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EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

SPEECH BY DR ONG CHIT CHUNG, PARLIAMENTARY  
SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND HOME AFFAIRS AT THE  
SINGAPORE INSTITUTE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT  
(SIPM) 27TH ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE 1992 ON 23  
OCTOBER 92 @ 7.30 PM AT THE BALLROOM, THE PAN  
PACIFIC HOTEL.

Mr Edward Tan, President of SIPM,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me first thank the Institute for  
inviting my wife and me to your 27th  
Annual Dinner and Dance.

Changing Emphasis of SIPM

2 Twenty-seven years ago, SIPM was  
formed with just 34 members.

It had a modest objective of exchanging

views on labour matters. Today, the Institute has more than 1,400 members. It provides a wide variety of activities, ranging from organising seminars and forums to conducting industrial relations clinics and training courses. SIPM has come a long way. It has firmly established itself as a professional body. Besides representing its members, SIPM has also played an important role in helping its members achieve a high level of professionalism in the field of personnel and human resource management.

**3 What has been the key factor for the rapid increase in your membership?**

In my view, the success factor is the Institute's efforts and active involvement in the training and upgrading of your members. Through training and upgrading, the Institute has helped its members better equip themselves to meet the changing needs of the industries around them. As effective personnel and human resource managers or executives, they are able to play a catalytic role in improving the quality of the workforce in their respective companies.

4 In the early years of its inception, the Institute's activities were mainly confined to information sharing, standard setting and the promotion of personnel management as a career or profession.

It also served as a focal point for personnel practitioners to share experiences and discuss how difficult issues could best be resolved. These have helped to lay the foundation for the Institute to take on a greater role in assisting its members to meet the challenges of rapid industrialisation in the later years.

5 In the 70s and up to the mid 80s, the main focus of the Institute was on training and upgrading.

The most significant of these was the launching of the diploma and certificate courses in Personnel Management. The certification of Personnel Management courses by the Institute was critical in that it set standards for the professionals and encouraged personnel practitioners to undergo formal training and upgrading. This has definitely helped raise productivity and enhance efficiency.

6 To further upgrade the training programmes and meet the needs of changing business conditions and environment, emphasis has been given to the development of human resources by your Institute in recent years.

In line with this emphasis, the diploma and certificate courses in personnel management have been upgraded to include other areas of human resource management. They are now offered as diploma and certificate courses in human resource management.

7 To enhance course content and promote closer labour-management cooperation, the Institute has jointly organised courses with the Singapore Institute of Labour Studies established by the NTUC.

The joint courses with the labour movement are useful in that participants from both unions and management can undergo the same process of training and examine issues from different perspectives. This will help bridge the perception gap between management and unions. Hence, more joint courses should be explored to enable both management

and unions to share and learn from each other. Such a form of interaction will enhance labour- management understanding and forge closer rapport between the two.

### Regional Perspective

8 With the relocation of labour-intensive operations to neighbouring countries and MNCs setting up operational headquarters in Singapore, managers and executives, including human resource professionals, will have to take on regional responsibilities in the field of personnel



management, industrial relations and human resource development.

It will therefore be appropriate for the Institute to consider organising suitable courses which will help your members gain a better understanding of the labour laws, industrial relations systems and human resource conditions in other countries. This will enable them to prepare and adjust themselves to suit foreign conditions.

9 The emphasis on human resource development beyond the traditional boundary of personnel management by

your Institute is a significant move.

With increasing competition and globalisation of businesses, it is often human resources that determine how well a company and indeed a country performs.

**The role of the HR Practitioner in**

**Promoting Productivity**

10 For the message of this year's productivity campaign to take effect, human resource or HR practitioners must recognise that they have an active role in promoting quality and productivity.

11 Too often, the quality efforts of companies do not reach their full potential because the people or culture aspects of the organisation are not well-managed.

Their efforts fail or achieve only mediocre results because of lack of teamwork, insufficient employee involvement, inadequate motivation from management, or simply because the wrong people have been assigned to the job.

12 To help solve these problems, line managers should be able to turn to their Personnel or Human Resource departments.

But, alas, many managers may feel that their HR people are not equipped to help them make the necessary changes towards achieving quality and higher productivity. In fact, a survey conducted by SIPM and NPB in 1990 revealed that there might be some truth to this. The survey found that productivity promotion was amongst the least performed functions by HR practitioners. In many companies, the HR department simply plays the conservative role of administering corporate policies and procedures. Because of this, they miss the opportunity to be catalysts for

change.

13 With the launching of the Productivity  
Month Campaign just round the corner,  
this is an opportune time for HR  
practitioners to consider taking the lead in  
promoting quality and productivity  
improvements.

Let me offer some suggestions on how I  
think HR practitioners can prepare  
themselves and the HR function to  
assume this responsibility.

## How HR Can Promote Productivity

14 The starting point is for the HR practitioner to assert his role as a part of the executive team.

Increasingly, HR practitioners worldwide are recognising the pivotal role that they must play in the organisation. A recent international study of HR managers commissioned by IBM in the U.S., concludes that human resource management is "in the throes of a radical transformation." The reason is that the majority of the 3,000 respondents reported that a new HR function is taking

shape. HRM is being transformed from a specialised stand-alone function to a broad corporate competency in which HR practitioners and line managers build partnerships to gain competitive advantage and achieve overall business goals. To make this happen, HR policies and programmes have to be responsive to market conditions, closely linked to business plans, conceived and implemented jointly by line and HR managers, and focused on quality, customer service, productivity, teamwork and workforce flexibility.

15 To support the organisation's goals, the HR department must develop the full potential of their workforce and build an environment that is conducive to employee participation in improvement efforts.

The long-term success of any improvement effort depends on teamwork, management leadership, effective communication, and a willingness to train workers - qualities which this year's Productivity Campaign will be addressing. Given the importance of these people factors, the HR department should assume a frontline



position, alongside other departments, in implementing quality improvement initiatives.

### **Tripartite Approach**

16 Your Institute should also consider attracting industrial relations and human resource practitioners from the labour movement and government bodies with the view to making it a truly tripartite professional body.

For this purpose, it may be necessary for the Institute to adopt a name which will better reflect what the organisation

represents and what it wishes to achieve.

17 In Singapore, tripartism involving management, union and the Government has worked well.

This can be seen from a number of tripartite bodies such as the National Wages Council and National Productivity Council which have played an important role in the promotion of harmonious industrial relations.

18 While such tripartite bodies are formed with representatives from the employers, labour and Government to

represent their respective interests, there is no tripartite body organised on a professional basis with the objective of promoting closer labour management cooperation.

If your Institute could be this truly tripartite body, it could draw resources and expertise not just from the management, but also from the labour movement and the Government. Such a body will provide them the platform for learning from one another and establish closer rapport between all three groups. In this way, the Institute will further strengthen tripartite cooperation which

has been the cornerstone of our  
harmonious industrial relations climate.

### Conclusion

19 To conclude, I would like to say that  
managing people is the aspect of  
management that experiences the most  
impact and challenge.

As the Chinese proverb goes, "If you  
want to live for centuries, grow people."

That is exactly what HR practitioners have  
to do - grow people to help their  
companies improve productivity and  
remain competitive. On this note, I wish

all of you a pleasant and enjoyable  
evening. Thank you.

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