

Singapore Poly EEE Speech 8 May 2018

**Members of the Board of Governors,**

**Mr Soh Wai Wah, Principal & CEO of Singapore Polytechnic,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Parents, Graduands,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good morning.**

### **Congratulations**

It is a great honour and privilege to join you at this Graduation Ceremony. On this special occasion, I would like to congratulate all graduates, but also not forgetting the lecturers and management of Singapore Polytechnic, who played a key supporting role.

I graduated from SP with a Diploma in Electronics and Communication Engineering in 1983. That was 35 years ago. At that time, did I know what I would be doing at age 55, what my career would be like or how my life would be? Of course not. But what I know is that all of us - at that time or even now would harbour dreams of a successful career and a happy life.

### **Success and happiness**

From my own 35-year journey, I realised we would never know where life will take us or where our final career destination will be upon graduation. Neither would we know whether we would be happy with our lives.

But despite the uncertainties that are inherent in every part of our lives, there are a few guiding principles that can guide us towards our dreams of success and happiness.

Let me share a little story with you. One Sunday, my 19 years old daughter and I were walking out of a building and we bumped into a small girl, maybe 7 or 8 years old. She was very bubbly, pretty, and was talking to her grandmother. From what she said and her behaviour, she looked like a very intelligent girl, so I told my daughter that I hope this little girl will succeed in her life. My daughter reminded me and said that it all depends on her habits.

It is as simple as that. Whether you will succeed and be happy in your life depends on your habits. An American Philosopher, Will Durant, said: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit".

Over the last 35 years of my working life, I have observed that a quite lot of people are not happy with their careers, relationships or both. And if you dig a bit deeper, you will likely see

that it is due to a lack of certain good habits, or that these good habits were not fully developed or applied.

To be successful and happy you must continuously invest in yourself and your relationships. Attaining both desired outcomes require a set of good habits. I will first talk about the success habits, and then the relationship habits.

## **Success habits**

There are many good habits that will help you attain greater success in life, but allow me to share with you three that I believe are of particular importance:

1. Curiosity. When I graduated from SP in 1983, there was no internet, smart phone or Google. What was available then and now was very different. The pace of change over the last 35 years has been phenomenal. But this pace of change going forward – in the next 50 years – is guaranteed to be even faster. I encourage you therefore to be curious, and continue learning and trying out new things. Only a healthy sense of curiosity will keep you relevant and employable.

When we are curious, we see things differently. We feel more energised and engaged, and are more capable of identifying opportunities to improve ourselves and to help others improve theirs.

Let me share with you briefly how I have kept and continued to keep learning. Firstly, by attending short courses and going to schools for my undergraduate degree, master degree and executive management training. Secondly, through self-paced learning - built a website, wrote an App, and also studied a new programming language, Python. Thirdly, in keeping a healthy sense of curiosity – I will deliberately find out more about unfamiliar things that I come across from time to time. All of us know how useful a tool Google can be for this purpose.

We also learn while working on the job, and one of the best way to learn is to read widely. The national library App for one, provides access to a huge array of good books.

2. Proactiveness. Being proactive means taking responsibility for your life and actions, and not just reacting to events that occur. You have to be intentional about what you want to do with your life, and understand that the choices you make have consequences. A good choice or decision will lead to a good outcome and a bad one can have adverse and lasting consequences. You have to consider your options and actively make good decisions to achieve your goals. The need to be proactive is understood by many, but sadly not adopted by many consistently.
3. Self-Discipline. Without a high level of self-discipline, it is impossible for you to ever achieve what you are truly capable of achieving. If you read the biographies of successful people, you will find invariably that they are all very self-disciplined.

Next, I will talk about relationship habits.

## Relationship habits

The level of happiness in our lives is determined by the quality of our relationships.

Several studies linked happiness to good relationships. For example, a Harvard study of adult development which continued for almost 80 years revealed that close relationships, more than anything else, are what keeps people happy throughout their lives. Money or fame cannot keep us happy.

So, what are some habits that can help you build lasting and meaningful relationships. Again, there are many that can help you build good relationships with your parents, colleagues, friends and your spouse and children. I will talk about four which I find useful:

1. Honesty. Trust is the most important value in a relationship. Without trust, there cannot be a meaningful relationship. You need honesty to build trust.
2. Respect. Without a healthy respect for one another, there cannot be a lasting relationship. We have to learn to appreciate that no two persons are alike. We all think and act differently. To build lasting relationships, we have to build the capacity to accept these differences, manage conflicts that often surface in a close relationship and respect one another. I cannot overemphasize the need to build the capacity to accept differences. Most of us think we have this capacity. But when tested, we often fall short.
3. Generosity. Be helpful, be kind and be generous with your time and resources. Building relationship is about giving: the giving of your time and attention. Never be selfish. Selfishness places a limit on the depth of your relationships.
4. Spending your time wisely. If you work all day and then spend the rest of your time watching TV or any screen, then you will not have time to build any meaningful relationships. You have to decide how to spend time to build relationships with your parents, colleagues, friends and your spouse and children. You cannot build good and lasting relationships using only leftover time. And I am afraid giving only your left-over time will be like handing them your left-over food. You have got to decide on your priorities and allocate time to build relationships. For me, I decided to stop watching TV programmes about 20 years ago. This gave me time to work as well as build relationships particularly with my family members. Successful people are intentional about relationship building. It cannot be left to chance.

Your success and happiness in life will depend on your habits, and I would highly recommend all of you to read two books: The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey and The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg.

## Conclusion

In closing, once again, I would like to congratulate all SP graduands on your achievements, especially the 329 of you from the School of Electrical & Electronic Engineering.

But even as you celebrate this milestone, remember to thank those who have supported and guided you in your learning journey – your parents, teachers, loved ones. No man is an

island, and none of us would be able to stand here today without the help and support of key individuals in our lives. Thank you, and I wish you every success in your future endeavours.