

SPEECH BY BG GAURAV KEERTHI, COMMANDER AIR DEFENCE & OPERATIONS COMMAND / CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER, RSAF AT SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC 59TH GRADUATION CEREMONY (SESSION 11 AERONAUTICAL ENGG + AEROSPACE ELECT) ON 7TH MAY 2019

Mr Soh Wai Wah, Principal and CEO of Singapore Polytechnic, Distinguished Guests, Parents, and most importantly, the graduating batch of 2019. Congratulations!

It is an honour for me to be here with you today at this important event. Thank you for the invitation. I was informed that you normally invite qualified professionals from the industry or distinguished alumnus to speak. I am neither. However, I am a pilot, and this means that I may form a very unique relationship with some of you: I will trust you with my life, every time I strap into the cockpit. If you do a good job keeping the aircraft in tip top condition, I come home safely after a flight. So it is in my best interests to accept this invitation and flatter all of you as if my life depended on it.

The aerospace industry is a tremendous one to be a part of. The opportunities are growing every day because the technologies are evolving so quickly. The industry has always done well in Singapore, with major local companies like ST and SIA, and multinational companies like Rolls Royce having huge plants here. But today, the opportunities are even more exciting because advances in AI, computing power, batteries, and multi-copter platforms means that we are one step closer to seeing flying cars on the road. Technically they won't be on the road, I guess. I am excited to see where all of you end up, and how you help advance technologies in this important sector.

Let me first introduce myself, so you understand the context of my points. I'm BG Gaurav, callsign Yoda. I fly Chinook helicopters for the RSAF, and some of my more memorable flights include the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami relief operations, and quite a few National Day Parade flypasts. I am the Commander of the Air Defence & Operations Command, which is the part of the RSAF responsible for watching over your skies 24/7 against any threat from

the air. In addition to this role, I am also the first Chief Innovation Officer of the RSAF. I encourage my people to experiment with new ideas and new technologies so that we can get our job done better, safer, faster so we can go home to our family early! I was fortunate to be able to work with SP recently in this role, and to sign an MOU to bring our problems and your ideas together. Outside of work, I volunteer a lot in the debate community in schools, and also co-created and hosted Singapore's first Emmy-nominated TV debate show back in 2007. What motivates me?

I wanted to share three answers to that question, and I hope they motivate you too. To make it easier to remember, they all begin with the letter 'c': Curiosity, Commitment, Compass.

(1) CURIOSITY

First, Curiosity. I studied economics, not engineering. So how did I end up as the CIO of the RSAF? I realised after graduation that **what you study** is important, but **how curious you are about the world** is even more important. I didn't like studying, but I really loved learning more about the world, especially technology. I never stopped learning, even after graduation. I read up online about photography and built a dark room in my toilet. I took courses on programming and website design and built a number of websites, including the debate site dialectic.sg. I have watched 131 courses on Lynda.com which is an online video tutorial site that all of you can access for free via the National Library Board website. I now know more about blockchains, artificial intelligence, graphic design, javascript, and so much more. I still watch videos every week, and am currently learning more about cyber security.

As the CIO of RSAF, I need to keep filling my head with new ideas so that I can keep up with all the exciting developments that come to me from my military innovators. Here's an example. In order to protect Singapore, we deploy GBAD systems across the island, sometimes in the middle of nowhere. In order to make sure that the network equipment at the sites all work, every week someone needs to drive to every site, plug in a device, and check the signal from the network equipment. He realised this was silly, and decided to watch

youtube videos about how to build a solar powered network monitoring device. In just 60 days, he learned what he needed and built it himself. Amazing engineering, in practice.

Curiosity is key to your life long learning journey. Graduating with a diploma or even a degree is not enough. I had to learn by reading books and watching bad youtube clips; you have so many options with SkillsFuture and online learning. You can be curious and learn new things so that you are able to do amazing things like that and open up new pathways for success for yourself.

(2) COMMITMENT

Second, Commitment. I am worried about some members of your generation because #FOMO and #YOLO and dangerous hashtags, and the Tinder app has affected more than just your dating habits. There was an article that said people who live life with a “tinder” philosophy, are afraid to commit to someone because you believe that there may be some one even better just one swipe away. I believe that keeping options open is useful, but after a certain point, you need to commit. Pursuing a life of endless options may be fun, but it does not lead to happiness. It is the difference between going on a dozen Tinder first dates versus developing a meaningful and loving relationship with someone. Obviously there is a balance, and you don't need to marry the first person you date - but at some point, you need to commit. To a pursuit. To a job. To a sector. To a spouse. To something. Commitment matters, because it leads you on a more fulfilling journey in the long run. In the industry that you are joining, experience and knowledge matter a lot and can make the difference between a safe and unsafe aircraft. You will have lives at your hands, so please commit to doing your best.

I was not the best debater in Singapore, but I chose to commit almost 20 years of my life volunteering to teach students and coaches how to speak persuasively and with confidence. The work I have done has affected many thousands of students indirectly, and I often get emails from ex-students telling me how debate changed their life. I committed to being the best debate volunteer I could be, and it brought me so much joy and unexpected success in life. I never thought I would create a debate TV show, but because of how passionate and

committed my team was, we created an amazing show that became Singapore's first Emmy nominated TV show. Commitment is important, at some point in your development. Find what you are good at and enjoy and commit to doing your best at it.

(3) COMPASS

Third, Compass. This is a bit cryptic, so let me explain. I believe there are two ways to navigate through life: the Google Maps theory and the Compass theory. The Google Maps theory is how many Singaporeans plan their lives: they have a fixed target end point, a fixed route, clear turning points, and a precise ETA. Imagine this: I am 21. I want to be married and successful at 30. So that means I need to propose and be earning well at 28 so I can afford a flat. So that means I need to have a steady girlfriend and be promoted by 24. So that means I need focus on doing well in my career and dating by 21. Wait I'm already late which means my life is over and I can never succeed! This is a recipe for stress and disappointment because you are leading your life backwards.

Life is not like google maps, because the turns are not predictable. And if you are so fixated on meeting that destination on time, you will be stressed every time something happens along the way to delay you. There is a better way to live life: my Compass theory. First, decide where North is for you: do you want to be a colleague who is respected and valued in your company and a friend who is trusted by those around you? Then let that be your guide. Make choices to keep guiding you north, and don't stress about the detours and delays along the way. As Dory in Finding Nemo says, you just keep swimming, just keep swimming. Enjoy the journey, and life will be less stressful.

CONCLUSION

Once again, congratulations to all of you. For the guys who are about to join NS, you have an opportunity to develop a very different side of yourself, in terms of leadership and responsibility. I encourage you to make the most of it, so that you learn something useful in the two years. For those of you going directly to the workforce or to further studies, good luck. The world is an exciting place, and you are joining it at an exciting time. I wish you all

the best, and I hope that some day, I will be able to proudly put my life in your hands as a pilot or a passenger of an aircraft that you and your team helped to put in the sky. Thank you.

[1615 words: ~11 mins]