

## NUS Commencement 2008

Ceremony on  
11 July 3pm

**SPEECH by  
Pharmacy Alumni  
Mr Lim Lay Yew**

*Photo with his Mrs **Lim Yae Foong**,  
Pharmacy Alumni*



### 3 REASONS AND 3 HYPOTHESES

Mr Presiding Officer Lee Tzu Yang, Distinguished Guests, Parents and Families, Graduands, Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon!

I am your average guy so what credentials do I possess to give this commencement speech? What topic should I speak on? I can only think of 3 reasons to give the speech. First, I am a Pharmacy graduate. Second, I am older than you (I mean the graduands, of course) by more than 30 years and as my grandmother would have said I have eaten more salt than you have eaten rice. Third and most importantly, I have 2 sons your age so I can offer you the same hypotheses I shared with them on how to live a purposeful, meaningful and joyful life. Notice I use the word hypothesis as I am still struggling with the question and it is very much a Works In Progress.

You are each a unique individual and needless to say, you have to put the hypotheses to the scientific test and experiment on yourself. What resources do you have for this experiment? In a sense you are all born with varying amounts of time, money, energy, talent and opportunity. These are the building blocks and whether you have a purposeful, meaningful and joyful life depends on what and how you allocate, invest, save, spend or squander these finite resources at different stages of your life. Face this truth, right here, right now and make your choices. Your destiny is in your hands. Today on your commencement day is the beginning of your new experiment.

The first hypothesis is financial measured by how much money you have or how you earn your money, and therefore your living. Your university education at the National University of Singapore should have equipped you with the basic skills, knowledge and experience to compete in an increasingly global, uncertain and ever changing world. I am sure you would have expanded your brains, worked hard, met people from all walks of life and from other parts of the world and learned how to organise and work in a team. You should start your working life by being prepared for changes. Change is

ever accelerating. A secure, stable predictable career is a thing of the past. When you go out and look for a job do not just look for the highest salary. Do not look for job security. Instead look for a job that suits your temperament and look for employment security. You have employment

security if in your job you can see, know, learn and be involved in implementing and discovering new things and becoming more valuable. If the company you work for does not recognize your value, then look for one that would or better still be an entrepreneur and start your own company. Keep learning as a way to enjoy life long employment security. As Mark Twain once said, "Don't let your education get in the way of your learning". Alvin Toffler the futurist said: The illiterate of the future are not those who cannot read or write. They are those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn. To be successful in your job you must plunge into the depths of the project – knowing deeply and achieving greatly. And contrary to what health pundits claimed previously working long hours at a rewarding job may even be good for you. Psychologist George Vaillant studied the leading achievers among graduates of the Harvard Business School and found they had disproportionately excellent health, stable marriages and satisfying lives despite their 70-hours week. The ultimate meanings of life for some of you may come from religious faiths but our task on earth - labouring in service to others - can only be satisfied through hard and unbalanced work. As the 1977 Nobel Laureate for Chemistry Ilya Prigogine has written, life itself is disequilibrium. In life or work, to stay even is to decline and decay. We must grow instead. It is good to balance your diet and your car tires but don't balance your life. Give it everything you've got. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing and whoever you are with, give the best you have.

The second hypothesis is your well being, comprising your physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual lives, and measured by how happy and contented you are with life. Ayn Rand once said: Happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one's values. What are values? Values are sets of personal principles on which you guide your life. If we do not live life by values then we end up performing daily acts of trivia. Happiness is not based on possessions, power or prestige but primarily on relationships with people you love and respect. My second hypothesis is very importantly, you must marry the right person. This one decision will determine 90% of your happiness or misery. If you have not found the right person to marry yet you should do so shortly and without delay. Too many people are drawn to someone like themselves. Instead you should look for complementary differences that add value. Differences can be relationship-fulfilling provided the core values are the same. You should be sober and look for a person who is independent and emotionally mature so that your relationship is healthy and interdependent, not dependent or co-dependent. Life is long and you want a mature person to share it with. The overwhelming feeling of being "in love" is not a very reliable emotion. The only way to know you are in love is to give yourselves plenty of time to get acquainted. Once marriage occurs then your commitment with one another will be much more important than the feelings that come and go. Divorce is upsetting to happiness, achievement, success, wealth accumulation and growth. It is worse if you have children and it is totally unfair to them. There is a sweetness and unique joyfulness in life that can only be known through a loving and committed relationship based on ATCG. No, not Adenine, Thymine, Cytosine and Guanine but Attitude, Trust, Commitment and Growth. A good relationship enhances your aliveness and eases the sense of isolation that begins at birth. For those who are willing to take the plunge, work hard at it and honour the marriage commitment, the reward of true love is one of the finest gifts life has to offer. As Goethe said: We are shaped and fashioned by what we love. The touchstone is that the person you marry must make both of you better. In which case a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved and a happiness shared is a happiness doubled. Life is not a bed of roses and there will be trying times. In summary, live, love and leave a legacy. The best legacy is to start a family. Do it soon.

This is my third and final hypothesis. Speaking as a father one of the greatest moments in my life was when I first looked into the eyes of my two newborn sons. The feelings are sublime. There is also nothing more exciting and rewarding than seeing my two sons learn, grow and bloom. The family is the source of both happiness and wealth in every respect the financial, emotionally, intellectual and spiritual. Your family is your fortress in the world and the true measure of your success in life.

The first, second and third hypotheses are interlinked. As you know how much money you have should not be a measure of your success as your wellbeing may or may not require a lot of money. Financial success, like your wellbeing, is different for each person because we all have different aspirations and hopes. Indeed, some of you may find the joy that comes from doing something you love is far more important than how much you earn. Lastly, allocate, invest, save and spend wisely your time, money, energy, talent and opportunity. Stop comparing yourself with others now, in the future or ever. When you look at another person's strength and compare to your own weaknesses, there is just no possibility of feeling good about yourself. Do not set yourself up for failure. Accept life as it is and be willing to make the most of your unique strengths and talents you've been given. When that is achieved, comparison with others is no longer a relevant issue. Let me now wish that you will find more purpose and meaning in life than I have so far. May you increase in wisdom and joy as the years go by. We only live once and if we do it well, once is enough. Therefore savour every moment of it. Be a person of good values and character. If your parents are here, do not do anything that would not make them proud. Be filial.

Thank you and have a good life.

#### **SPEAKER PROFILE – MR LIM LAY YEW**

Mr Lim graduated with a B Sc (Pharmacy) in 1973. A recipient of the Triangular Trust Scholarship, he was an avid speaker in his undergraduate days and was conferred best speaker in the Chemistry Speech Competition for Tertiary Institutions in 1973.

His career started with the management of retailing and wholesaling of Pharmaceuticals, veterinary medicines, and scientific and medical products in Singapore and Australia. In 1978, Lay Yew ventured out on his own, with the founding of Esco Technologies (Asia) Pte Ltd.

While successfully steering the company to its present global standing, Lay Yew has actively contributed his vast accumulated experience and expertise to many professional and civic organisations. His versatility and business acumen are reflected in his contributions and participation at one time or another over the past 3 decades, as Chairman of the Association of Electronics Industries of Singapore, Secretary of the Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore and memberships in the NUS Biological Sciences Consultative Committee, the R&D Advisory Panel for Natsteel Ltd., and the Construction Industry Development Board among others.

As CEO, he was also a Singapore member of the Young Presidents Organisation, and is currently an active member of the World Presidents Organisation.

Company webpage: <http://www.escoglobal.com/>