

SPEECH BY GUEST SPEAKER, MR CHAI CHONG MENG, HEAD OF
MAMMALIAN MANUFACTURING, LONZA BIOLOGICS TUAS PTE LTD AT
SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC'S 59th GRADUATION CEREMONY 2019 ON
THURSDAY, 2 MAY 2019, 1:30PM (SESSION 2)

Good afternoon to all graduands, parents, friends, teachers and distinguished guests.

It is a great honour for me to be at this ceremony this afternoon and I would like to personally thank the Principal & CEO of Singapore Polytechnic and Dr. Adrian Yeo, Director, School of Chemical & Life Sciences for having me.

Graduands, today is a great day to reflect on your success and how far you have all come since you started at Singapore Polytechnic. Well done to all of you! You would have shared many experiences with your fellow graduands and developed friendships that will probably last you a lifetime, even if your paths should diverge in the years to come.

It is also a day where you should share your success with the people whom have supported you until now, especially your parents. They are extremely proud of you, so do spend a few moments with them today and be patient when they ask you for just that one more photo opp to celebrate the occasion. They only want to ensure that the memories of today are captured in time. I know because I am a parent too. I cannot imagine how your parents are able to hold back their tears of pride and joy. I was a mess when my little girl graduated from pre-school 4 years ago. I think your parents deserve a round of applause.

It was more than 15 years ago that I graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the US. I have been reflecting on what I can share in this speech to help you on with the next stages of your life journey and here are some of my thoughts.

You have all worked very hard, some no doubt more lucky than others, to be graduating from Singapore Polytechnic today. Now, doors are open to you to start the next chapter of your life whether that is to further your studies or to embark on new careers. Please remember though, that you have to be going through life with your best and more importantly, with passion in order to continue to be successful.

Life goes by very quickly, so have the courage to explore new opportunities, whether this is today or in the future. It may take you down different paths and even those which you did not foresee, but enjoy the journey and embrace every experience.

You all have been students for the last few years and you may be thinking that starting from today, my student days are thankfully over. I am sorry to disappoint you but this could not be further away from the truth as you should always go back to being a 'student' in any new scenario that you being are exposed to. Being a 'student' allows you to learn and develop exponentially. Never stop being a 'student' and hopefully you will also start to give back by becoming a coach to others as you learn more. When I look for talent to develop within my organization, I always look at whether the individual has this 'student' passion for continuous learning. If you do not possess this attribute then you will not be stretching your potentials and therefore less likely to be successful in life.

I am sure all of you have ambitions for your future. It is good to be ambitious, but one lesson I have learnt is that is that ambition can quickly become arrogance if you are not respectful to the people whom you are working with. This can easily destroy your ambition, so please stay humble even when you are successful. Remember, to be successful you will need the support from a team of people around you. Just bear in mind the support that you have been given to enable you to be at this ceremony today.

With ambition you will be facing many challenges and changes ahead. Always think about what you want to do, but chances are you will not always have all of the answers. You have to become a 'warrior' and take on the unknowns and changes that you may not be fully prepared for. Take courage and confront the 'stress' with a positive outlook. Be brave to make decisions, knowing that you will be fully accountable for the consequences, be it positive or negative.

It is very true that when you take on challenges and changes, you will not always succeed and will experience 'failures' from time to time. Take these 'failures' as great learning opportunities and, in my experience, you often learn more through 'failures' than successes. The trick however, quoting Mr Albert Baehny, Chairman of the Lonza Group, is to ensure that you always have more successes than failures. Be resilient and maintain your courage to continue to take on new challenges head on.

You will learn, or may have already learnt, that you cannot do everything by yourself. Being a good contributing team member, building a strong team or leading a talented team is the invariable cycle to success. People create successes and the more talent and diversity you have in your team, the more likely you are to succeed and more importantly, have fun while doing it.

Remember you will create opportunities for yourself by being successful in the opportunities, which you have already been given. Do not expect to get new opportunities and challenges unless you are willing to the play of roles of a student, a warrior and a leader over and over again.

All these personal insights can be summarized from the book 'Good to Great' by Jim Collins in the two phrases 'Professional Will' & 'Personal Humility'

The sentence I remember most from the definition of 'Professional Will' about how one should act is, and I quote, "Looks in the mirror, not out of the window, to apportion responsibility for poor results, never blaming other people, external factors, or bad luck". What does this mean? I think it means that we are responsible for our own destiny and success. We must look to our self when we fail and analyse what we could have done better.

Similarly, the sentence I remember most from the definition of 'Personal Humility' is, and I quote again, "Looks out of the window, not in the mirror, to apportion credit for the success – to other people, external factors, and good luck". What does this mean? I think this means that, although you may be successful through your own efforts, success can never be credited to any single individual. There is always some form of support network, which one can rely on to get to the finishing line.

You have successfully graduated today but, as I said earlier, you are here not entirely due to your own merits for you must have received support and help at one point or another during your time at Singapore Polytechnic. Take time today to thank the people who have journeyed alongside you and remember they will always be there to support you and help you make the right decisions.

Finally, if you have missed what I have said in the past few minutes, now is the time for the take-home messages. I shall leave you with 4 points:

- take charge and be in control of your destiny
- stay curious, inquisitive and do not stop exploring
- be part of a team, member or leader, it does not matter
- most importantly, enjoy what life throws at you

Once again, I congratulate you all on your outstanding achievements and becoming graduates from the School of Chemical & Life Sciences at Singapore Polytechnic.

I wish you every success in your future. Thank you.

Chai Chong Meng