

“I am able to support my family and I can support my younger brother to study.”

A Conversation with Lathtanaphone Keomanythan, graduate of Digital Divide Data

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August 27, 2025

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Could you please introduce yourself and share about your life before you knew Digital Divide Data? What were you doing before? During your time at DDD, what did you learn and what roles or responsibilities did you have? And after leaving DDD, what kind of work have you been doing, and how have you applied the knowledge and skills you gained at DDD to your new job?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: At first, before joining DDD, I was a student. During the morning hours, I saw friends studying together and also working with DDD, which piqued my interest. Some friends even recommended working at DDD, so I decided to apply. I studied with DDD from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m., as DDD has two work shifts: morning and afternoon.

I noticed that friends were enthusiastic because the work was computer-related, and I also saw that the company offered opportunities for people with fewer chances, including persons with disabilities. This is what drew my interest, and I decided to try working at DDD.

If I recall correctly, the starting pay I received was about \$100, increasing depending on the work I did.

What I gained from working with DDD included computer skills, such as typing. While others might need to pay for training, I didn't have to because DDD taught me many

skills, not only in typing efficiently without looking at the keyboard but also in English. Every Saturday, there were competitions to see who could type the fastest.

For me, DDD is an excellent company that helped me gain knowledge and skills, which I could apply later in my career.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: You mentioned that you first got to know DDD while you were still a student. Where were you studying?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: At that time, in the mornings, I worked at DDD. In the afternoons, I attended classes at the National University of Laos [NUOL], and in the evenings, I studied accounting.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Which province are you from?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: I am from Sekong Province.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Besides working on computer typing and English, did you do anything else?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: At that time, I only focused on studying and didn't do much else because my skills were not very strong. For example, my English skills back then were not very good, so I couldn't help teach others. Looking back now, I feel a bit regretful that I didn't put in more effort at that time.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: But overall, do you think that the knowledge and experience you gained from DDD at that time was substantial and satisfying for you?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: Yes, I am satisfied because, compared to my friends who didn't work at DDD, I gained much more computer knowledge and skills without having to pay for additional training. It became a very important foundation for me, as I acquired knowledge, gained work experience, and earned money at the same time. This is an experience that I can also include on my CV.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: May I ask, during what period did you work at DDD?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: I worked at DDD during 2015-2016, for about a year and a half. Before joining DDD, I had taken assessments in computer skills and English. After passing the assessments, I was able to join as an employee immediately.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: What did you do at DDD that you consider a personal achievement?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: At DDD, there were many projects they worked on, but for me, I was involved in digitizing old book records by retyping them into the digital system. Overall, this allowed me to develop skills related to computer technology and English.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: After leaving DDD, what kind of work did you do, and how did you apply the knowledge and skills you gained from DDD in your subsequent work?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: After leaving DDD, I worked in accounting because, as I mentioned earlier, I had studied accounting in the evening.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Can you elaborate on how you compare yourself to others who didn't graduate from DDD? In what ways do you think you are different?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: Of course, accounting work also requires computer skills, which I already had a foundation in from my time working at DDD. This gave me an advantage over others who did not graduate from DDD. I also often recommend DDD to others or younger generations because it is very interesting and provides opportunities for people to learn and work together, something that is rarely offered elsewhere. Currently, I don't even know exactly how much my monthly salary is.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: That's really great, because you can learn, apply it to work, and earn an income at the same time.

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: Yes, it's really good because you don't need to ask for money from your family since you can support yourself, or even if you do ask your parents, it's not much.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: What are you currently working on? Do you think you were able to apply the knowledge you gained from DDD in your current job? Do you feel that you learned a lot and gained experience while you were at DDD? If so, do you think it has been very useful in your work compared to others who didn't come from DDD? Has it helped you improve your life significantly, whether in terms of satisfaction or the income you earn?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: Yes, the experience I gained from DDD helped me a lot. If I had only studied at school without working with DDD, I probably wouldn't have had as much knowledge as I do now.

When asked about satisfaction in life from past experiences up to the present, I can say that I am definitely satisfied. I am able to support my family, and currently, I don't have any children yet.

Regarding income and the knowledge I have in today's economic era, it is quite suitable, and I can support my younger brother to study.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: What do you think DDD has contributed to Lao society?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: One thing I particularly like about DDD is that it provides opportunities for people with disabilities to work and earn an income for themselves without discrimination or being singled out, everyone can participate equally, and when there are activities, everyone collaborates well together.

Another aspect is that even if you continue working, you can still earn income and gain experience, just like I did while working at DDD alongside my studies. This is one of the points I really appreciate about DDD.

Additionally, it is a place that opens opportunities for people to learn and gain real work experience simultaneously, which I consider a very valuable aspect.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Even today, you still keep in touch with former Bunda Sit staff, right? I noticed from talking with many former staff members that everyone has their own good attitude, and even if they weren't in the same cohort, they maintained good relationships with each other.

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: In the past, DDD also organized activities and invited former Bunda Sit staff to join consistently. Around June-July, DDDD even organized casual meals together, and most of us stay in touch through Facebook. The reason why those of us who were at DDD have such close and friendly relationships is probably because we all come from similar backgrounds, which makes it easy to interact and understand each other. It feels like being part of the same family. Even after we went separate ways, we still think of each other and keep in touch. DDD is a really great place, and I encourage you to try applying and seeing for yourself.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: What do you think about DDD in the current climate, with the challenges of technological change, especially with the arrival of AI? What do you think about DDD's role in today's world? Do you think DDD will remain necessary and survive in this globalized world?

Lathtanaphone Keomanythan: If you ask me what I would like to see DDD change, I would recommend more advertising. Many people still don't know about DDD as much as they should. If more people knew about it, they could access the opportunities that DDD provides, because DDD has the funds to support disadvantaged people. For example, before, I didn't know what DDD was; I only knew that they taught English, so I applied.

Overall, that's my main point, I want them to advertise more so people know about them more widely. One thing I admire about the DDD management is their good vision and mindset. I hope they maintain that.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Thank you.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane is a journalist and writer based in Vientiane, Laos. He is an active contributor to The Laotian Times, covering topics including environmental issues, socio-economic development, and regional geopolitics, often highlighting the intersection of local developments with broader regional and global dynamics. Thongsavanh has also contributed to The ASEAN Frontier, focusing on historical and geopolitical narratives. He is a member of the Global Shaper Vientiane Hub, contributing to youth-led initiatives for positive change.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*