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LIFESTYLE WORLD - DOWNTOWN EAST, PASIR RIS**

**FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE NEW MILLENIUM**

Dr Law Song Seng, Director and CEO of ITE

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. I am very happy to be here with you today.

**YOU ARE IN THE RIGHT PLACE**

2 Let me start by sharing something on surfing. I mean real surfing at sea, not surfing the Internet. I don't surf myself but am told that waves usually come in sets of three. The third wave is the biggest and the best. It's the one with the most energy and power. To catch it, you have to be in the right place at the right time and take advantage of the opportunity as it presents itself. As you see it on the horizon, you paddle to the point of pickup. Then, as it surges towards the beach, you use all the arm and shoulder power you can muster to thrust yourself forward. You can't hold back. You have to go for it with all your skill and strength. Your reward is the thrill of coasting up and down the swell and enjoying a smooth ride.

3 Some of you are more familiar with football. Scoring a goal at the end of a surging run is no different. Some of you, like me, have experienced that feeling. Everything must be just right. You must see the opportunity coming, run to open space, call for the ball, your first touch must be just right as the ball is played to you, beat the defender, look up briefly to see where the goalkeeper is and either drive, lob or tap the ball into the net. Your reward is to see the net bulge as the ball hits the net.

4 Achieving something in life is not unlike riding a wave or scoring a goal. We must be in the right place at the right time, spotting an opportunity and taking it well. But behind every exuberant ride and spectacular goal are lots of hard work, patient, and sometimes tedious, practice and training.

5 Well, let me share a piece of good news with you: You are in the right place at the right time, practising and honing your skills to ride your wave and score your goal in life. You probably know by now that Government is undertaking a revamp of ITE education. There will be brand new state of the art regional campuses. The curriculum will be further refined so that ITE students will have a more rounded education to complement the useful skills you are taught. There will be even closer collaboration with industry. Recently, there was media publicity on how well ITE graduates have fared upon graduation. All these affirm Singapore's total approach to

education where all our young people, in their various streams, can do well relative to their potential and temperament. The key is matching their different talents and inclinations with the excellent training opportunities available, in other words, providing the best opportunities for everyone to excel in his or her own field. Remember, no one is second-grade unless he himself or she herself feels he or she is so.

### **KEY FEATURES OF THE NEW MILLENIUM**

6 In this new millennium, the global economic landscape has changed. The pace of CHANGE has been tremendous. For example, TECHNOLOGY has become a critical new factor in deriving competitive advantages of scale. Internet e-commerce has made the international market more accessible to all. Information on a wide range of topics is now accessible at the click of a button. Cable Television links our hearts instantly with those suffering elsewhere, as happened in the US last week when the country was subject to terrorist attacks. Financial markets worldwide react as instantly. The world has become interconnected. Many phenomena now have a global dimension, including environmental protection, cross-border crimes, flow of migrant people and terrorism. Besides technology, there has also been realisation worldwide that human resource is also a key requirement for development. In short, at the turn of this millennium, technology, knowledge and human capital have emerged as key factors to economic success.

7            In this new economy which is knowledge-driven, anyone who succeeds in creating and sustaining VALUE can make it big. "Knowledge-driven" does not just mean having paper qualifications or book knowledge. Much more than that, a core requirement is to embrace an INNOVATIVE MINDSET; a continuous thinking process to do the right things, in the best, and sometimes novel, way. That requires an inquisitive, curious mind. It requires a mind that understands the potential of technology in a given field. That requires a mind that always wants to learn ie a lifelong learning mindset. Thus, in Singapore, we have embraced LIFE-LONG LEARNING as a national lifestyle. We must keep on learning because the new millennium landscape is one that is ever changing, where knowledge can become obsolete. The new millennium challenge is for us to remain mentally NIMBLE, as individuals and as a people. This has always been government's exhortation to Singaporeans. But this imperative has become more real, more pressing, more urgent now than ever before because the future has become less predictable. Being more uncertain, there portends more danger. Yet, an uncertain future also means that there can be greater possibilities and opportunities out there that we may not quite yet be aware of. There is therefore scope for us to adapt and innovate as we go along. That is why every Singaporean must put shoulders to the wheels and do his or her best.

