

**SPEECH BY CAPT LEE CHEE SEONG
CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER, APL
AT THE SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC (SP)
58TH GRADUATION CEREMONY
THURSDAY 3 MAY 2018, 5.00 P.M, SP CONVENTION CENTRE
(FINAL)**

Mr Soh Wai Wah, Principal and CEO, Singapore Polytechnic

Distinguished Guests

Parents and Graduands

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good evening. I am honoured to join you here today on one of the most significant days of your lives. It's always good to be back here in SP, my alma mater, especially on a special occasion like this. Today, 234 of you, graduates of the Singapore Maritime Academy, will be receiving your diploma scrolls as a reward of your hard work here in Singapore Polytechnic. This day would not have occurred without the support from your families and friends; not forgetting your committed lecturers who have pushed and guided you along the way. A big congratulations to all of you.

2. Not too long ago I was just like one of you sitting here, graduating from the Diploma in Nautical Studies (DNS) course. Unsure what the future may bring, I embarked on a journey in the maritime industry – in what has now turned out to be an exciting and rewarding career.

3. The first time I stepped on board a ship, I entered a whole new world. There was a sense of adventure and a home away from home with fellow seafarers. I experienced shipboard camaraderie, the thrill of visiting foreign countries, and eventually settled into shipboard life. I also experienced the natural environment first hand – there were brilliant sunrises and sunsets, peace and tranquillity of the oceans and also the occasional bad weather. There was never a dull moment. I kept watch through the witching hours, on the graveyard shift, and there was always the excitement of being on deck for mooring stations as we entered a foreign port. We learnt a lot at sea – from taking soundings of water ballast tanks to safety training, lifeboat drills to deck work, navigation and cargo watches in port. This allowed me to put into action what I learnt during pre-sea training and through a correspondence course. We also learnt from senior officers, fellow cadets and crew.

4. My first year at sea was wonderful and that was 38 years ago and I have not looked back ever since. For those who intend to work ashore, your shipboard training and exposure will be an asset. Shipping companies like APL, which is part of the larger parent CMA CGM Group, also provide opportunities for our seafarers to advance their careers at sea and ashore. On shore, a wide range of opportunities are available, which include roles in Cargo Stowage & Planning, Logistic Support, Crew Management, Marine Incident Investigation, Marine

Safety & Risk Management, Chartering & Brokerage, Marine Insurance, Maritime Law and various commercial positions.

5. When I took up a shore role 14 years ago, after commanding ships for 15 years, I was introduced to a whole new world of opportunities in the maritime industry. The opportunity came knocking at my door after I graduated with an M.Sc in Maritime Studies. I was promoted to Crewing Director and later made Managing Director in 2007. Early this year, I took up the post of Chief Operation Officer of APL, overseeing all aspects of APL's global marine operations. From my initial experience commanding a ship out at sea, I'm now responsible in ensuring APL's modern fleet of 63 operated vessels stay safe, secure, efficient and green all year-round.

6. Was a lot of hard work and sweat involved? Definitely, but I can tell you it's worth all the sweat and tears, and I encourage all of you cadets to be bold and to take up opportunities that help you to realize your dreams, just like I did.

Essential Qualities of an Outstanding Maritime Professional

7. Seated among you, there are many inspiring students that already exhibit the qualities of becoming an outstanding maritime professional. Let me take this chance to highlight a few inspirational examples that recently came to my attention.

8. Miss Farhana Thair had a promising future in athletics being a national sprinter at the Singapore Sports School but the uncertainty of

job security made her explore other opportunities which brought her to the maritime industry. Aspiring to be a seafarer, Farhana scored 8 points for her O' levels and was ready to apply for DNS but her parents required more convincing as she was the only child. Following her parents' wishes, she spent one year in a junior college but that did not stop her from pursuing her dreams.

