

# Best in Class CEO on Franchising & Education



ALIST sat down for an interview with Hao Lam, CEO of Best in Class. Born in Vietnam during the communist regime, Lam combined twin passions for teaching and entrepreneurship to create a successful business. His Seattle-based education program has 30 locations around the county and provides students with tutoring to help them prepare for college. Please visit [www.bestinclasseducation.com](http://www.bestinclasseducation.com) for more information.



**ALIST Magazine: Can you tell us about Best in Class Education Center?**

**Hao Lam:** Best in Class is dedicated to providing superior supplemental education. We started small, but with huge a passion for education. We believe education is the door to the future and we want to leave a lasting positive impact on our students, staff members and communities.

**AM: What are the top things you've learned by opening a franchise?**

**HL:** Running a franchise has taught me how important it is to establish a solid system, to stay focused, to keep learning, to build a strong and dedicated team, and most importantly, to realize that we have a chance to grow our business exponentially.

**AM: Did your own sons Louis and Albert use the center?**

**HL:** Absolutely! They started coming to our centers as soon as they could hold a pencil. They both grew up at our centers.

**AM: Describe your day's schedule.**

**HL:** 6 to 10 a.m.: work from home; 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.: attend meetings and catch up on phone calls at the office; after 5 p.m.:

“My passion is to be a successful entrepreneur and to help people around me, especially our team (including staff members and franchisees), to be successful.”

personal and family time. I work six days per week and only take one day off: Thursdays.

**AM: You've said that four out of your 12 franchisees fall into the 20-something age group because they have little to lose-why choose education? Why not open a Subway or Dunkin' Donuts?**

**HL:** Many people today are searching for business opportunities where they are able to utilize the skills they've developed from their career or from their college education. Many of our franchisees have chosen Best in Class because they are passionate about helping more students reach their potential. As opposed to a retail outlet or restaurant, our franchisees benefit from more flexible schedules. Their business can even be operated part-time. Because Best in Class is a lower investment compared to many other opportunities in the franchise industry, it is attractive for people of all ages.

**AM: As an entrepreneur, would you convince someone to start a franchise instead of pursuing his or her own start-up? Why or why not?**

**HL:** As an entrepreneur myself, I understand exactly what a new business owner will face on a daily basis as well as the primary obstacles they will need to overcome. Some studies show that franchises have a success rate of approximately 90 percent as compared to only about 15 percent for businesses that are started from the ground up. One of the many advantages of a franchise model is that you do not need to reinvent the wheel.

**AM: You left Vietnam in 1988; have you been back since then?**

**HL:** Yes, my whole family went back for a visit in 2007. I brought my two boys back and showed them the place where I grew up. It brought back many good memories when I was there and the boys were very interested



“The best advice I received is to balance work, self and family life.”

**AM: Coming from Vietnam, you made your way to the Philippines, then Canada, and then to Seattle. How has each place helped you grow as a person?**

**HL:** Moving around helped me learn to adapt to new environments very rapidly. In Vietnam, where I was born and grew up, I witnessed two totally different political systems: democratic and communist. Escaping the country in the midst of the civil war helped me develop a fearless and positive attitude. My first few escape attempts ended disastrously (running from gunfire, capture and imprisonment). Even Vietnamese prison couldn't stop me! I learned to never give up. Finally, we successfully escaped by boat to the Philippines.

There, I first encountered hospitality and humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and I benefited as a refugee. This is also where I fell in love with my wife Lisa, who has helped me grow as a person in many ways. In Canada, where I completed my high school and my college education, I appreciated so much from the bottom of my heart the welcoming, the support, and the welfare from all the people who supported me during my first few years as a new immigrant.

In the USA, where I first started my business, I was exposed to the land of opportunity, and I experienced the American Dream.



**AM: How has your Asian culture helped or hindered your professional career?**

**HL:** I have lived in North America for the past three decades and have inherited both American and Asian culture: work hard, never give up (perseverance), take risks, die hard and dream big.

**AM: What are three things most people do not know about you?**

**HL:** I started to learn English as a second language when I was in the Philippines at the age of 20. I graduated high school when I was 23 years old. And I love to read Hong Kong celebrity news.

**AM: What are the top three items on your to-do list?**

- HL:**
- 1) Lose some weight, exercise more, and stay healthy.
  - 2) Build at least 100 Best in Class centers within the next three to five years.
  - 3) Set up a non-profit organization to provide

supplemental education to underprivileged students.

**AM: What inspires you?**

**HL:** Stories of success and innovation, books and business news.

**AM: So far you have locations in California, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Texas and Washington. Where are you looking to expand to next?**

**HL:** Because of our ongoing success in Texas, California, New Jersey and Ohio, we are planning to continue to expand our footprint in those markets. We are also focusing on several emerging areas for Best in Class including New York and Pennsylvania.

**AM: What is the best advice someone has given you?**

**HL:** The best advice I received is to balance work, self and family life.

### According to Hao, Best in Class stands out from other tutoring companies because:

- 1- They hire qualified and talented instructors with college education in their fields
- 2- They do not waste time on repetition. They always want to challenge their students to move ahead
- 3- They maintain a small class size with strict student to teacher ratios
- 4- They have assigned class schedules that allow tutors to monitor each individual student's growth
- 5- They have tutors who actively teach throughout the tutoring sessions
- 6- They have their own curriculum designed to help students achieve success by thinking critically and by excelling at standardized tests
- 7- They correct all homework and tests so they can monitor student progress every step of the way
- 8- They strive to provide top of the line education at affordable prices