## **OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND**

8        Size is no longer a hindrance to growth. We may be only a tiny red dot on the map. But there are many opportunities for everyone to contribute to the value-chain, and to offer unique products and services, either locally or globally. The key is to have a winning idea, the right skill and a "I can do it" attitude. This is where ITE graduates, with their practical, hands-on and industry-oriented training, can make a special contribution to the value chain.

9        How can a tiny place like Singapore compete with giant economies like the United States and Japan? Well, here's food for thought. Nokia comes from Finland - a country with a comparable population, income and standard of living as Singapore and Hong Kong. Look how Nokia has swept the world! Besides, wasn't it Singapore's Creative Technologies that got the world hooked on PC soundcards and multi-media.

10       With a little imagination and readiness to try new things, everything is possible. Macdonalds was a pioneer in Singapore's early fast-food scene. It continues to innovate, sometimes going against conventional wisdom. For example, its employment of senior citizens may not appeal to customers who prefer a sweet young pretty face to serve them, but it also touched many a customers'

heartstring and strengthened its corporate image. The conveyor-belt style of serving food in some Japanese restaurants attained several purposes all at once. It cut down staff, made eating more interactive and fun for friends and family and provided customers with a wide choice of food literally at his fingertips. Also, look at Dell Computer's "just-in-time" strategy. Its focused vision made it the world's leading direct computer systems company, with approximately 38,300 employees in 34 countries around the globe. One bold concept - direct customer contact - has made Dell one of the most successful companies of the 1990s. By directly delivering PCs custom-built to specific customer orders, Dell could most effectively and efficiently understand and respond to customer needs.

11 These real-life examples show that it can be done. But it would require an imaginative mind, a keen sense of what is possible and a readiness to try new ways of doing things. These ingredients mark not only successful businessmen and businesses but everything that we do in life. Many of you can relate easily with sports. If Fosbury had not tried what must have appeared to be quite crazy and certainly unorthodox at that time, - jumping backwards - we would probably still be looking at 7 ft or thereabouts for the world high jump record. What about the backhand serve for badminton doubles which almost every world class player now uses? The first time it was used, many people must have been sceptical whether it would be more effective than the orthodox forehand serve. The same goes for the arts where young musicians like Vanessa Mae, who has a Singaporean mother, has

revolutionized the way the violin can be played, in a way that is especially appealing to younger listeners.

### **MESSAGE TO THE ITE STUDENTS: 5 PS**

12 As you prepare to face the challenges of the new millennium, there are 5 things you should remember. These 5 Ps will help you achieve your dreams: they have mine.

13 **The first is Potential** - Know your personal strengths and weaknesses. Focus on what you CAN do, not on what you cannot. For me, that meant switching from hurdling to football. Focus on what's ahead of you (your future). Do not let what you see in your rear-view mirror (your past, your problems) distract you from the tasks ahead. Yes, you must understand the past, especially past failures and setbacks. But these should strengthen your resolve to face future challenges, not pull you down. I understand that under the ITE Breakthrough Plan, the first strategy is to "maximise the potential of every student". Everyone of you is unique. Remember, everyone can contribute. Yes, everyone matters. So stretch yourself. Get out of your comfort zone. I urge you to make use of all available opportunities in ITE to maximise and develop your potential. Stretch yourselves, not just academically but all-round - general knowledge, business know-how and awareness of what's happening around you in the region and the world. Don't forget: success is what you make of it. We can be a successful father, husband or

wife because we provide for and bring out the best in our children and spouse. We can be a successful community service volunteer because our efforts touch lives. The thing is to make a mark in your chosen field. Hence, in football, for example, we've got many former ITE students who have made their mark in life and contributed to Singapore in their special way. These include Fandi Ahmad, Sundramoorthy, Nazri Nasir and Indra Sahdan. Even in the arts, there are ITE graduates who have made a mark. One example is Ramesh Mayyapan, a deaf-mute, who, disabilities notwithstanding, is pursuing a BA degree in Liverpool Institute of the Arts under a NAC-Shell Scholarship. There are also many successful ITE graduates in business. I will highlight three afterwards.

