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May it please Your Honour, on behalf of the Law Society, I seek your leave to address the cohort of 2016 to the Singapore Bar.

First, congratulations to all of you on being called to the bar.

The occasion of speaking to new young lawyers always gives me pause for thought. What can I say that will genuinely add value to you?

I confine myself to what I know. How to survive as a practising lawyer. How to survive attrition in that wasteland known as the “middle category”. I have a dual perspective – a once-upon-a-time young lawyer, and now as an employer trying to hire, train and motivate junior lawyers. My insights are imperfect and possibly idiosyncratic, but I have invested some time and energy thinking of how we can retain our best and brightest in this honourable profession.

An honourable profession. Maybe that's the key. We used to think that all that mattered was pay, promotion and partnership, like any other job. Certainly that used to be my framework. I need to revisit that antiquated view. The three "P"s are important, but they are not decisive.

Modern psychology tells us employees are not motivated by their compensation – that's just a hygiene factor. Pay mustn't be an issue in that it must be fair, and if there is a differential with their peers, then *ceteris paribus*, it cannot be too large.

Instead, enduring motivation is thought to be driven by three elements, mastery, autonomy, and purpose.

Mastery. The challenge and opportunity to acquire true expertise. There is a real satisfaction in being, and becoming, really good at something. Leading a cross-border deal team, or being first chair in a law making case; it feels good to earn the trust and confidence of one's clients or the Courts. However, there must be intermediate goals so that you can map your forward momentum.

Autonomy. While supervision and training is important, most of our best and brightest minds don't want to be micro-managed, but aspire to be masters of their own destiny. In our profession, this would be to run their own practices or teams, manage their own clients, do business development, and originate

deals. The autonomy to take responsibility for one's advice and decisions ultimately creates the ownership mentality that all lawyers need to play the long game. Being the master of one's practice also restores a modicum of control over one's life.

Purpose: This can mean different things to different people. Some people are competitive and just want to be the best. Some look to do things perfectly, over and over again. Some see practice as a means to a larger purpose of helping people in need, or making the world better. As a profession, and as employers, we need to communicate a sense of mission, whatever that might be. Our focus must be to make our young lawyers the best professional versions of themselves, not how many billable hours we can squeeze from them. Because none of you will find real purpose in being a money making machine – your suffering is on sufferance, and only for the short term motivation of a pay packet.

That's just the supply side. It is for the partner or the law firm to supply the opportunities to develop mastery, autonomy or purpose. Your role, is to aspire to these.

That's where the demand side comes in. A wholehearted commitment to the craft of law is required from the new lawyer. It takes a long time to get good at something. Malcolm Gladwell, author of "Outliers", talks about 10,000 hours of deliberate and purposeful practice. That's effectively 10 years. Doing

something well is immensely satisfying – it just takes a long time to get there. Which is frustrating. No instant gratification. This may in part explain why so many drop out of practice before 10 years. They don't give themselves a chance to become really really good. And, it's more fun when you are good. You experience what top class athletes or musicians call "flow" or being "in the zone"; where everything comes easily, you see things with absolute clarity and articulate the heart of the matter with unerring precision. I wish it happened to me more often, but it does from time to time. Those moments of "flow" are in and of themselves, deeply rewarding.

Building those 10,000 hours, is hard work. It requires a combination of commitment, determination and resilience. Those qualities are necessary, but they are not sufficient. So what does it take?

Dr Angela Duckworth, a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania called this "Grit". She also wrote a best-selling book about this, and said this – "Grit is passion or perseverance for very long term goals. Grit is having stamina. Grit is sticking with your future, day in and day out – not just for a day, not just for a month, but for years – to make that future a reality."

We associate grit with perseverance, tenacity and resilience. Some label it "AQ" or adversity quotient. According to Angela Duckworth, it is that, but more. It is about passion, which is the fuel that sustains us in the long term.

Passion doesn't exist in a vacuum. We only persist, sweat blood and tears for a reason. A paycheck is short term, insufficient. It has to be tethered to tangible purpose. What might be this purpose? That's unique to each of us, and it takes time to develop and evolve. But law inherently lends itself to causes, projects and long term goals which should resonate with us.

It may be as simple as pride in one's work – wanting to become a genuine expert in your field, being the best professional you can be. It may be to become managing partner, senior counsel, a Supreme Court Judge, or earning the respect of your peers. It may be to start your own practice and build a firm. Some have noble ideas, to use their knowledge to do all the good they can, for all the people they can, in all the ways they can.¹ That attitude of service may manifest itself through pro bono, "low-bono" or paid work, in the area of community law. If you have more jurisprudential ideals – you may find fulfilment in advocating the abolition of the death penalty, the elimination of discriminatory laws, enhancing timely access to counsel in criminal cases, building greater protection for battered wives or migrant workers, designing better corporate governance, or the many other causes that require legal training or advocacy.

But there's a tension. In the life of a young lawyer, managing deadlines, clients, bosses and the courts can overwhelm, and purpose is obscured in the daily trials and tribulations of practice.

¹ Acknowledgements to Hillary Clinton and the Methodist Church

I have advice, but not a universal panacea. Set short term targets. Make sure they are realistic. They are steps on your ladder. Start with arguing your first contested application, take on a CLAS case as first chair, and work up to becoming first chair in a High Court trial. Draft your first transactional document, then lead the deal team. Aim to be a senior associate, then junior partner. Bring in your first client. Bring in the next. Become a deal maker, or rain maker. Join a committee of the Law Society. Chair it, stand for Council election. You acquire experience, gain credibility and build respect along the way to your final destination.

When you have experience, when you have credibility, then everything you say, or do, is amplified. Your influence is multiplied, and your actions impact one or sometimes many more. Life as a professional does not get more fulfilling than that.

It seems a long way off. You may feel that you are not as talented as your peers. The good news is that in practice, talent is often overrated. Talent alone is a great start but not enough. Effort counts. According to Angela Duckworth, it counts twice. She had a simple and elegant equation which made sense. First - talent combined with effort results in skill. Second - that skill must then be put to work, effort must be applied to that skill, over, and over, and over again. That leads to achievement. Success is sustained effort over time.

To those about to join us at the bar. The first 3 years will be tough. Expect that. But remember, what you go through in your first 3 years of practice is not the rest of your life. So, find a purpose and a goal, be passionate about it, and figure out the intermediate steps on how to get there. Then pursue it. Woody Allen observed: "Eighty percent of success in life is showing up". Show up. Keep showing up. Relentlessly.

I look forward to our path's crossing professionally. I'll meet some of you later, at the Law Society's welcome reception for you and your parents. Use the photo booth, collect your welcome gift, and most importantly, remember and enjoy this day. You've earned it.