

A Global Success: Chinese Immigrant Excels at Selling German Luxury Cars

By Bill Leonard

Ludia Li was searching for a better life for her three children when she and her husband emigrated from Hong Kong to Canada in 1990. After a few twists and turns and some setbacks, Li found a level of success she didn't dream was possible when she decided to move her family halfway around the globe.

In what is typically a male-dominated profession, Li is one of the world's top sales representatives for BMW. She has been so successful that she donates time and money to charity and her community, inspiring her employer and co-workers to do the same.

In 2008, she was named the BMW Brand Ambassador from more than 3,000 sales representatives around the globe.

Li won the award because she sells more than 250 of the German luxury brand vehicles every year for Auto West BMW in Richmond, which is a suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She had sold nearly 220 BMWs in the first 10 months of 2011—a typical pace for her, even in a very rocky economic climate.

“Ludia excels in her job because of her commitment to customer service,” said Joachim Neumann, principal retailer and founder of Auto West. “The level of attention and care that she provides to each of her customers is remarkable, and her client list is very loyal. Every one of them knows that if they have a problem or question about their car, Ludia will find the solution or the answer they need.”

Li and her husband immigrated to Canada after the United Kingdom ceded Hong Kong back to China. The couple had worked in restaurants around Hong Kong for several years and planned to open a fast-food grill. They began operating a small restaurant in High Prairie, Alberta—about 240 miles northwest of Edmonton.

Adjustment Needed

Li worked around the clock cooking hamburgers and french fries, but the bitter winter weather on Canada's northern prairie was quite a shock. Up to that point, she had lived only in the balmy environment of Hong Kong.

In Canada, “It was very cold in the winter, and my family and I were not used to that kind of weather at all,” Li said.

Shortly after the family relocated to the more temperate climate of Vancouver, Li's husband returned to Hong Kong, making her a single mother. She was forced to work several jobs to support her family. However, the demanding schedule of restaurant work in the evenings and weekends didn't leave Li, who was teaching herself English, much time to be with her children. When a friend told her about an opening at a Ford dealership, Li applied and got the job.

She discovered quickly that she had a knack for car sales and began to excel in her job.

Li always kept her eyes open for opportunities and saw an opening for a sales representative at Auto West and applied. Her success in selling Fords, particularly pickup trucks, caught the attention of Neumann immediately.

“I knew that if she could do well selling pickups to that customer base, then she could probably sell any kind of vehicle she wanted to,” Neumann said. “So I hired her, and it was one of the best hiring decisions that I have ever made in my life.”

Li said that she is grateful for the opportunity Neumann offered her and that his faith in her abilities has motivated her to work harder. Her children are grown now. Her youngest is enrolled in college, and her eldest daughter is married with children. Even though Li achieved her goal of making a better life for her children, she doesn't take her success for granted. She donates nearly a third of her annual income to her church and charities.

Since 2003, she has worked closely with BC Children's Hospital to help organize the hospital's fundraising dinner. The annual dinner program has raised more than \$1.6 million to purchase medical equipment and fund construction of a building.

In addition, Li helped to develop the Young Superheroes program, which encourages students from elementary to high school to help raise funds for the hospital. The program has raised more than \$80,000 since 2009. Students who participate in the Superheroes program have the opportunity to learn public speaking, how to network and how to organize events.

While Li puts a lot of effort into helping others in and around Vancouver, she gives back to her homeland, too. She donates her time and money to the Culture Regeneration Research Society, an international charity dedicated to building schools and providing educational opportunities in underdeveloped and poverty-stricken regions in China.

Her charitable giving and her work in the community have helped build a positive image for Auto West. Li's employer has donated to dozens of local charities and encourages its workers to become involved in community efforts.

“Ludia really is an inspiration to all of us,” said Neumann. “And many of our employees are actively involved in the community. It has built a very positive image for the dealership, which makes us all proud of where we work and live.”

Bill Leonard is a senior writer for SHRM.