

Good morning Mr Soh Wai Wah, Principal & CEO of Singapore Polytechnic,

SP Board of Governors,

Parents & Graduands,

Lecturers especially my lovely lecturers from DMC,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Introduction

Today is a very awesome & special day for all of you and it is also a very awesome & special day for me. I am very privileged to stand together with all of you here at the School of Communication, Arts & Social Sciences and the School of Digital Media & Infocomm Technology, celebrating your graduation and your children's graduation. I am also commemorating my 14th graduation anniversary from Singapore Polytechnic's Diploma in Media & Communication where I met my wife as well! Let's give ourselves a round of applause for today that is very well worth celebrating.

I thank everyone in Singapore Polytechnic, especially Principal CEO, Mr Soh Wai Wah, for giving me this amazing opportunity to speak today and the opportunity to be wearing a suit since my career has never given me the chance to.

I reflected over the past 14 years as I thought about what I want to share with you and I thought it would be most relevant to share with you my 3 greatest reflections after stepping out of SP at 20 and today leading Marketing across Asia Pacific for everyone's favourite toy brand.

1. Our Mindset in a Globalized Singapore.

My first reflection is about our mindset in a globalized Singapore. In my current role, I lead a marketing organization of 80 people across different countries, culture and diversity to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow, based in Singapore. From culturally homogeneous markets like Japan & Korea to very liberal and independent markets like Australia.

Singapore is a regional hub of many MNCs & start-ups, attracting the best talent across the world to be in Singapore to deliver the best value. Start-ups leverage on the best talent in Singapore to develop products, test & learn and scale a successful product across the world.

By attracting a diverse talent pool across the world into this small island, Singaporeans are naturally concerned and critical of "opportunities" taken away from us.

I would like to share with you that I sincerely hope our mindset can be placed on taking those opportunities, on being proactive and being able to deliver the best value, the Singapore value in this very globalized Singapore vs being worried about "lost opportunities" that we may not have even tried.

It is a fact that will not change that Singapore is successful and people around the world want to work in successful locations regardless if it's Singapore, Palo Alto, Shanghai or New York.

Successful Singaporeans embrace challenges and identify what is the value they can contribute to stand above the challenge.

My personal reflection on my career linked to this point are 3 things – 1, being culturally-diverse and curious. 2, having a global mindset vs local or only my area of work. 3, very important that I share with my team constantly – being solution-oriented vs simply raising problems/complaining.

I have observed many successful Singaporeans' unique and special capability on being very adaptable to global changes, being solution-oriented and have much wider respect and the ability to embrace other working cultures.

2. Future Singapore Leaders in Global Businesses

My second reflection is about Singaporean leadership in global businesses. Global businesses do not mean only MNCs, it also refers to local start-ups that have global potential, it also refers to local businesses that export products and services to other countries.

I sit on LEGO Asia Pacific's leadership team. I also sit on LEGO Global's product development & marketing leadership team. I am very fortunate that my company is one that heavily promotes diversity – whether gender, culture or country. I have now the pleasure of working with people from not so common countries like Eastern Europe, Russia, Latin America and of course Denmark and the Nordics.

However, when I first took the role in November last year, I am the only Singaporean & the second Asian on both leadership teams. I immediately reflected and asked myself why are there not more Singaporeans although we are 65% of 300 employees here in Singapore?

I learnt from many non-Singaporean peers that there is still a gap between Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans who understand global leadership and the interest to develop leadership capabilities to lead a culturally-diverse organizations while still maintaining your own authenticity.

Allow me to share with you an example – when I first started to work with the Japanese, it was very challenging for me to understand when “could be, perhaps, let's explore” are simply polite ways of saying No. If it is not an explicit “Yes” it means No. It was also very challenging for me to understand what “Nemawashi” was and “Nemawashi” is the Japanese corporate culture of pre-aligning on every meeting matter that needed agreement before the meeting and in the meeting itself, it's pretty much ceremonial and no one is expected to raise points or objections. I had to lean in, understand and embrace a lot before trust can be built, work can be done and they are willing to be led by me.

We are definitely improving and it is understandable to lean towards engaging and leading people of similar interest. It is human nature and today I would like to encourage and challenge all of you to step outside your comfort zone to start engaging people who may not come from here and people who may not have similar interests as us. Identify a mentor who is successful in this area, be proactive to embrace differences and identify how to work with people and win people from diverse backgrounds. This will be the first step towards more Singapore leadership in global businesses.

3. Disrupted Economy, New Opportunities

My final reflection is about the new economy that we live in and the new opportunities that this generation has. I have been very fortunate to work in a company that offers me opportunities to partner global brands like YouTube, Facebook, Nintendo and Movies like Star Wars, Marvel and Disney.

Such valuable partnerships have opened up my eyes into industries like animation, gaming, content creation and licencing. They have also opened my eyes into emerging economies like eSports, indie animation & filmmakers who make content and sell them to emerging platforms like Amazon Video & Netflix in Asia.

I would like to share a current coaching experience I'm doing – I'm currently coaching a small eSports team to market themselves to attract funding and sponsorships. They are young and ambitious, 18-23 years old. They have just won a regional gaming competition and they are going to Russia for the world championships. They have tasted their first success and more success are waiting for them.

Through them, I learnt about the eSports industry and how big the market is, how there are TV channels in US, Europe and Korea dedicated to eSports; how there are so many kids and youth watching pro-gamers on YouTube, just to become better gamers and participate in competitions.

The essence of what I want to share with you is that economies are changing and there are many and new opportunities out there now in this very disrupted and fragmented economy. There is no mainstream career. Instead, there are many new opportunities that you can find your real passion in and create a career and a life that you are passionate about; that you are willing to live your passion to become a sustainable career. Passion and Sustainability are very important as I have learnt, to achieve a successful career and a successful life.

Closing

In closing, I want to take this opportunity again to congratulate all graduands, parents and our very dedicated and hardworking teaching and support staff of Singapore Polytechnic. I am very sure it has been a very fun and memorable 3 years for all of you here today and you will bring the knowledge, the counsel and the memories with you for the rest of your lives like how I have brought with me.

To all graduands, I sincerely hope my 3 reflections were able to inspire you and support you in your very exciting next phase in life. There are many unknowns and there will be many challenges along the way. I can only encourage you that with the right mindset, openness and grabbing opportunities that reflect your passion; success will come your way and life will be very fruitful and amazing. I wish every success to all of you and may all of you be blessed with good health and good luck.

Thank you very much.