

SPEECH BY GUEST SPEAKER, DR PAUL CAMERON, RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY  
DIRECTOR FOR ASIA PACIFIC, CRODA INTERNATIONAL PLC AT SINGAPORE  
POLYTECHNIC'S 59th GRADUATION CEREMONY 2019 ON THURSDAY, 2 MAY 2019,  
9:30AM (SESSION 1)

Mr Soh Wai Wah, Principal and CEO of Singapore Polytechnic

Members of Singapore Polytechnic Board of Governors

Distinguished Guests

Parents and Graduands

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and privilege for me to join you at this morning's graduation ceremony.

To our graduands, today's occasion belongs to you. Through hard work, discipline and dedication, you have successfully completed your course and I would like to congratulate all of you on your achievement!

Today also marks a day for you to recognise your family members, friends and SP staff who have been a pillar of strength throughout your journey in SP. Can I invite our graduands to give a big round of applause to show your appreciation to your family members, friends and SP staff for all the love and support they have given you over the past few years?

Delivering a graduation address is a great responsibility; or so I thought until I cast my mind back to my own graduation at Durham University in 1992. The commencement speaker that day was the esteemed British actor, dramatist and philosopher Sir Peter Ustinov. Reflecting on his speech has helped me enormously in writing this one, because it turns out that I can't remember a single word he said!

I've been wracking my brains, thinking hard about what to say, seeking ideas from watching world famous people on Youtube deliver the most amazing graduation speeches. In the end, at the ripe old age of 44, I've settled on providing you with 5 (well 5 ½) pieces of advice I hope you find useful, applying my own first piece of advice in the process...

#### NUMBER 1 – BE YOURSELF

In the words of the American actress Judy Garland, "Always be a first-rate version of yourself and not a second-rate version of someone else."

Why spend your whole life trying to be somebody that you're not? It's so much more fun to be yourself. I remember early on in my career, a senior colleague told me that to get on in the business I had to be more like a particularly successful, highly respected colleague who had an aggressive authoritarian leadership style. This was not me – my natural style is someone who's people & feeling orientated who tries to keep the peace. I artificially tried to be someone I wasn't for a short while, but I just ended up feeling unhappy, stressed, guilty and like a fraud. So, I took it on myself just to be true to myself, and immediately felt much more relaxed, and became a lot more effective in the process. I've tried to stay authentic ever since and I've been lucky enough that career opportunities have come my way, despite not having a fiery red approach!

#### NUMBER 1 ½ – AND TRY NOT TO WORRY WHAT OTHERS THINK OF YOU

Easier said than done. Not much to say here but I think this is nicely summarised by former American First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt “You wouldn’t worry so much about what others think of you if you realised how seldom they actually do.”

## NUMBER 2 – LIFE MOVES FAST

In the words of Ferris Bueller in the iconic movie from my childhood about his day off, “Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it”.

I find that time seems to get faster and faster the older I get. I remember sitting in my office in the UK in 2005, the day it was announced, in Singapore of all places, that London was going to host the London Olympics in 2012 and commenting to my office mate at the time that we’d probably have children when it came around. It seemed eons away at that time and quite a scary prospect. Whoosh!!! 7 years passed in a flash, and in that time, I took on a job that involved global travel, got married, moved to Singapore and had a daughter. My prediction turned out to be spot on, and I ended up being in London for the games with my young family. As you get busy with a career, family and the more mundane things that come up, don’t forget to look around, do things that make you happy, have experiences, and make time for yourself.

Life’s short.

Which leads me nicely to...

## NUMBER 3 – WORK HARD PLAY HARD

A bit of a cliché, and perhaps this one is a little controversial in Singapore, where there is such an emphasis on academic achievement. Bear with me – I am a foreigner after all!

I remember my Gran telling me how important this was when I was about 12 years old and I have lived by this mantra ever since. Life to me is about balance. Hard work IS important. You know this, as you would not be sitting here today if that were not so. I do think, however, that it is also important to have interests and passions away from work too. As I get older, I realise that most things I’ve achieved have involved hard work – in my studies, my career, golf, marathon running and my current passion in life – triathlon – the common theme here to be successful is hard work. I’m sure you’ll encounter people who are lucky enough to achieve things with seemingly minimal effort. All you can do is your best and you can take a lot of self-satisfaction from achieving something you have really had to work for.

## NUMBER 4 – DON’T STOP LEARNING

Never stop learning and be always ready to try out new things. Please take care of, and make time for, your own development. Do not sit back and expect someone to do it for you, whether it be your parents, your tutor or your boss. Be proactive.

## NUMBER 5 – DON’T WORRY IF YOU HAVEN’T GOT YOUR LIFE PLANNED OUT

A quote now from Baz Luhrmann’s 1999 hit “Moulin Rouge”. If you haven’t listened to this, please do. I remember being moved to tears the first time I heard this, way back in the day, shortly after I started work.

“Don’t feel guilty if you don’t know what you want to do with your life...  
the most interesting people I know didn’t know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives  
some of the most interesting 40 year olds I know still don’t”

Personally, I don't think it's hugely important to have a long term dream. If you spend your time dead set and focussed on a long term dream, there is a good chance short term opportunities will pass you by. Who knows where you may end up?

I see life as dendritic – that's the scientist in me coming out – you head out along a branch with decisions / things happening at each branch point along the way. Everyone's branch is unique. However, you don't have to agonise too much about choices made as future decisions may result in you reconnecting with another branch thought to have been missed. The wonderful thing about it there are touch points along the way where all our lives interconnect.

When it comes to the next major branch point in your life, whether it be higher education, joining National Service, or entering the workforce, Singapore Polytechnic has done a great job in equipping you to face the challenges that lay ahead.

From a workplace point of view, SP works very hard in ensuring the Diplomas they offer stay relevant to industry. I have seen this first hand, with many Perfumery & Cosmetic Science students over the years being employed as interns in our business. Also, just this year I was lucky enough to work with John Xie and Meilanty (before she left) and a talented group of Applied Chemistry students with us today – Hannani, Jean-ne, Ronaleen, Tiru and Umairah. They did an amazing job in their Capstone project to do some groundbreaking research on some of Croda's unique Polymer Additives.

Graduands, it is an exciting time to be a scientist in Singapore. We live in a time of unprecedented technological change. When I was at University, I didn't even have a mobile phone, and now my 3 year old is an absolute whizz at using an ipad! The workplace is changing. Jobs exist today that no-one would have foreseen even 5 years ago. Flexible working hours are becoming commonplace.

You are extremely lucky to be in Singapore, which is such a vibrant, energised place to live and work. Singapore is so forward looking, and clearly values science, scientists themselves, and research and development. Just look at the latest Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2020 Plan where the government committed to spending \$S19 billion over the period 2016-2020. Singapore truly is a global R&D hub and I see this myself every day – the ecosystem around One North where I am based is amazing. There will be opportunities in science, or whatever it is you choose to do.

Now it is your chance to seize those opportunities.

I congratulate all of you once again on your graduation and wish you the very best of luck, every happiness and success as you move on to the next chapter in your life.

Thank you.