9. Finally, with her parents' blessings, Farhana enrolled in DNS and had the experience of a lifetime while in SMA, especially during her one-year sea training with APL. Being out at sea as the only female on board came with its challenges but it made her learn more about herself and was fortunate to have sailed with good crew who were supportive and accepting of female officers. Farhana is getting closer to her dreams as she graduates today with a Diploma with Merit.

10. I applaud Farhana's determination. In my line of work, I look out for such qualities in potential seafarers and groom selected ones to become captains. Basically, there are some essential qualities that I look out for in a talent and these are qualities you need to get ahead in your career.

11. Firstly, hunger. Hunger is a key element in succeeding in the maritime industry. Hunger is what makes a candidate go 'all out' - to obtain and retain the job. Hunger also produces drive; an unstoppable drive that causes one to keep learning and growing. It is this hunger

that will motivate a cadet or a young shore staff to succeed and eventually become captain or a top maritime executive.

12. Secondly, it is boldness. This job is not for the shy, intimidated and fearful. You need to possess courage and boldness as the job requires you to step out of your comfort zone.

13. A Diploma in Maritime Business (DMB) graduate, Miss Murfiqah Syahirah Binte Jalavddin, had to overcome personal challenges. In her first year in SMA, Murfiqah's father suffered a stroke. It was a difficult period for her family as her father was the sole breadwinner and he had to stop his job as a taxi driver. In order to support her expenses, Murfiqah started giving tuition to primary school students. Unfortunately, in her second year of studies, Murfiqah underwent an ear surgery and then was hospitalized due to high fever and stomach infection which made her miss weeks of lessons.

14. Despite the setbacks, Murfiqah was determined to catch up in her studies. She is graduating today with a Diploma with Merit. She never allowed the unfortunate incidents to pull her down but rather, to strive harder. In Murfiqah's words, "Always remember, stars cannot shine without darkness. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl. No matter what, keep moving forward." These are wise words from such a young lady. Let's give Murfiqah an encouraging applause.

15. Another important quality you must have is adaptability; towards people and situations. Your ability to adapt to the diverse cultures of an international shipping industry is integral to survive and thrive in your career.

16. A maritime professional needs to also be independent and ‘think on his feet’. Seafarers, for example, will often face unforeseen circumstances or weather on board the ship, hence you must be able to respond fast and well.

17. Leadership is another valued trait. Regardless your rank, you will be placed in situations where you will have to lead and solve problems. Knowing how to solve problems, plus the ability to thrive under pressure, makes one a valued seafarer or professional. Beyond leadership, you also need to be a good team player. A collaborative spirit is vital in order to work effectively with co-workers across various responsibilities, functions and ranks.

18. Finally, the last quality that I look out for in a seafarer, is loyalty. You need to show to your employers not only your capability and the qualities that I’ve just mentioned but to show them that you are there to stay with the company and worthy for them to invest in you.

Treasuring Friendships Forged in SP

19. Like many of you here, the best time of my growing up years, was during my time as a nautical cadet in SP. The friendships forged and support you receive as part of a like-minded community are the things that I would always remember.

20. Like me, Miss Tiwana Manamol from the DMB course, mixed with a group of very supportive friends during her time in SP. She suffers from epilepsy and had frequent seizures in the first year of her studies. It affected her studies, impacted her self-esteem and she had even considered quitting school to avoid the embarrassment of having seizures in front of her schoolmates and lecturers.

21. However, her friends and lecturers in SMA were extremely supportive. Her friends were always there to help her up after her seizures, reminded her to take her medicines on time and encouraged her not to give up. The SMA lecturers were also very reassuring during class and provided useful advice, tips and encouragement. With a rigorous medication regime and the conducive environment that SMA had provided her, it had kept her seizures at bay and she has been seizure free ever since. She is graduating today with a Diploma with Merit and would be receiving a book prize. This is an example of how your friendships in school can be important in helping you to overcome various adversities in life; treasure them.