14 **The second P stands for Possibilities** - keep a positive outlook, be enthusiastic and upbeat on the prospects of success. Be passionate about what you can achieve. You must believe in yourself! Nothing is sadder than non-achievement through self-fulfilling prophecy. *Remember - "If you think you can, you can. If you think you can't, you can't."* It's important to have beliefs that give you hope and energy, not beliefs that frighten you. Make the possible probable, and the probable, a reality. Grab opportunities that come your way and make the best of them. They may never come by again. With the world around us changing so rapidly, what may seem impossible a few years ago can become a reality. Who would think it possible that both Manchester United and Liverpool would play in Singapore within 2 weeks of each other! But it happened! Who

would have thought it possible in the bleak days in the 1960's that Singapore would become what it is today? But it happened because the pioneer generation of Singaporeans and their leaders dared to dream big and worked hard to achieve that dream.

15 **The third P is Persistence - Success** is 99% perspiration and 1 % inspiration. What you get out of a venture is what you put in. There is no quick fix or over-night success. Only a very few people win a lottery in their lifetime. Remember the story of Colonel Sanders - the homeless, penniless 65-year-old gentleman who spent two years driving across America in his rusty old car, in search of a buyer for his chicken recipe. Do you know how many times he was rejected before someone finally said, "Yes! I'll buy your recipe." He withstood the disappointment of hearing the word "No" more than 1,000 times. But today, thanks to his persistence, we can get to enjoy finger-licking good KFC. Michael Owen is now the toast of England. His transfer value has increased manifolds after his superlative performances for England, particularly in the match against Germany. But, those of you who follow English Premier League will know that he had a tough time over the previous 2 seasons in Liverpool when he was plagued by injuries, at which time the manager, Houllier, also bought several foreign attacking players. If Owen succumbed to the competition and allowed self-doubt to get the better of him, he would not be where he is today. He persisted in his calling as a professional footballer and is reaping the rewards today.

16 **Persistence must be accompanied by Pace** - maintain consistent and sustained efforts in your journey to success. Take time to chill out, relax and recharge your batteries. Do not be caught in a mad rush, and lose your bearing. Build stamina, and make steady progress. Don't forget, life is a marathon, not a sprint. In a marathon, as in life, the scenery along the route will change- there will be pleasant and not so pleasant stretches; there will also be uphill as well as downhill slopes requiring different techniques of running; there will be moments of pain as well as the inspirational second-wind; indeed, there will be moments when the runners want to give up. Competitors change lead all the time. A fellow team-mate running alongside you, or at least in the same pack of runners, can make a world of difference, to push you along. The eventual winner would have paced himself, striding steadily all the way, with an eye always directed at the finishing point. So life is like that with its ups and downs. Ultimately, it is not how you begin the race of life that matters, but how well you end it.

17 **Finally, I want to stress the importance of Place** - success is meaningless unless you have people to share it with. Some say it can be lonely at the top. But that often happens because in making one's way to the top, one ignores friends and other people. Friends are important. Good friends with positive values can act as ballast. Everyone will have moments when he is down. That is when friends can really make a difference. Appreciate your friends who give positive

encouragement. In the same vein, appreciate Singapore which is our home. Some of you later on will work overseas. As you venture out into the global marketplace, anchor yourself solidly in Singapore, where your memories, family and friends are. Yes, Singapore is really a big family where lives cross all the time. Hence, treat each other with appropriate decorum and respect. Do your part to serve the community and contribute to the wellbeing of others. Here, I am happy to note that many ITE students are involved in community service. For example, ITE students have collaborations with CDCs where they visit less fortunate Singaporeans to do minor home repair jobs. My hope is that you will continue as volunteers even as you immerse yourselves in work later on.

