

Good afternoon, Principal Mr Soh Wai Wah, Director Ms Tan Yen Yen, Graduands, Teachers and distinguished guests.

It gives me great pleasure to be here today at the Singapore Polytechnic's 58th Graduation Ceremony. I applaud all graduands and award winners from the Business School on your achievements. How does it feel to be sitting in the exact same convention centre for your freshman orientation three years ago? Do you feel more confident and more accomplished as compared to your younger self? I hope the answer is a resounding yes! Today's event is important to you, as it is to me. I wanted to give you the best advice possible, to provide you with a good head start for your next journey, so I started working on this speech as soon as I was invited to your graduation ceremony—so, for the last two to three months, no matter where I'm at (overseas or Singapore, on a ship, airplane or a car) every time I see or think of something inspirational, I would note it down in my phone or in my notebook because I wanted to deliver a message to you today that was meaningful and useful to you for years to come.

In 2007, I chose to study Business in Singapore Polytechnic after graduating from ITE (because it is no secret that our polytechnic is the most established among all polytechnics and our school of business is among the most prestigious). As I look back at my decision 11-years ago (and being a corporate executive today with Seristine Group of Companies, a regional Business Consortium involved in a multitude of sectors of the economy founded by Dato' Dr. Nicholas Ho and Dato' Dr. Jay Ho also polytechnic graduates), the decision to enrol in our School of Business was a correct decision I made as the school provided a solid foundation from which I would continue to build on towards further education and through my career – even though it has been almost a decade, some of the modules learnt in school, contribute towards guiding me in my day-to-day business decisions, such as Mr George Teo's Experiential Business and Marketing Class, Ms Cynthia Lam's Business Development Module, Ms Olivia Koh's Logistics & Supply Chain modules as well as Mr Tang Kah Heong's Operational Management module, just to name a few. I have arrived where I am today, because I chose to study in this school, if I had chosen another institution, well... God knows how my life might have turned out, could be quite different. I thoroughly enjoyed my SP Experience! I came into the school from ITE, struggled with some modules such as statistics and calculus, enjoyed almost all my classes, participated in a few CCAs and became President of the SP Ambassadors and SP Photography Club, I was a student leader for Mr George Teo's Youth Expedition Project (YEP) Team, received one of the highest honors for internship by the person in-charge of the Government-linked Agency I was attached to (I was given a testimonial and was read out by the Director at that time). So I graduated in 2010 with the SP Model Student Award and an Academic Prize by TNT Worldwide Logistics. I didn't get a Certificate of Merit (COM) but I was satisfied nonetheless with the effort and performance I've put in during my 3 years – as I had given my best!

So after graduating in 2010, I reflected on my journey and experience in SP, I thought of what I was satisfied with myself and what I thought I could have improved on and the next thing was to set career goals (I may not be exactly sure of what I will be in the future, but if I were to set markers and yardsticks for myself, it will guide me in my journey). Personally for me, 8-years fast-forward from the day of graduation, I am clear of my business skills and industry capabilities – my capabilities today include knowledge and experience in entrepreneurship, business growth, internationalisation and sustainability. So the question is, how to know what you're good at? One of the earliest indicators for me, which guided me to the next institute of higher learning was going through the

lessons in our business school – I realised that I was exceptional in courses such as “Understanding Cross-Cultural Diversity, Global Business Environment and Business Development” so knowing that, I just built on it and continued exposing myself to other business competencies, to discover my other talents.

Today, being one of the most special days of your lives, I wish the best for you and want you to be as successful as me, if not, be better! So with that, I hope to use the next few moments to share with you ‘4 Basic Principles which have guided me thus far – these 4 Principles have been my creed’ and following that, if I could turn-back time and graduate with you – I’ll share what the 5 things are that I would have done better!

Now, Let’s begin with the 4 principles. Whatever the case and whichever route you choose, if you have no “guiding principles” yet, you can follow these 4 Basic Principles. Firstly, have a positive mindset. It is important as it enables you to take failure as “part of the process”, enables you to be self-motivated and is the fuel to make you a determined person. To be honest, I have never met a successful person who is not positive. In life you will have both moments of success and failure, know that every time you face a setback, there is a solution and you must pick yourself up, stand tall and keep walking. As British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill once said, “success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts”.

For the second principle, know that your Diploma is not the end of your learning journey. Whether you choose to pursue your Bachelor Degree straight after graduation or if you decide to gain some valuable work experience first, please know that learning doesn’t stop. Reason being? The world we live in today has an economy that moves at a fast pace and is changing at a fast pace due to disruptions in most aspects of the economy – we’ve seen how transportation has been disrupted with Uber and Grab, how we eat has changed due to UberEats, HonestBee and Food Panda, how food is farmed has changed through Agritech with Plenty, Freight Farms and Frontier Agrotech, how people live is being changed with PropTech, Co-living Spaces and Co-working Spaces, how we transact economically and financially is also quickly being transformed by the Fintech Industry, Blockchain Technology, E-wallets and Cryptocurrencies, with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence and all the disruptions I’ve mentioned above provide opportunities only if we are willing to learn about it and adapt. We can learn through self-learning by reading books, attend short courses and trainings or seminars, and even skills future programmes. We need to bear in mind that the only thing that is constant is change – so it is important to keep ourselves up-to-date with the economy and our industries. As Anthony J. D’Angelo once said, “develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow”.

