



**“A Hinrich scholar is a global citizen who gives back to the community and to the world.”**

**Sapphire Nguyen**, Senior Manager - Business Intelligence  
foodpanda, Singapore  
Thunderbird School of Global Management, MBA '17

**Giving back**

As an accomplished senior professional in the business intelligence industry, we asked Sapphire Nguyen what success means to her:

“Success is to build a strong team wherever I go, improve the quality of life for myself and for my loved ones and, as much as possible, empower myself and others to give back to the community.”

As a Senior Manager for Business Intelligence based in Singapore at foodpanda – a leading global food delivery service present in over 40 countries – Sapphire Nguyen strongly believes in not only giving back to her native Vietnam, but to every community that is in distress.

“My education has transformed me into a global citizen, and I feel it’s my duty to improve the quality of life for communities that need our help, regardless of the country they belong to...”

**Hinrich Global Trade Leader  
pathway to success in trade**



**The “T-Bird” family**

Sapphire Nguyen completed her two bachelor’s degrees in Finance and International Business from University of Greenwich and University of Economics (respectively) in her home country, Vietnam. Her studies were motivated by the experience of growing up with her sister and facing the aftermath of her father going bankrupt when she was just five years old.

“I saw my father work very hard to give us an education. My father always put education first and did everything within his power to provide an opportunity for us to study.”

Sapphire knew that to give back to developing economies like Vietnam, she had to have a larger perspective and become a global citizen. She was interested in international business so that she could connect with more significant players in the workplace, and the Hinrich Foundation scholarship was a step in the right direction.

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A Hinrich alumna – Mai Nguyen, also from Vietnam – championed her case to Alex Boome, Program Director at HF. Sapphire was accepted at the Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University as a Hinrich Foundation Global Trade Leader scholar.

“Without the Hinrich Foundation scholarship, I could never have been able to afford to study at Thunderbird. For me, living in the United States and learning at Thunderbird were the most unique experiences of my life. Graduating from Thunderbird has made me a part of a very large ‘T-Bird’ family.”

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*Sapphire’s graduation day at the Thunderbird School of Global Management in December 2017 with her host parents in Arizona, USA*

While studying Finance and Banking at the Ho Chi Minh City campus of the University of Greenwich, Sapphire met her favorite professor, Andrew Sadler, who is also a Thunderbird alumnus. While her father’s emphasis on education led her to pursue an undergraduate degree, it was Andrew’s advice on giving back to the community that struck a chord with Sapphire. She felt empowered to use her skills and put herself in a position to contribute. Sapphire said:

“Mr. Sadler followed a very different way of teaching, which really sparked something in me,” she said. “He never told us what to do; rather, he guided us to have analytical thinking, which kept me engaged. It was Mr. Sadler who always encouraged us to give back to our communities and most of his students, including me, wanted to follow in his footsteps.

In August 2015, he introduced me to his classmate, Ms. Aara Killian Pickelsimer. From that moment on, she became my mentor. I remember her sharing a photo of the Thunderbird entrance gate, and it inspired me to become a citizen of the world and I knew in my heart that this program would allow me to be one. Since then, Ms. Aara has become my ‘life’ mom, and she has continued to express her care, love, and support all this while. I feel more confident knowing that she has been a loyal companion on my journey in the form of her love, care and support.

Sapphire considers herself lucky to be part of both the Hinrich Foundation and “T-Bird” families and makes it a point to stay connected to her vast network across the world.

“As the Thunderbird alumni community, we have a ‘T-Bird First Tuesday,’ where we get together and chat every first Tuesday of the month. We share memories and enjoy our time together. It happens in every country around the globe where our alumni members live. It really makes me believe that I am a global citizen.”

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It was through these connections that Sapphire became an active part of the large Habitat for Humanity project in Indonesia, where the Thunderbird alumni gathered to build houses for underprivileged communities to improve their quality of life.



*Thunderbird alumni gather together in Singapore for a T-bird First Tuesday event in 2018*

During her time at Thunderbird, Sapphire interned in the Vietnam office of Global Sources – a leading business-to-business trade media company and a primary facilitator of trade with Greater China and the world. She worked primarily with the company’s project Startup Launchpad – one of Asia’s largest trade shows for sales-ready startups – for four months, where she researched hardware startups globally. After graduating from Thunderbird, she returned to Vietnam and worked at Lazada, an international e-commerce company part of the Alibaba Group, for nine months.

### **Inclusive and innovative**

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Sapphire’s niche lies in data analytics. While working as a Business Intelligence Manager at Lazada, she was responsible for creating and managing multiple complex automation dashboards and analytics reports. Her goal was to measure performance pre- and post-evaluation of projects based on business needs, providing conclusions and advice based on data analysis.

As Senior Business Intelligence Manager at foodpanda, she leads the Business Intelligence (BI) team to play a proactive role in defining the business’s data needs, and she collects, organizes, and analyzes data from a variety of sources. Her team also supports the Management in their analytical needs across all departments (Operations, Logistics, Commercial, Marketing, Finance) as well as competitor analysis.

She and her team are responsible for monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the business, taking the initiative to do complex analysis to identify causes and trends, and driving data-based decision-making through insightful reports. Currently, the team is tapping into machine learning. They have just created a recommendation model for the cuisines that customers have never chosen but have a likelihood to choose in the future, based on a user-based collaborative filtering model. They also have been using machine learning for useful business cases at foodpanda Singapore.