Industry Support for Fresh Talents

22. Seated in the convention centre are also our maritime industry partners who are potential employers of our graduates today. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to give these fresh talents a chance to be part of your organisation. We were all in their position once and it took that someone to give us that big break that we needed to prove ourselves, even without much work experience. It was that break that made the difference and it could have been the turning point that put you in your current position today.

23. Mr Muhammad Khairul Afiq is a **Gold Medal Winner of the Diploma in Marine Engineering (DMR) Course**, as well as an Institutional Medallist who received the Lee Kuan Yew Award. During his internship, he had the opportunity to travel overseas to investigate vessel breakdowns and witness the repairs of machinery, partake in several audits and handle Hull & Machinery insurance claims for vessels.

24. The internship was an invaluable learning experience. It not only allowed him to apply the knowledge learnt in class; it also required him to take responsibility over the given tasks and to work on them independently. His stint there made him realise his shortcomings and that he still needed to seek further knowledge to establish himself in the maritime industry. Motivated, I understand that he will be pursuing a

degree in Maritime Studies in Nanyang Technological University after his National Service. This is the kind of positive impact I hope our young talents will gain from their job experiences in the maritime industry; for them to not only remain but to inspire them to gain deeper industry knowledge.

Life-long Learning

25. When you walk out the gates of SP today, don't think that your learning stops here. The ever-changing seascapes and ongoing transformation of our maritime industry means that every maritime professionals needs to continually upgrade themselves with multiple pathways across existing qualifications, and to deepen or broaden our skills and knowledge.

26. Echoing government's call for life-long learning, I understand that Singapore Polytechnic will be expanding its scope of Continuing Education and Training (CET) to make SP the preferred polytechnic for CET and a poly for all ages.

27. To support this call for life-long learning, our Singapore maritime industry has collaborated with SkillsFuture Singapore to launch various initiatives. One of them is the "Earn and Learn Programme" or ELP, a work-study programme designed to give fresh graduates from polytechnics and ITE a head-start in careers related to their discipline

of study. With support from the Ministry of Education, the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore and SkillsFuture Singapore, the ELPs for Maritime (Deck Officer) and (Marine Engineer) were introduced for the DNS and DMR graduates in April 2016.

28. In June 2016, in support of the Port and Terminals sector, SMA also launched an ELP for graduates from the Diploma in Maritime Business (DMB) as well as other graduates from maritime and logistics-related courses. This is the “ELP in Port Management and Operations” that leads to the award of a Specialist Diploma. I understand that there are plans to introduce new ELPs and other SkillsFuture series courses in partnership with other government agencies.

29. As a member of SMA’s Maritime Industry Advisory Committee, I had the opportunity to highlight issues facing the maritime industry and to contribute in the discussions towards finding solutions. I am pleased that SMA has always been forthcoming to come up with the necessary training that is lacking in the industry. SMA had recently launched a new Diploma (Conversion) in Maritime Business Management course with its first intake in April 2018. This course is suitable for shipping, logistics and offshore executives currently working in the maritime industry, but do not possess maritime qualifications or relevant sea-going experience as well as new entrants to the maritime industry.

30. SMA will also be rolling out the Specialist Diploma in Maritime Superintendent course with its first intake in October 2018 for those seeking to attain relevant knowledge and technical skills to plan, direct and coordinate the marine and technical operation from shore. As you can see, there is never short of opportunities to learn and upskill in the maritime industry.

Conclusion

31. Echoing the inspiring stories that you have just heard, life may not be easy at times. Especially when you are starting out in the industry and still trying to find your footing, my advice to you is be prepared to work hard as it is not easy to start off from the bottom of the rung. Don't expect to work with only good bosses but be ready to work with the toughest ones as well. Learn as much in the shortest time, persevere, add value to your employer and I am sure you will emerge a winner.

32. In closing, let me, once again, congratulate all of you for reaching this important milestone. I wish you the very best as you pursue your passions beyond SP and I'd like to welcome you into the maritime family.

THANK YOU