### **SUCCESS STORIES FROM ITE**

18 Many have graduated from the ITE. You are part of history in the making, part of a story that is still unfolding. The actors and actresses are many, but each is a unique individual. Many ITE graduates have succeeded as entrepreneurs in life. These are people who embraced the 5 Ps, in one form or another. Let me just cite 3 examples of ITE graduates who seized the opportunity and made it as entrepreneurs.

19 The first is Mr Roger Gan; his occupation – Professional Automobile cum Diagnostic Engineer, Accident Investigator Reconstructionist, Expert Witness, Arbitrator and Mediator, all rolled into one. Roger is the Principal Engineer of his

company, ROG Associates. In 1965, Roger joined the former Singapore Vocational Institute (now ITE Balestier) where he studied NTC-2 Automotive Technology. He later worked in several jobs in the automotive industry as a mechanic, chargehand, foreman, and workshop executive after NS. He started his own automobile consultancy company because he discovered that very few surveyors had an Automotive Engineering background. He spotted the possibilities before him. He knew he could provide a unique service because he had a winning idea and the right skill. His motto: "*Keep learning to earn a living*" and not "*Keep working to earn a living*".

20 Success for the next ITE graduate did not come easy. Mr Mohd Johar Kasimi had to juggle 2 jobs before his dream became a reality. He started with a National Technical Certificate Grade 3 (NTC-3). He then went on to obtain the NTC-2 in Tool Making, through a part-time course, while working as a Toolmaker. After almost 10 years with the company, he decided to go into business, while holding on to his day job. The next 6 months were very tough. In the day, he continued with his job as a Tool Maker for financial reasons. After office hours, he toiled to put his new company in place with his brother. Most days, they would stay behind to work till the wee hours of the morning. Finally, their persistence and hard work paid off - Daiya TEQ Precision Engineering Services was launched.

21 The final example is Mr Phua Swee Hoe. Instead of working to help support the family after his secondary education, as his mother had wished, Swee Hoe chose the ITE path. After his NTC-3 course and an apprenticeship programme, he joined first Hewlett Packard, and then a plastic mould-making company. This experience widened his horizon personally and professionally. He then decided to chase his entrepreneurial dream. Drawing on his knowledge and experience, he set up a mould-making company with a partner. In 1987, he struck out on his own. Mold Technic Pte Ltd was born, now known as Inzign. Like Swee Hoe, you can also make it one day. All you need, in the words of Swee Hoe, are: first, technical skills and knowledge; second, good relations with people around you; and finally, a "dare to do" attitude.

## **CLOSING**

22 Let me now close. Over the next three days, you will discuss issues close to your heart. These are issues you will face as you tackle the many challenges of this new millennium. Think of yourselves as the pilot of your aircraft. You decide whether your plane goes up, or down. Make the most of your Potential, believe in the Possibilities, Persist in the face of discouragement, Pace yourself, and think of Singapore where your family and friends are as your Place under the sun. With these five points marking your compass, I am sure you will navigate your aircraft successfully through any turbulence ahead.

23 As I have said, you can hold your head high as an ITE graduate. Please pass on this message to all your classmates. In the Singapore of this new millennium, you will have more space to express your individuality; to express your special talents. So, please make use of all the opportunities you now have at the ITE to imbibe not only useful technical skills and knowledge, but also nurture key social skills such as the ability to communicate, to empathise and interact with people. Read the newspapers and take an interest in events in the region and the world. Take part and support sports and arts events. But do all these in the context of a team, a member of the ITE family, indeed of the Singapore family. Embrace a “one for all, and all for one” mindset.

24 I wish you a fruitful time at this Seminar!