### Ingenious ideas

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Sapphire shares her most recent experience with machine learning when she and the team studied a large customer dataset and used a recommendation model to suggest the next, most likely cuisines customers may end up choosing. This is designed to help increase the customers’ engagement with the platform as it displays a variety of choices and increases customer exposure to new cuisines and restaurants.

“The success of this project was a winning moment for me and my team,” says Sapphire.

### Working in the background

Sapphire enjoys the multicultural environment at foodpanda and how this contributes to an engaging workplace.

“The culture at foodpanda is very international, and I sometimes liaise with people from more than 20 countries. I think different cultures bring in different work-styles which results in dynamic thinking.”

Sapphire also thrives on working behind the scenes to produce analysis that ultimately drives the business. “Our product as a Business Intelligence team is analysis. Therefore, accurate and high-quality data analysis is the backbone of key business decisions.”

Sapphire and her team are comfortable working behind the scenes, but a lucrative business decision that has a direct impact on sales and profits gives them great satisfaction and highlights their contribution.

### Alert and accurate

“In my mind, a good BI team needs to be accurate and self-aware of their strengths so they can contribute in the best way, as well as their weaknesses so they can improve upon them.”

Sapphire feels that in data analytics, it is important for every member to stay updated on new knowledge and remain adaptable. She is presently leading a multicultural team, including people from Myanmar and China, and hopes to add more to her ‘global tribe’ soon. As a leadership initiative, she insists on appraisals that record each member’s commitment towards meeting deadlines with the right quality of work.

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“I want my team to move to the next step on their own. They need to think on their feet because good analysis manifests into good decision for the business. I like them to explore and guide if required, but I also learn from them because they come from different cultures carrying different perspectives.”

### Moving together

Reflecting on her educational and professional journey thus far, Sapphire says she is grateful. She attributes her success to the Hinrich Foundation for their support in her academic journey and to her professor, Andrew Sadler, and her ‘life’ Mom, Aara Pickelsimer who have been nurturing her absolute potential. She said:



*Sapphire (front left, black blazer) at a year-end event for her cohort of Thunderbird scholars in 2017*

“I owe a lot to my father who worked very hard for my sister and me and although he was very strict, he kept us focused. Also, to my American mom who has been loving and supportive towards me, and to Mr. Merle Hinrich whose inspiring story is a living example of how education can impact lives and change them forever.”

I am grateful towards everyone I have worked with, from professors, to colleagues, to every team member, to different teams I’ve been a part of, to family and friends – for all of us have to move together to make something or someone succeed. I owe a lot to my father who worked very hard for my sister and me and although he was very strict, he kept us focused. Also, to my American mom who has been loving and supportive towards me, and to Mr. Merle Hinrich whose inspiring story is a living example of how education can impact lives and change them forever.”

### Exploring new horizons

“I have very wonderful memories of living in the United States. It opened new doors for me.”

In the future, Sapphire aspires to live in the United States, Australia or Germany. Her ambition is to be in a place that thrives on innovation. In terms of work, she envisages working in a larger team where she can manage data engineers, analysts and scientists. She hopes to work for an exciting firm in the digital space that uses data analytics to evaluate customer preferences.

Sapphire is confident that her determination will take her anywhere she aims to be – wherever in the world that may take her.

**Flexible and focused**

When asked to give advice to future Hinrich alumni, Sapphire has a few simple, yet powerful, words of advice:

“Keep your unique selling proposition flexible. Be ready to be uncomfortable to realize your true passion.”

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Sapphire’s advice to fresh Hinrich scholars is to be like the phoenix who sits in the discomfort of a fire, until they burn with new energy and move towards raising awareness. For her, it is the only way to fully realize their true passion.



*Mr. Hinrich and Vietnamese alumni pose at the HFAA Global Connect event in September 2019. (Right to left: Tristan Truong, Thuy Ho, Giang Pham, Sapphire Nguyen, Merle Hinrich, Yen Nguyen, Dory Do, Karen Pham, Mai Nguyen, Han Pham, Khiem Vu)*

## Read more stories of inspiration from our Hinrich Global Trade Leaders [here](#).



*“A Hinrich scholar learns to actively listen and respond in meaningful ways. That’s what we do.”*

**Rotha Chhoem**

Founder & Managing Director  
SEB Enterprise Builder

Hinrich Foundation alumnus  
De La Salle University  
MBA '15



*“A Hinrich scholar tries to be in someone else’s shoes – to embrace other viewpoints, cultures and ideas.”*

**Jean Shen**

Customer Engineer  
Mode Analytics

Hinrich Foundation alumna  
Thunderbird School of Mg't.  
MBA '10

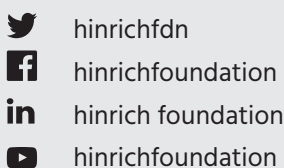


*“A Hinrich scholar values work-life balance. Peace of mind is as much a target as fame and material wealth.”*

**James Gong**

Operations Expert  
of Products  
Alibaba

Hinrich Foundation alumnus  
Hong Kong Baptist University  
BBA '13



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