

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR HO KAH LEONG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (EDUCATION), AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE PRODUCTIVITY MONTH CAMPAIGN OF THE NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE AT THE LECTURE THEATRE 3, NTI CAMPUS ON MONDAY 1 NOV 82 AT 2.30 P.M.

It is a great pleasure for me to speak to you on the opening of your productivity month. The standard of living and well-being of Singaporeans, and in fact of the whole human race, is dependent on productivity. Productivity should be the prime objective of everybody, be he an administrator, a businessman, a self-employed person, a varsity don, an undergraduate or even a politician. The politicians in addition are given the tremendous task not only of formulating policies and programmes to increase the productivity of the whole nation but also of ensuring that productivity gains are shared equitably amongst the whole workforce.

Some people may define productivity as the ratio of output over input. Some may take it one step further and define it as "the amount of wealth created per worker". But on closer examination, one cannot really separate "productivity" from "the share of productivity gains" in the pursuit of higher productivity. These are the two facets of productivity; in fact, the two sides of the productivity coin. No successful organisation or leader can afford to overlook for long the one or the other side of the sharing of productivity gains. Productivity therefore includes two basic activities - the creation of wealth and the sharing of wealth created.

It is widely acknowledged that central to the success of the processes of creating wealth and of sharing wealth, is good human relations and teamwork. What constitutes good human relations and teamwork? Basically it involves respectful of other's rights.

and fairness to others. It sounds simple. Yes. Newton's Three Laws are said with less than one hundred words. Yet all classical mechanics, no matter how complicated and complex, are solved by the application of the Three Laws.

When the promotion of one staff member triggers the resignation or resentment of another, you know that either the promotion is unfair or there is refusal on the part of the one who resents, to respect or acknowledge the other's contribution and his rights to be promoted.

When a staff member is sent overseas for training, and, on completion of the training, resigns to join another firm for better pay, then that employee is not playing fair.

Or when a union insists on high pay rises despite heavy losses incurred by the company, you know that the union does not respect the basic rights of the company to remain viable, not to mention profitable.

I have no doubt that you too can cite numerous other examples. I believe we all agree to one thing and that is that there would be no good human relations and teamwork without mutual respect for each other's rights and for fair play.

There are two ways one can ensure that each party's rights are respected and that dealings are fair. One is the regulation of human relations by law and the other by social customs and a built-in value system within ourselves. From time to time, we do lend money or articles to our friends. In most cases, we never say explicitly that the borrower must return what he borrows, let alone have it written down. In human relations this is understood. Yet, if there is a default in such a case and the lender brings the case to the Court, he is unlikely to find redress.

Fortunately, most human interactions operate on the basis of customs and traditions. What one borrows one must return. However, the return of borrowed money, can be enforced by the law courts if proper procedures are observed. Parents who have grown old and are unfortunate enough to have unfilial children have no recourse to recover the time, money, sleepless nights and anxieties spent on bringing up these children. Can we legislate to protect them? Yes, it could be done but how to enforce such legislation would be another matter. It would not be possible to ensure that the poor parents would be treated with dignity.

The Government can always legislate for a whole range of problems - from looking after old age parents, relations between neighbours, relations between a citizen and the society. But the question of enforcement comes in. How could one enforce legislation that a citizen must be fair to his country or that a person must make at least a matching contribution to the society from which he has benefitted?

If we were to rely on legislation alone, we may end up with employing all the working population as law enforcement personnel. We know this is impossible. It is with this consideration that the Government has embarked on moral education. By instilling the right values in our people we can reduce the need to increase the amount of legislation.

The law is just like the traffic lights along the road; the fewer the better for productivity. The focal point of secular or non secular moral teaching, should be the inculcation of a positive and constructive value system within ourselves.

A culture which permits progress is to destroy its value system instead of building on it is a culture which destroys itself. We are on the threshold of entering into a new era of human civilization. We must develop a whole range of social customs and a value system that will prepare us for entry into the new era. I have no doubt that your scientific and technological competence will contribute to Singapore's progress. But at the same time, I hope you will also help to strengthen our value system. Then the progress of Singapore will be truly assured.

I now have much pleasure in declaring the Productivity Month open.