The third principle is about effort, may I remind you again that “you reap what you sow” (if you are a farmer, and decide to plant chilli in the fields, 7 to 8 weeks later with constant watering, you will harvest chilli, but if you don’t plant anything, nothing will grow) so in order to be successful in whatever you do, you must put in the effort, if you don’t and expect things to happen – nothing will happen. I am where I am today because I made a conscious effort to build my career by investing time and effort in my capabilities, I just had to push myself to keep going and going. As Winston

Churchill once said, “continuous effort – not strength or intelligence is the key to unlocking our potential”. You just got to go on and on, never give up!

The fourth principle is “to build mastery”. Remember, we live in a global world, you can easily get a job overseas as an expatriate and expats from overseas can easily access jobs in Singapore, if we’re not good at what we do, someone else will take our place. Hence we must build mastery, make sure that we’re outstanding to the point that we become “specialists” or even “experts or opinion leaders” in our field that we become highly sought after. In all you do, give your best – be the best that you can be, the best entrepreneur, the best accountant, the best consultant and so on! Skills Mastery will come when you have the interest to do your best and you go on and on to develop your skills. Trust me, you won’t have a problem finding a job or getting a promotion as you bring great value to yourself and the organization you work for.

So, months ago, when I was crafting my speech, I was thinking what my biggest regrets were, and through that, if I could turn-back-time and do things better and become a student all-over-again and graduate with you, the class of 2018, what would be the “Top 4 tips” I would advise myself to do, what would I want my younger self and my classmates to know?” Hmm...

Firstly, know that “experience is the most important thing”. Even Julius Cesar said, “experience is the teacher of all things”. He rose from a soldier to a general, and to eventually become a Roman Emperor. The rich experience has to be relevant and up-to-date. Experience gives you capability to carry out your duties effectively, run a company as an entrepreneur specializing in a field you know best. A good example I want to share, is a friend of mine, Mr Mark Tan who graduated from our School of Business. He took on his first job in the Banking and Finance Industry in 2011 (while at the same time pursuing his degree on a part-time basis in Singapore), mark grew his experience in the Banking and Finance Industry working for global banks and financial institutions like UOB Kay Hian, Western Union and Standard Chartered Bank accumulating a total of 8 years of experience and was recently promoted to Senior Manager. I have no doubt that if he keeps it up, he will be in a senior leadership position at the bank before he turns 40.

Secondly, know that “the destination at the end of the day is what really matters – where you reach and what you become”. Whatever route you take after this, is ultimately a route, not all routes are suitable for everyone, we all have to go on this journey at a pace we are comfortable with. Your poly life results does not define you. The polytechnic is supposed to be a place where you learn the foundation of business and grow. A good example is a friend of mine, Mr Farid MN who is the President Director of a fast-growing fintech company in Indonesia, he is on the Board of Governors of one of the polytechnics in Singapore. It took Farid 18-years after poly, attending private university, working for several companies before becoming an entrepreneur. He has accumulated a lot of experience along the way, but one of the determining factors of his success is his thirst for success and determination – he keeps going at it and this is probably not what you would expect from someone who failed PSLE twice and didn’t really do too well in secondary school. He wasn’t going to let his past experience prevent him from reaching his goals, he failed previously, so what?! He learnt from it and he focused on the Destination!

Thirdly, know that there is no overnight success, no quick-get-rich schemes. Even an entrepreneur has to do everything him or herself at the beginning with a startup, work daily with little or no sleep and with little or no salary for many months until the business stabilizes. But if you know you want it, it is your goal, you keep persevering and go on until you achieve. Never give up and you'll achieve success. A good example is my entrepreneur friend, Mr Syafiq Yusoff who is CEO of Riverwood Logistics; syafiq has little formal qualifications due to his circumstances decades ago, but he never let it affect his chances for success, Syafiq would be diligent to read on his own, and he is probably one of the few friends I have in the working world who has a ferocious appetite for learning – he attends courses, seminars and adult learning workshops on a regular basis. Syafiq started building his logistics company 7-years ago right after a failed business, he was very observant of changing technologies, he made his small business competitive by adopting new technologies and customizing solutions for his customers – his business strategies and practices were highly praised by Amazon Prime that his company was awarded the main distributorship rights in Singapore and now, Syafiq is in the process of having Riverwood Logistics be a logistics partner of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics Games. He was mentioned by PM Lee Hsien Loong in the National Day Rally (NDR) last year.

Lastly my friends, know that no man is an island. We need each other to learn and grow. So once you join the industry, I encourage you to network with other people within or outside of your industry, connect people together, help others within or outside your industry. And most importantly, when you are successful, look behind you and reach out to those who are struggling and need assistance most. A good example is from Seristine Group, where Dato' Dr. Nicholas Ho and Dato' Dr. Jay Ho decided to start a S\$400,000 Endowment Scholarship for one of our local universities to help students who are doing well academically but come from underprivileged backgrounds to strive in their education.

I like to end with a quote by Conrad Hilton, one of the international hotel magnates. "Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit". Take action of your life today, Ten to twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do which could have contributed to your further success. So start now, have a positive mindset, adopt a lifelong-learning attitude, put in all your effort and try to achieve mastery in all that you do. I am confident that all of you achieve success in your life.

I extend my hearties congratulations to all of you on the successful completion of your studies at the Singapore Polytechnic School of Business and wish each of you success in your career and further studies.

Thank you!