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Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • TEL. 3378191 ext. 4269, 4270, 4271 / 3362207 / 3362271

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SPEECH BY DR WAN SOON BEE, MINISTER OF STATE (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE), AT THE SINGAPORE INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT'S GRADUATION DINNER AT THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON FRIDAY, 10 MAY 1985 AT 7.30 PM.

Tonight we are here to witness the Graduation Ceremony for the 334 graduands who have just successfully completed their courses. My congratulations to all graduands who are present here tonight. You have all worked extremely hard for the past one or two years to complete the course and it is without doubt your efforts will be richly rewarded. Many of you are already holding middle management positions, and you form the important link between the chief executives, the line supervisors and the workers. You are in a crucial position to contribute to the economic development of Singapore.

Most of you rose in your organisation because of the time and effort you put in to ensure that you develop the necessary competence in the various professional and technical fields. Equally important, if not more important, however, is the need for you to acquire managerial skills as you move up the corporate ladder. As you move up the corporate ladder, you will realise that the ability to manage people and motivate people will become more and more important. Ultimately, it is people who matter in a company. Workers are your most valuable resource.

A manager is also a leader. He must have the respect of his subordinates if he is to motivate his workers positively. And respect is earned, not bestowed

upon by virtue of rank or status. Over and above this, a good manager learns to bridge the communication gap between the workers and top management in the place of work. Good communication helps to generate trust, understanding, co-operation, commitment and a strong identification with the organisation. In a nutshell, a good, dynamic manager develops man-management skills. In fact every manager is a personnel manager. Unfortunately, personnel management is not one of the strong points of our Singapore managers.

According to the Times Organisation Survey conducted in 1984, 82 per cent of the workers felt that management was ineffective in dealing with its workers. What is more appalling are the observations by both the employers and unionists that the lack of man-management skills among the middle and lower management seems to be the more prevalent among the new breed of middle managers and supervisors. Due to the rapid expansion of industries, many were promoted to management and supervisory levels far too quickly, and this, compounded with their lack of work exposure and inexperience in handling and motivating subordinates, often contributed to frustrations and conflicts between labour and management in their companies. In this respect, the efforts of the Singapore Institute of Management to provide managerial training to the new breed of middle managers is most appropriate.

The feeling of alienation between managers and the shopfloor is also another problem. This is accentuated by the fact that some managers tend to be status conscious and often distance themselves from their subordinates. This often results in a breakdown in communication and a lack of interaction between themselves and their subordinates which in turn results in a mutual lack of understanding and rapport.

In order to avoid such situations from arising, it is essential that you put into practice the management theories that you have learnt in your course. There must be greater emphasis on people-centred management leadership styles if there is to be a close co-operation between management and the workers.

At this juncture, let me highlight two important roles of the middle level managers. You are probably aware that the middle level management is often saddled with the most unenviable task of trying to reconcile the differing interests of both the workers and the firm. They are constantly under pressures from both the demands of top level management and the needs of the workers. Besides, some of these differences are irreconcilable. This has made the role played by the middle management extremely important and critical. They must have the ability to explain to the workers the demands of the management and at the same time they must be willing and able to keep the management informed of the fears and aspirations of the workers. At this point I would like to point out that the type of support given by top management to the middle level managers will ultimately determine whether the middle level managers are able to carry out their jobs effectively and successfully.

One area that deserves some consideration by middle management is the introduction of new technology. Singapore must move with the technological age. We must upgrade our industries to produce higher value added products and products that embody high technology. In this process of economic restructuring, some workers will be made redundant by the new technology. New skills will be required. As workers are human beings, the adjustment process may be traumatic and painful, and families will be affected. Middle level management can help to ease the adjustment process by helping workers to anticipate such changes, retraining them for new technology and to provide the necessary counselling and supportive network.

Secondly, the middle level managers play an important role in the promotion of healthy labour management relations. From the surveys conducted by the National Productivity Board, it is found that there is a perceptible correlation between management styles and the state of labour management relations in the company. Autocratic managerial style and the authoritarian attitude of managers was one of the most frequently cited impediments to good labour management relations by unions and employers. It also frustrates the development of self-reliance among workers, thus affecting their work performance and productivity. For the sake of Singapore's future development, we must move away from an adversary or confrontational form of industrial relations to a co-operative approach to industrial relations. This co-operative form of industrial relations cannot be achieved without the adoption of people-centred form of management by our managers. There must be greater consultation between the managers and unions to strengthen labour-management relations. Mutual respect by unionists and managers are also essential ingredients for this co-operative process.

Another important function of middle level managers is their contribution to human resource development. Most of us are aware that human resource is the only valuable resource that Singapore possesses. Unless we harness the vitality of workers and upgrade their skills, we may not be able to compete successfully in the international market. In Singapore, many of us appear to associate the training responsibilities of workers with either major training institutions or professional training consultants. Yet, one of the most valuable training resource that a company has is its own middle management staff and line supervisors. One well-known trainer even calls supervisors and managers the "company's hidden training resources". I believe that we must

emphasize this important role of the manager. Unfortunately, many managers neglect this aspect of their managerial function, to the loss of the company. Much of the in-house company training is often left to the professional trainer or consultant rather than to the man on the job. I would like to encourage middle management to undertake more training of their subordinates. They are in the best position to identify the training needs of the company, the course objectives of any training and the persons requiring such training. They can also help in the organisation and actual preparation of training materials. Their involvement would ensure that the type of training conducted would be relevant to the firm and the workers concerned.

Let me conclude by reiterating that middle management has a very important role in Singapore's economic development and in creating a peaceful industrial relations climate that is necessary to attract new investments. The challenge ahead for all the graduates present here tonight is to find your niche and contribution to the development process. I wish you all an exciting and meaningful career in management. Congratulations and happy managing.