



Commencement Ceremony C9

Guest Speaker: Ms Christina Lim Seow Ling

Good evening Mr Phillip Tan, NUS Board of Trustees member; Distinguished Guests; Graduands and Parents; Ladies and Gentlemen

I am indeed honoured to be invited to address you tonight. 34 years ago, I was sitting right where you are tonight! What's my journey like the past 34 years?

With God's blessings, I experienced a fair amount of success, learnt from many failures and lived a good life. Today, I can say that I have everything that I wished for. Was it smooth sailing? Far from it but I survived.

I would like to congratulate each and every one of you for your achievement and congratulations to your Parents and Guardians as well. You have done a great job giving your children all the moral support, financial support and unconditional love. Graduands, whether you scored very well or below your expectation, you made it and that is all that matters. How successful you are in the future, whether you become a retail pharmacist, hospital pharmacist, CEO of Hospitals, owner of Pharmacies, CEO of Pharmaceutical Companies, Chief Pharmacist, Minister of Health, Chief Statistician, Researcher, Entrepreneur, depends on what you do from today. You have the potential to achieve anything you set your heart to do. NUS is the world's top 12 university in 2015. QS World University ranking ranked NUS at top 9 university for Pharmacy and Pharmacology, higher than Yale and John Hopkins University! NUS is ranked top university in Asia for Pharmacy and Pharmacology. For Statistics & Operational Research, NUS was ranked world's top 8 university and top university in Asia! You should feel very proud of yourselves!

When I graduated in 1982, I did not imagine myself to be an entrepreneur, much less the owner of 2 well-known brands, one developed from scratch and proudly bearing the flag of a Singapore brand. I was an enthusiastic pharmacist, proud to be a professional and I wanted to make a difference.

During a career talk, I was so inspired by Mrs Pauline Ong, then General Manager of Guardian Pharmacy. She inspired me about what difference pharmacists can make at the retail pharmacy in primary health support. So I joined Guardian Pharmacy as a pupil pharmacist with a meagre basic monthly salary of \$750. I am thankful for the opportunity to start my career there. I worked very hard, giving my best to whatever tasks given to me. Being the pupil pharmacist who never say no to her boss, I landed up with a project to set up the central warehouse for Guardian Pharmacy. With that project, I was the only pair of hands to help my boss entertain Sales and Marketing Managers on weekly promotions. My interest for marketing grew and when I was offered a position as Marketing Executive in Diethelm (now called DKSH), I accepted the challenge. It was really tough at the beginning because I had to supervise 15 sales reps and oversee 13 pharmaceutical principals. Some sales reps were older than my father then! I will not share the details tonight although they were very fun, exciting yet coupled with many sleepless nights. (Otherwise we will be here all night! I was headhunted for all my subsequent jobs and the last job I held in Singapore was the position of General Manager of a pharmaceutical distributor that came with a car and a handsome salary.

Some of you may already know what you want to pursue in your career. Others may not have any idea where your degree is going to lead you to. One pharmacist I know started out as retail pharmacist and become CEO of a large public hospital, while another started out as hospital pharmacist and become Group CEO of a healthcare cluster in Singapore. Some started out as salesmen for pharmaceutical companies and later become owners of large pharmaceutical distributors and/or wholesalers. There are also those who never practised as pharmacists but joined the consumer sector, one of whom became CEO of Health Promotion Board. One of my classmates graduated from Pharmacy, but went on to pursue a career in HR and is now the Chief People Officer of CrimsonLogic, overseeing the full spectrum in planning and implementing people strategies for the group globally. Of course there are other pharmacists happily settled in their jobs as community pharmacists, hospital pharmacists, buyers, sales managers, marketing managers and regulatory officers. One of my classmates went on to study post graduate medicine and became a doctor!

For Statistics and Applied Probability graduands, some of your alumni are VPs and Directors of global banks, Director in the Ministry of Trade & Industry, Heads of Research companies for scientific research, clinical trials, financial institutions and pharmaceutical companies. Many play very important roles in research, clinical trials, data analysis and data collection for the government. The choice is yours.

The training you get at NUS not only equip you with knowledge for related jobs and careers but also trained you to think and solve problems in very systematic and effective ways.

Allow me to share some things I learnt in my journey:

1. Forge ahead

Imagine your life as a journey along a traveller. As you travel down this traveller, some windows will open and you can take whatever is there. If you take too long to decide, the window may close. Some look back with regret and miss out on new windows opening up with better goodies only to regret again. There are many windows opening ahead. If you miss one, just move on. Do not dwell too long in what you've missed. Learn to move on. You have at least another 40 years ahead of you to work on your career. Set a goal. Have the courage to dream and forge ahead.

2. Passion

Seek your passion in your work. You can develop the passion in your job, if you can't, find a new job. Don't work because of money. You need the energy to sustain you for the long haul. Passion gives you that energy to complete your marathon. Money is good but it can burn you out and you could suffer from all sorts of ailments. Passion doesn't do that to you.

