

GRADUATION SPEECH AT TEMASEK POLYTECHNIC 2010

Thank you.

I'm deeply honored to be here, as your Guest of Honor on this important milestone in your lives. I never went to a University or a Polytechnic, and to quote Steve Job, "This is the closest I'll ever get to a graduation".

When I was invited to be your Guest of Honor, the first question I asked myself was, what could I possibly say that hasn't already been said. Besides, hearing a speech today is probably the last thing on your minds. So please bear with me.

After much deliberation, and consultation with friends, I'm going to talk about something I'm truly familiar with.

I'm going to talk about myself.

It all began at age six, the year my parents discovered I had a talent. They discovered that I could draw with the confidence of a master. You see art, like music is a gift. You either have it or you don't. Some of us are fortunate to be born with these gifts, while others have to rely on perseverance and hard work to succeed.

I figured that if I have the desire to make the most of what was given to me I would have a head start. It's like being on the starting grid in Formula One racing.

As luck would have it, God did not equip me with a head for academic achievements. I once harboured the thought of becoming an architect, but discovered that mathematics was one of the criteria for getting into architecture school. I was hopeless at math, and still am.

Fortunately, when I finished my secondary education, my dad kept his word to send me to Art School, and he sent me to Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. At that time, Nanyang was exclusively a Fine Arts college. I did nothing but draw, paint and sketch everyday. I led a bohemian existence. It was art and rock and roll.

Eventually, all good things had to come to an end, and I got drafted into the army to serve my beloved country.

It turned out that the army wasn't a total waste of time. Among the many things I learnt was that a University education doesn't always make you a better leader; and the best leaders are those who work their way up through the ranks.

When I finished my National Service, it dawned on me that I had to make a living. My Dad was retiring and I had to support myself. So, armed with a few oil paintings and charcoal sketches, I went about looking for a job as a Commercial Artist, a term used to describe Visualisers and Art Directors in those days. Everywhere I went, I was told that my qualifications were not relevant to the job I was required to perform.

Eventually, a gentleman who I showed my paintings to, advised me to enroll in an Advertising Art course at Baharuddin Vocational Institute.

The government in those days did not value right brain thinkers. There weren't any colleges, polytechnics or universities teaching Design and Visual Arts.

To study Graphic Design, I had three choices - England, Canada or The United States of America; none of which was feasible since my parents weren't wealthy and it would have blown their life savings just to pay for my tuition. So, for my two years effort at Baharuddin, I was finally rewarded with a Trade Certificate. Design and Advertising wasn't a profession but a trade in those days. And to add salt to injury I had to don a school uniform and attend a flag raising ceremony every morning.

But I learnt one thing at Baharuddin. That is, if I wanted something real bad in life, I have to swallow my pride and persevere. After all, if I could make it through National Service, what's two more years in a school uniform.

Today, there are many polytechnics and colleges teaching Art and Design. There is even a secondary school devoted to the arts.

But talent and opportunities alone cannot guarantee success. To borrow a phrase more commonly associated with Science and Technology, "Necessity is the Mother of Invention". You see, great things come about in dire situations. When I have nothing but a blank sheet of paper in front of me, and time isn't on my side, I have only two choices, seek help or try harder.

Upon leaving Baharuddin, my girlfriend's father, who became my father-in-law, got me a job at his friend's Ad Agency. For \$300 a month, I was expected to be an FA Artist, a Visualiser

and an Art Director. The Vocational Institute did not prepare me for the challenges of life in an Ad agency. But I learnt all I could learn in three years, and joined Ogilvy and Mather, a large multi-national Ad firm. There, I picked up writing and some presentation skills. When I became a senior Art Director, I got to mentor interns and juniors and made many friends along the way.

One day when I was working at Y&R, I received a call from one of the former trainee Account Executives at Ogilvy. He had become a Marketing Director of Citibank. He said, "Pat, guess what? We're going to be working together again". Due to a global re-alignment, the account had moved to Y&R from JWT and we had inherited this huge business overnight.

During the time we had this business, we produced many great ads for this client, which I attributed to a great client-agency relationship. Years later, during a casual conversation over dinner, he confessed to me that the reason he loved working with me was because I treated him well when he was a trainee at Ogilvy.

That, was the most important lesson I learnt till this day. What goes around comes around. My employee today can become my employer or client tomorrow. Bearing this in mind, I'm always mindful to treat people with respect, integrity and fairness.

I mentioned earlier that I didn't graduate from a Polytechnic or a University. In the University of Life there is no graduation. And in the University of Life, the learning never stops.

Take sports for example. Football is a game I have been playing since school days. One of the lessons it taught me was that I am only as good as my teammates. An Ad Campaign requires many people with different skill sets to put together, and its success is determined by how well each of these individuals execute his or her job. The campaign fails if one of them fails.

The other lesson it taught me was about dealing with defeat. Like all sports, it has taught me to pick up the pieces when the chips are down and to come back a stronger person.

Perhaps the most important thing I gained from playing football is connecting with the target audience. No other sport is played and watched by so many. Not the people who join country clubs, drive Lamborghinis or feature constantly in lifestyle magazines, but your

average regular guy next door, who works 9 to 5, takes the train home and watches free to air channel TV.

After a game, we would sit down for a drink and indulge in some mindless conversations, usually with the help of a social lubricant, more commonly known as beer. These sessions are actually forums for everyone to discuss their needs and wants. In order to help me think out of the box, I need to constantly take in what life has to offer.

If I am not playing football, I shall be listening to music, watching a movie or reading a book. Exposure is the key ingredient to creation, whether I am writing an ad, art directing a poster, or shooting a TV commercial.

The good news for you all is that you have your whole life ahead of you, and with an open mind and a Macintosh, the possibilities are endless.

They say that Success is the journey not the destination. When you graduate today and embark on your journey in the University of Life, you may encounter many trials and tribulations. But if you stay steadfast to the course and persevere, help will come your way, because remember, if you have been good to others, others will be good to you.

So dear graduates, God has given you the talent, the government has provided you the opportunities. And I have just told you my life story. Now it's all up to you.

I wish you God speed and thank you for listening.