

Commencement Address by Professor Tan Chorh Chuan

University Cultural Centre

6 Jul 2017

NUS Chancellor, President Tony Tan Keng Yam, and Mrs Mary Tan
Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills), Mr Ong Ye Kung
Excellencies
NUS Pro-Chancellors
Chairman and members of the NUS Board
Professor Klaus Schwab and Mr Gerard Ee
Distinguished Guests
Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen

To our graduating class of 2017, my very heartiest congratulations!

We are really delighted to join you, your family and loved ones in this well-deserved and joyous celebration. You have worked hard, achieved much and done yourselves proud, so do please enjoy your Commencement fully.

As many of you step next into the world of work, what are some of the signposts that might flag the directions that lie ahead?

You enter a world of work which is changing rapidly.

Technology and new business practices will disrupt many jobs, but they will also open exciting opportunities for people with the right mind-set and drive.

Competition is intense, but with it comes fresh possibilities for synergistic collaboration.

Knowledge is growing explosively, but unlocking its full potential requires discernment, imagination and the ability to join the dots across different domains.

In response to these sweeping changes, NUS has placed much attention on nurturing future-ready graduates. It has been great working with our students, to develop the breadth and depth of expertise, the adaptive social and thinking skills, and the resilience that the changing economy and society require and value.

This is well exemplified by the graduates represented at today's main Commencement ceremony.

For Yale-NUS College, this is a historic milestone as we celebrate our first graduating class. We are immensely proud of our pioneering students who have helped us develop a unique model of liberal arts education that investigates complex issues from both global and Asian perspectives. I am confident that Yale-NUS graduates will bring the fresh insights and creativity that would be valued by society and the economy.



1st cohort, Yale-NUS College

The School of Computing had created novel academic pathways, many of which involve entrepreneurship or industry engagement. Admission into the School has become extremely competitive; and last year, its graduates recorded the largest salary jumps among fresh graduates in Singapore.



NUS School of Computing

The NUS Business School had also remodeled its courses, and introduced leadership core and industry practicums as graduation requirements. Our Business graduates are highly sought after because they combine analytical rigour with an understanding of the needs of industry. The School has recently increased its emphasis on Business Analytics, which should further position our graduates well for the future.



NUS Business School

It is vital that our students graduate with the skills, knowledge and abilities to do well in their chosen careers.

Beyond these, however, there are two critical areas which I hope NUS graduates will continually cultivate.

First, to grow a mindset which looks with optimism to the possibilities of the future and is not deterred by obstacles along the way;

Second, to contribute in service, and have a positive impact on society.

The best way to explain what I mean, is to refer to our two Honorary Graduands who are excellent exemplars in this regard. Shortly, we will hear more about their extraordinary achievements. Here, I will just say a few words about what makes them so remarkable, as individuals and as leaders.

Professor Klaus Schwab is a pioneering global thought leader and shaper, most recognised for establishing the World Economic Forum. Today, the Forum is one of the most important venues where top government, corporate, academic and societal

leaders from across the world, gather to exchange ideas, and collaborate to address major global developments and issues.

Amongst his many sterling qualities, I find three most impressive.

First, he has an unshakeable optimism for the future. The Forum's agenda encompasses very daunting and complex issues, yet Prof Schwab approaches them with an intellectual fearlessness, as well as hope for the future, that is truly inspiring.

Second, he is constantly learning and re-learning, anticipating and reinventing.

For example, he is today one of the most influential thought-leaders on the "Fourth Industrial Revolution"¹. While he stresses the immense potential of these advances, he has also brought much fresh thinking, and launched major initiatives to develop frameworks to help ensure that every level of society will share in its benefits.

Third, he is not just a thinker but a man of action.

He has shown that by galvanising multi-stakeholder engagement, we can find solutions to even the most complex challenges. He has also been a powerful advocate for the important role that leaders² in government, corporate and civil sectors can play to build inclusive growth and long-term sustainability.

Turning to our second Honorary Graduand, Mr Gerard Ee is well-known to Singaporeans as Mr Charity.

He has indeed given a lifetime of devoted service to charitable causes, but he has also contributed greatly in broader service to Singapore and to society.

All of us can learn much from the inspiring example of Mr Gerard Ee.

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/>

² <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/10/four-leadership-principles-for-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/>

He has a deep compassion for the less advantaged in society and a fierce commitment to work for their benefit.

Despite a busy career as an accountant, he served for over 3 decades in many organisations that advanced the well-being and care of the less fortunate. He is widely admired as a corporate and community leader with a true spirit of humility and empathy, a man with a big heart.

He is also a person of great integrity and hence someone who is uniformly respected and trusted.

It is because of this that he has been asked to take on some of the most challenging public roles in Singapore including the Chairmanship of the Public Transport Council and the Ministerial Salary Review Committee.

What is perhaps most noteworthy is his truly remarkable sense of public duty.

In 2005, Mr Ee stepped up to the role of Chairman of the National Kidney Foundation, in the aftermath of the scandal that had engulfed it then. This revealed the depth of his sense of public duty and community spirit. On his motivation for taking this on, despite the intense public controversy and the toll the work was having on himself personally, he said,

“I had to take on the role because of the patients. The work had to go on.”³

Our Honorary Graduands are therefore embodiments of selfless contribution to society, and of proactive optimism and hope for the future.

These have led them to a lifetime of distinguished contribution and impact, in service of Singapore and the global community.

³ The Straits Times, “Mr Charity spends his life helping others”, 9 Aug 2007

I would like to close by coming back to the topic of signposts.

Perhaps the signposts I have enjoyed most, are the bright yellow ones on the winding mountain roads of Northern India.

A few are obviously designed by men, like this one that says:

“Don’t nag him, let him drive”.

Some are philosophical, like this one:

“Life is a journey, Complete it”.

But the one I like best is this:

“Impossible will take time, Difficult will be done immediately”

To all our graduates, as you bring your skills, talent and energy to the world, I hope you will take inspiration from our two Honorary Graduands – that you will step into your future with the same spirit of optimism and contribution, with resolve, resourcefulness and resilience, and make your own distinctive mark - for yourself and your loved ones; for Singapore and the world.

Once again, my warmest congratulations and best wishes for the future! Thank you.