

**OPENING REMARKS BY EMERITUS SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG
AT LKY SCHOOL 13TH ANNIVERSARY DIALOGUE SESSION ON
8 SEPTEMBER 2017, FRIDAY, AT THE LEE KUAN YEW SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC POLICY**

Welcome. Homecoming for me.

Importance of public policy

2 Government schools are gaining prestige around the world. Research and study of public policy have become more relevant and urgent in the face of pressing national, regional and global challenges. Yet it is a fairly new field, compared to more established schools in business, medicine, law etc.

3 As marketable as MBAs and other degrees are, their graduates do not purport to solve society's problems. It remains the special purview and imperative of governments to lead, effect powerful reforms through programmes, legislation and regulation, and unleash the full potential of societies for the common good. It is for the students of public policy to answer society's call of duty and to serve.

4 My question to you is: what is the value of a good and stable government? It cannot be measured like a company on a stock market. Yet we all know instinctively when there is a good government or lack thereof. We can certainly see it in the faces of the people, the harmony and standard of living in the country.

5 For Singapore, the government has been the architect for success and the foundation for nation building. From day one, Mr Lee Kuan Yew and the founding fathers set out to build and strengthen national institutions like Parliament, judiciary and the civil service. They went to great lengths to recruit and groom the best of every cohort to lead the country.

6 LKYSPP was established to spread that philosophy: to build the next generation of public leaders to serve the people and deliver positive change. That is why we are here.

Personal journey

7 I have experienced a similar course as yours. As a young civil servant, I was sent to Williams College in the US to study Development Economics. The class comprised 20 young officials from 16 different developing economies in Asia, Africa, Central America and Europe. On return, I put what I learnt to good use. I was then working in the Economic Planning Unit of the Ministry of Finance.

8 Years after my Williams programme, I find it instructive to look back at the vastly different fates of the 16 countries represented in my Class of 1967. Categorising the achievements of these countries into Good, Bad and Ugly, only four could be considered Good. Six would be in the Ugly group. Amongst them are countries that have since broken up.

9 In Singapore's case, few gave us a chance when we became independent in 1965. What was the secret of our improbable success?

Moral Leadership

10 I want to focus on one: moral leadership. This is the most underrated aspects of successful societies and leadership. Winning elections and having the legal legitimacy to govern is not enough. You must have the moral authority to lead.

11 Moral authority goes beyond personal probity and character. It is the leader's value system, for himself and his people. It is the basis for building trust in government that is often missing.

12 Lee Kuan Yew who gained independence for Singapore established his moral authority to govern with a set of values to underpin, hold and bind Singapore together. They include:

- A fair and just society based on the rule of law.
- Putting country before self, family and clan.
- Integrity and incorruptibility.
- Tolerance and multiracialism.
- Family as the building block of society.
- Hard work and frugality.
- Meritocracy, i.e. equal opportunities and reward according to merit.
- Compassion and helping hand for those lagging behind.

13 These values are deeply embedded in the Singapore leadership. They are also entrenched in our society.

14 Moral values are not just for political leaders and office holders. You need to give full meaning and perpetuate them as part of the national character. Here, the public service is key. Ministers will need to rely on competent and honest officials to help them formulate policies, and very importantly, to implement them. If you have a public service run by bad people, the latter will corrupt and undermine the system. Conversely, if you have good public officials supported by upright political leaders, they will find a way to reform a bad system.

15 In Singapore, we have built up an ethical, efficient public service with values as its core – integrity, service, excellence. Our civil servants are paid a market-competitive salary. There is an intrinsic desire to serve and to improve people's lives. How do we attract, retain and promote the right people? I hope you will be curious to find out more during your time in LKYSPP, because an outstanding, ethical public service is the backbone of the Singapore story.

What next for LKYSPP

16 We set up the School not just to honour Lee Kuan Yew on his 80th birthday but also to share Singapore's developmental and public service experience with other countries.

17 Since its inception, the School has grown significantly. Students come from all over the world – I'm told that we have students from 38 different countries currently enrolled in the School. We also have alumni taking on prominent and interesting roles in many different areas of work. I was given a long list of these alumni but I will just mention two. Aditi Prasad, an MPP 2011 graduate, is co-founder of Robotix LS, a company with a mission to inspire the next generation of innovators and creators. She helped lay the groundwork for 'Indian Girls Code', a free, hands-on coding and robotics education programme for underprivileged girls. The Indian Girls Code initiative works to inspire and educate young girls to learn to code and develop real-world programmes for real-world applications. Next, Will Chua, also an MPP 2011 graduate, who is now an entrepreneur. In 2014, he co-founded FOLO (Feed Our Loved Ones) Farm in Johor Bahru. FOLO Farm is an urban farming community that aims to change the way we look at our waste and the way we grow our food. FOLO Farm collects three tonnes of food waste per day from hotels and restaurants, and turning it into nutrient-rich compost. They use this compost to organically grow vegetables for a community of almost 100 families.

18 The School has done well. Much of this is due to the hard work put in by Dean Kishore, his management team and staff. But we want to do better. How do we climb higher peaks? Let me share some ideas. I hope the Faculty will study them with an open mind, and take on board those which will help the School do so.

19 First, strengthen the link between theory and practice. Public policy theories are useful in developing and evaluating policies, and the School needs to continue to have rigorous teaching in this area. But it is good to go beyond theories. The School today has many good Practice Professors with deep experience in public service. We should find ways to better integrate the experience and lessons that these Practice Professors can impart within the academic lectures of our professors.

20 Second, bring the Singapore insight home. If the art of government is an Olympic sport, we would have won more than one gold medal. We have innovated many ground-breaking political, social and policy ideas. Foreign delegations come from all over to study the Singapore journey. At the LKYSPP, you have a front row seat to dissect, analyse and contribute to the continuing work here. In this regard, the School has introduced the LKY School Course this year to provide an overview of Singapore's policies. This module is compulsory for all.

21 Besides rigorous teaching on the theoretical side, we can offer Singapore's experience through Practice and Adjunct Professors. Beyond tapping on the experience of past officials, we can consider inviting serving civil servants whose knowledge is current to be Practice Fellows. This integration of theories and practice will set the School apart from other public policy schools.

22 Third, I think the School has reached a comfortable size. It should now shift its focus to qualitative growth. In my view, the School is in a good position to examine how it can provide greater value-add to policy making in Singapore. As Minister for Law and Home affairs, Mr Shanmugam, said in his speech last month, think-tanks like LKYSPF play a critical role in policymaking by putting forward “practical viewpoints that help the country”. We should take up the invitation. This does not mean that we should agree with the government all the time. In fact, I think it is more valuable when we can critically but constructively provide the government with alternative perspectives from research and analytical studies.

23 Fourth, looking back to my experience at Williams College, I found it did not teach one fundamental lesson essential to nation building – the importance of political leadership. Teaching this is not going to be easy but the School should continue to emphasise the importance of a fair, competent and honest leadership and an excellent, ethical public service.

24 As the Governing Board Chairman, I look forward to working with the management team and faculty staff to build a better Lee Kuan Yew School for our students, and for Singapore. For our discussion, I will be happy to share with you my experience in formulating public policies and the trade-offs required.

25 Thank you.
