

Penyampai : TAN SRI DATO SERI AHMAD SARJI BIN ABDUL HAMID
Tajuk : THE GRADUATES OF THE EXECUTIVE MASTERS IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
Lokasi : RENONG AUDITORIUM, KUALA LUMPUR
Tarikh : 14-01-1996

1. I would like to express my thanks to the organisers for inviting me to be the Guest-of Honour this morning and to deliver the graduation address.

I also wish to congratulate the graduates of the Executive Masters In Business Administration and the winners of the various prestigious awards for their outstanding achievements. I believe that your outstanding performance will undoubtedly be a milestone to spur you to greater heights in your future career in the corporate world. I am confident that many of you will assume the role of senior managers and would eventually be the corporate leaders of tomorrow.

2. I am sure that upon graduation, you will return to the working environment with new insights and ideas on how to improve management in your organisations. Given the changing world economy, new information and the need for innovation, how does one go about implementing change? What skills and abilities will an executive need to practise to be effective? And what are the personal traits and values that a manager should have to lead the organisation? Doubtless to say, there is a need for personal effectiveness or leadership skills. Old skills are, of course, required, but there are new ones which are likely to be important.

3. Firstly, managers must manage by going out of the office to where results of the business take place. One advice to senior managers - spend sometime behind the counter and you will be surprised as to how much can be learned about your organisation. Where markets and technologies are changing in all directions, to wait in the office until the reports arrive on an executive's desk may be too long. Some managers in the course of duties may not often meet the customers. But it is the customers who define quality. Increasingly, customers have higher expectations about the quality of goods and services, not only in terms of product features, but also in the support services provided: timely delivery, courteousness and the likes. Each encounter the customer has with the frontline staff forms the moments of truth that will make up the customer's impression about the organisation. If they are not satisfied, they will eventually "vote with their chequebooks" that is, go elsewhere.

4. Secondly, find out the information you need for your job. What is wrong with most organisations is that what they have is data, in such volumes that often it causes information overload or blackout.

Over and above that, the data is not readily available in the form required for decision making on-the-spot. What managers should do is to ask what he is doing now; what he should be doing; and how can he get the information to do his job. In a competitive world where information technology plays a crucial role, it is not the technology itself that creates the competitive edge, but the leadership's exploitation of technology that is really important.

The world economy is becoming increasingly globalised as a result of strong linkages between nations

and regions through trade, investments, capital and labour flows. Advances in technology, particularly information technology, have enhanced the ease and speed with which capital, knowledge and information transcend across national boundaries.

These new technology-driven changes have made possible for access to information at a remarkably fast rates. Thus there is need for executives and managers to make use of the latest information technology.

5. Thirdly, managers must focus for effectiveness. A clear priority is essential. For maximum effect, we must concentrate on fewer tasks at one time. Do not splinter to do too many things at once. Often as top managers, we are not effective enough because we try to do too many things. Another mistake is that we believe that what we are doing is so obvious that we do not have to tell the others. To be an effective manager, one must always make sure that the people on whom one depends understand what one is trying to achieve, and you must communicate clearly your visions and priorities to them.

6. Fourthly, managers must build learning into the system. To maintain the high level of professionalism you need to constantly strive for excellence by engaging in a lifelong learning process. The primary means of building knowledge must be through the cultivation of a reading habit together with a thirst for knowledge. Besides, effective leaders must apply the most important principle in learning: that of feedback. Feedback in the working place is not always to identify weaknesses, but more importantly, to know our strength. We must know our strengths in order to find out where to improve. For example, what bad habits inhibit those strengths? However, learning must be continuous. We are living in a era where every change poses an opportunity. In this situation, an effective manager must recognise and exploit such an opportunity, to learn and constantly refresh the knowledge base.

7. Nevertheless, I am of the belief that as important as the acquisition of knowledge is the emphasis on ethics and values. Graduates of learning institutes must not assume that with their degrees, they have become fully qualified managers.

It takes more than book-learning to become managers.

Our respective religious beliefs, and experience all teach us that fundamental values like integrity and justice are vital for progress.

8. Integrity is associated with the practice of honesty, trust worthiness and high moral standards in discharging responsibilities. You can be blinded by temptations that you cannot distinguish the good from the bad. In some countries, commercial crimes are committed by increasingly sophisticated individuals well-versed in the intricacies of the markets and the conduct of business. In those countries, because vast sums are involved, even respectable bankers and businessmen cannot be presumed to be beyond such temptation.

9. Managers have more than just profits to think of, even though it is the core purpose of a business. The business world cannot afford to adopt the ethics of non-involvement. It cannot be a by-stander. Gone are the days when businesses need only worship profit, power and owe a responsibility to none but itself. It cannot avoid its responsibility to contribute to the achievement of non-business objectives. As managers, we play different roles as leaders, parents, teachers and corporate members. We must therefore contribute to the social developments of the nation. Companies should go hand-in-hand with the government to provide more public facilities such as social amenities, scholarships and donations to the needy.

These efforts not only help to enrich the quality of life of citizens but also generate goodwill for the company concerned. Hence, the nation not only needs competent but also caring and well-adjusted managers. Finding that useful balance is a challenge to all corporate managers.

10. In Islam, we learn that truthful merchants will live with Prophets and the trust-worthy in the hereafter. Islam forbids careless and indifference in work. Successful businessmen should not forget their social obligations. It is reported in genuine Traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad that collecting dirt from the street is a charity, helping the weak to get on his horse is a charity; trying to settle a dispute is a charity; enjoining justice and forbidding evil is a charity, and any favour whatever its kind is charity.

11. The Malaysian managers who have the values and the management styles that I have just mentioned, and whom we seek, may already exist in our midst.

You all have a bright future ahead. Some of you may want to be on your own and strike out in the business world as entrepreneurs, while some may prefer to be employees in the corporate sector.

Whatever your endeavour might be, I wish all of you good luck and success.