even though he is halfway around the world, during many dark hours, President Ikeda's encouragement was always there for me—all I had to do was seek it. This is something I will never forget.