

**SPEECH BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, AT THE WORLDSKILLS SINGAPORE 2014 CLOSING CEREMONY ON WEDNESDAY, 16 JULY 2014, 10.00AM, TAY ENG SOON CONVENTION CENTRE, INSTITUTE OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION (ITE) COLLEGE CENTRAL**

**Mr Bob Tan**

Chairman, ITE Board of Governors,

**Mr Bruce Poh**

Director and CEO, ITE, and Chairman of WorldSkills Singapore Council,

**Members of the ITE Board of Governors,**

**Polytechnic Principals,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Parents and Students,**

**Introduction**

1. I am very happy to be here with you at the WorldSkills Closing Ceremony to share in your anticipation and joy. I see many anxious faces waiting to find out whether you will be national champions in your skill areas. I am also excited to find out the results, but I think that each and every one of you is already a winner in some ways.

2. You have been chosen to represent your polytechnics and ITE colleges in the WorldSkills Singapore Competition. This fact attests to you having achieved a certain level of excellence in your craft. You have trained hard, you have risen to the

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challenge, and you have shown the discipline and resilience that will set you to achieve many other great things in life. I want to congratulate every one of you, and the many people involved in the organisation of this Competition – lecturers, staff and judges, as well as the sponsors.

### **‘I Create Wonders with my Skills’**

3. WorldSkills provides an excellent platform to recognise and celebrate skills excellence among youths in Singapore. But some of you may ask – what do I do with skills? The obvious answer is – you can get a good job and go on to achieve your aspirations. This year’s theme adds something more than jobs – ‘I Create Wonders with my Skills’ – that is, skills enable you to create new things and new wonders.

4. WorldSkills has provided many opportunities for young Singaporeans to discover their flair for creating – be it tantalising dishes, smart automation, new ways to connect with technology, or other innovations that will make a difference in the lives of others. Over the course of the competition, our youths pitted their skills against one another in areas that required them to do a variety of things: setting up a CNC milling machine, designing a relay logic control, installing a fibre distribution enclosure, designing an integrated software system, and implementing an integrated care plan for clients. We are proud of what you have achieved with your skills. Many youths of your age would not imagine themselves to be capable of such creations or be aware of their aptitude for skills, but we are proud that you have stepped up to the challenge.

**Becoming masters in your craft**

5. Skills are valuable for you to pursue your dreams and passions, and together, a nation of people with deep skills will enable us to achieve success together. As technology improves, deeper skills are needed. This will occur in many areas of our society and our economy.

6. I have shared this story from America before about the importance of skills. It was highlighted in one of the international papers, where one of the companies was looking for someone to take up on the job of an Excel programmer. The person who won the job was not someone with lots of paper qualifications, but it turned out it was a cashier from Walmart. This lady wanted to learn new skills and enrolled in a night class to learn Excel programming. When selecting the new employee, the company set a skills test – who was the person who could programme this better and faster than anyone else. This lady turned out to be the best in that particular skill, beating many others with experience and qualifications, but without that deep skill in that particular area. That was the reason why she was able to get the job.

7. You have built for yourselves a strong skills foundation. **Don't waste your training. Keep deepening your skills, stay relevant and keep up with changes. Persevere in working towards becoming masters in your craft.** My hope is for you not just to use your skills to create wonders, but also, to improve the way we do things and improve our society.

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8. SMS is chairing the Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review (ASPIRE) Committee. I have been following the deliberations of the Committee. There are some important and interesting proposals that have been put forward. I can assure you that the Government is committed to ensuring that polytechnic and ITE education, which we are very proud of and is one of the jewels of our education system, remains attractive, and that it enables our young children to learn deep skills and expertise, not just in our polytechnics and ITE, but in their areas of work.

9. Several nights ago, I spoke at the Singapore Human Resource Awards Presentation Gala, and I want to congratulate ITE for winning an award three times, so much so that ITE is now called an HR Champion. This is an excellent example of how our own lecturers and staff in the polytechnics and ITE must continue to deepen skills and develop themselves.

10. At the dinner event, I spoke about why on-the-job learning is so important. We can have all sorts of simulations in the class, and indeed we do a lot of that to accelerate the learning of our students. But at the end of the day, what better place to apply your skills and knowledge and to develop all sorts of soft and hard skills than the workplace itself? No simulation can replicate all the conditions in the workplace. The many people you might have seen who have done well in their careers are those who are deeply committed to what they do and to learning day in day out, every day on the job. It is a great learning experience. I would like to encourage all of us, especially our young students who are starting their careers, to consider this very seriously – how to turn everyday tasks in the workplace into a learning opportunity, and how to make sure that the boundary between school and

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work is blurred and not such a distinct change, and that the workplace is also a learning place.

11. So, I am looking forward to the recommendations from the ASPIRE Committee. I think there are many important things that we have to do to continue to make ITE an attractive and valuable one that will prepare our young people well for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are many more skills that you will have to learn and build on.

### **Conclusion**

12. Let me conclude by saying that all our competitors here are winners. In your own ways, you have achieved excellence in what you do. And I challenge you to continue to pursue excellence, to push the boundaries, and become masters in your craft. And I hope that in return you will inspire many young people to follow in your footsteps.

13. To all winners and competitors here, I wish you all the very best. For those of you who are chosen, and then go on to represent Singapore at the WorldSkills Competition at São Paulo, Brazil, I wish you all the very best. I would like to see you do very well for yourselves and for Singapore.

14. Thank you.