It gives me great pleasure to join you this morning for this happy occasion. Let me first congratulate you on your success. You have worked very hard for your diploma, and you certainly deserve a big pat on your shoulder.

You have made the right decision to equip yourself with a good skill. Your skills in visual communication and information technology, product design, and interior architecture and design offer you promising prospects.

Job prospects for our polytechnic graduates have been good. This is because of our strong economy and the tight labour market. 86 per cent of our polytechnic graduates last year got a job within a month. The rest were employed within one to three months. Only less than one per cent took more than three months. This is very good. Our polytechnic graduates are also paid competitive wages, ranging from $1,200 to $1,500 a month.

Prospects for our polytechnic graduates would remain good in the future. Our economy is expected to continue to do well. Economies in East Asia and
Southeast Asia are also performing well. There are plenty of opportunities within and outside Singapore, whether it is in the tourism industry, manufacturing, finance or business. Let us take a look at your prospects with the skills that you have acquired.

Those who are trained in Information Technology, and visual communications can find ample opportunities in Singapore. This is because we have been actively pursuing developments in the field of IT. We see this as a critical niche area in our economic development. We have wired up Singapore to harness IT to strengthen our economic competitiveness. The use of IT is pervasive in Singapore. This opens up a lot of opportunities for you.

Your expertise in visual communications is also a marketable skill. Business competition is increasingly keen. Organisations are looking for more effective ways to project their image or product. Multi-media and Internet are fast becoming household words to achieve this objective. All these developments translate into better opportunities for you.

A diploma in product design is also very useful. Product design has a critical role in our economy. We are emphasising product design development to enhance Singapore's competitiveness on the world market. We are encouraging our entrepreneurs to come up with innovative and creative product designs. This will enhance the marketability of their products. The Swatch watch is an excellent example of how product design can help sell a product. Research in product design is, therefore, crucial. I am happy to note that there is a product design course offered by Temasek Polytechnic. I encourage you to apply what you have learn in this discipline in an innovative and creative manner. Only then can we be successful in establishing a niche for our Singapore products on the global market.
There are also good opportunities for those who take up interior architecture and design. Housing demand will go up. We would have 3.3 million people by the year 2001 if our population grows at 1.2 per cent every year. Singaporeans will also want better quality housing as we become more affluent. We are expanding our building infrastructure to support our economic development. There will be many exciting projects for you. Coming onstream are office buildings, public and private residential apartments, hotels, and art and concert amenities.

Prospects for young Singaporeans will remain bright if we continue to pursue sound economic policies. A key strategy is to continually seek out niche areas and establish ourselves early in these areas. That is why we are actively developing our expertise in information technology, communications and biotechnology. Where our competitors are doing the same thing as us, we must also find better and more efficient ways of doing it.

To support this strategy, Singaporeans must continually upgrade their skills. At the higher level, our education institutions must complement our economic strategy. New courses have to be introduced time and again. Your role as a polytechnic is to produce the expertise needed for new and upcoming industries. At the individual level, Singaporeans must keep on upgrading their skills. The skills that you have today will become inadequate, and even obsolete, as we move into new areas.

Skills also become outdated as a result of rapid technological advances. The speed at which technology changes and replaces old ones is amazing. At the same time, this can threaten our economic survival. If we do not restructure our economy to keep pace with these advances, our economy will go downhill.
Jobs will be lost. Already, labour-intensive and low-skill industries are being relocated outside Singapore. You can see these industries coming up in Batam and Johor. Further away, you see them in China and Vietnam. We cannot compete with them in labour-intensive industries. They have the advantage of cheaper labour costs.

Singaporeans must continually upgrade their skills or they risk losing their job. You may be out of the polytechnic, but the learning process goes on. I encourage you to take skills upgrading seriously. It not only means a brighter future for you, but importantly, it will also ensure our economic survival.

Besides the technical skills you have, it is also important for you to acquire a few basic “life skills”. These are skills that will help you enhance your job performance and, more importantly, to succeed in the working or business world. I list out three key “life skills” - language skill, personal interaction skill, and networking skill. Let me briefly elaborate.

Language is a basic, but vital tool that enables you to enhance your knowledge, communicate with others and make effective presentations. In a fast-changing world, you have to keep up with changing trends and new developments. An effective way to do this is to read extensively. You will also find it useful to read beyond your field. If you can speak the language of your clients, you would establish rapport easily. Knowing a foreign language is therefore invaluable in our regionalisation effort. In business, your success in clinching a deal will critically depend on how well you present yourself or your product to your client.
Personal interaction skill is important for you to get along with others and to work as a team. You need to develop the social skills to deal with different people and different situations.

The third important “life skill” is networking skill. In today’s competitive environment, you will need to network to gain an edge over your competitors. Networking is beneficial in two ways. One, it can help minimise red tape as there is an element of familiarity and trust with the people you network with. Two, networking has a multiplier effect as your initial contacts will link you up with others in a similar field. This is certainly a more convenient and effective way of establishing linkages.

I encourage you to pick up these “life skills”, as well as other relevant skills to complement what you have acquired in your polytechnic education. You will become a more rounded and, certainly, a more competent person.

On this note, I wish all of you every success as you begin a new chapter in your life.

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