

Becoming a wedding planner

By **QUAH CHIN CHIN**

GROWING demand for wedding planners has lured some young professionals into making a mid-career switch. Two of them share their experience.

Hannah Chong, Heaven's Gift

Although it was a childhood dream years ago, Hannah Chong never thought of actually venturing into the wedding planning business. She had a comfortable job as an account director at training institute Raytheon Professional Services and travelled frequently.

A conversation with a friend who was getting married, coupled with her desire to "settle down because I missed home", took her in that direction and, after much thought, she left the company to set up Heaven's Gift in 2004.

"The conversation made me realise that I was quite excited about having an intimate connection to people who are getting married," she said. "The name Heaven's Gift was in my mind even before I started. I'm a staunch Christian, so I always think the company has to be something that reminds me of where I am. And Heaven's Gift is a gift to me.

"Later I realised that marriage is also a gift, more than an obligation. When you know that it's a gift, then the obligation comes easily," said the soft-spoken Ms Chong, 35. She later underwent training at Weddings Beautiful Worldwide, a global organisation that provides professional education and certification for planners.

Her clientele consists of inter-racial couples, expatriates and Singaporeans living overseas. Her fees start from \$6,000.

"I had a bride who loved painting, so we created a theme around it. The wedding favour was a painted egg on an egg holder with personalised guest names," she related.

"To others, it may be 'just a painted egg; what's so special about it?' but to us, the wedding was a reflection of our couple, and that's what matters."

She added: "If I can, I'll ask my clients to have a real cake; not cut model cakes . . . I'm (also) not a champagne-pouring, dry ice effect person . . . I believe weddings should be very personal and real."

And, to Ms Chong, the most important trait that a wedding planner should have is a passion to serve.

"If you cannot humble yourself to serve the bride



HEAVEN'S GIFT

Career switch: *Before venturing into the wedding planning business, Ms Chong had a comfortable job as an account director and travelled frequently*

or the family, then forget about entering the wedding planning industry. I came in with creativity, (but) the first thing I had to learn was how to serve my bride and her family," she said. "It's only when you know how to serve them (that) you'll start to feel connected to them, and that's when their dreams become part of yours."