A family business brought me to Silicon Valley. During weekends in the US, I would visit shopping malls checking out the pharmacies and health food stores. I chanced upon glucosamine. I brought some home for my mother who had osteoarthritis. She was given analgesics and anti-inflammatories which caused her gastritis. Another doctor gave her intra-articular injection of steroids and pain killers which worked only initially. With glucosamine her condition improved within a month. That got me really excited! I read up on osteoarthritis and researches done with glucosamine and various glycosaminoglycans. I saw an old uncle limping between the tables he was cleaning at Marine Parade hawker centre. It struck me that if I can bring in glucosamine at an affordable price, people like him can continue to work. This drove me to start Ocean Health in California and Singapore. I had to fight with the Ministry of Health for almost two years to get glucosamine sulphate approved to be sold in Singapore. That was the first product I developed for my mother. After that, I formulated a high dose Ginkgo Biloba to improve my mom's memory. Then she had trouble with her eye sight in the evenings and our Nutrition for Eye was born. Before long, I developed a line of effective supplements. It was my mother who provided the impetus for me to develop new products to ease chronic ailments of senior folks. Her high cholesterol started my research on Omega 3 Fish Oil. I found it can help clean up blood vessels. I wanted her to have the best, which led to Ocean Health Omega 3, now the best-selling Omega 3 in Singapore, prescribed by even the doctors at National Heart Centre!

What about tough times? 2003 was unforgettable. There was SARS. You were probably too young to remember but your parents will. SARS stopped the retail trade for many months. Hospitals, clinics and pharmacies were deserted and one part of our business crashed. Because of SARS, our vitamin C flew off the shelves and we increased our order with our suppliers. We had to pay cash because it was contract manufactured for our brand. Just before the goods arrived, news broke that our Australian contract manufacturer was ordered by TGA to make a worldwide recall for any and all products manufactured by them that year. Only 5 of our products came from them but retailers panicked and returned everything. We had to write off all the returned goods. That year, we almost went bankrupt. I wanted to give up. I spoke with my daughter who was 7 years old then. When I told her I was giving up the business and she understood. That night, she told me she wished I could keep the business because she wanted it. My heart was broken. I spoke with my mother. She encouraged me to mortgage the family house to save the company. I was so scared that I would lose the family house. She told me she had confidence that I could build up again. I took my mother's advice and the rest is history. Passion drove me to clear obstacles in my path. I gave up whatever I needed to give up to revive the company. The love and support I received from everybody, from my customers to my employees was overwhelming. Passion can give you unlimited energy.

3. Diligence

The harder you work, the luckier you get! Ask all successful people and they will tell you that they work very hard. Success never happens overnight nor does it fall from the sky.

4. Perseverance and Courage

It is important to persevere in whatever you believe in. There is no perfect nor smooth road. You cannot give up at the first road block. There will be mistakes. Learn from them but never give up your goal. Keep moving forward, try things you have never tried before to get a new set of results. Ask for help whenever you hit a wall. When I ran into financial trouble in 2003, I had no money to pay for rental of our facility. The landlord's accountant asked me to speak with his big boss. I was embarrassed but did it anyway. I told him why and how I got into trouble and how I planned to turn around in 6 months. To my pleasant surprise, he told his accountant to give me 6 months grace period.

5. Humility and gratitude

Success doesn't last forever. Build and nurture your success but stay humble. When you're arrogant, people will stop helping you. To succeed, you need team work. Humility carries you a long way in team work. Every single part of an engine is essential to get the engine moving. Don't forget to acknowledge

team members for their contribution. During my 2003 encounter, my employees supported, believed and assured me. They even waited till I could pay them their bonus late. Every little support counts.

6. Integrity

Never sacrifice your integrity for short term success. Trust must be earned. Honour your words even if it hurts you. Your integrity will pay off some day. I asked for help in 2003. People who helped me trusted my integrity. Do not underestimate the power of unity. Many small efforts combined will produce a force that a giant cannot conquer. When we had the product recall, we had customers who had opened and unopened bottles of supplements and wanted to return them. We asked that they stick with us, promising them 2 bottles of fresh stocks when the goods arrive. Many trusted us and we delivered. With that, we earned more trust from them and their family and friends. Our business grew even more rapidly after that incident.

7. Family First

Honour and respect your family who sacrificed many things for you to achieve what you have today. At his death bed, Steve Jobs said "God gave us the senses to let us feel the love in everyone's heart, not the illusions brought about by wealth. The wealth I have won in my life I cannot bring with me. What I can bring is only the memories precipitated by love. That's the true riches which will follow you, accompany you, giving you strength and light to go on."

In my darkest moments of my career, my family gave me the strength to carry on, that gave me strength. I had a choice: to expand the business internationally or stay close to home. I chose the latter. I would not spend any weekend away for business. I spent time to chat and pray with my daughter every night before she sleeps. Ocean Health did not go international; in exchange I now have a very close relationship with my daughter who treats me as her friend. She is 20 years old this year, studying in Perth and face time with me almost every night. This is a joy that no amount of money can buy.

8. Choose to be Happy

Happiness is a choice we can make, whether at home or at work. Do not make money a measurement of your success. It is very difficult to remain happy if money is your goal because the goal post changes every day. I choose to measure my success by the number of lives I touched positively with whatever I do and prefer to create smiles and laughter because it is easier to achieve.

9. Choose to be Healthy

Good health cannot be bought with money. When you earn enough money, you need good health to enjoy it! So work hard and give yourself regular breaks to recharge. Take good care of your body. You need it to last you a life time.

Graduating class of 2016, you are the thinkers and problem solvers of the future! Forge ahead with passion, work hard, persevere with courage, humility, gratitude and integrity. Open a bank account of happiness, honour your family and stay healthy!

Congratulations again and I wish you success in your future!