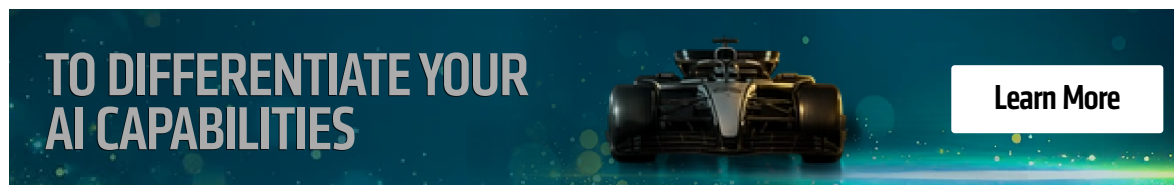


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TikTok CEO Chew Shou Zi urges NTU doctoral graduates to 'actively seek the unknown' at conferment ceremony



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In a 10-minute speech at the ceremony, the 43-year-old Singaporean spoke about his upbringing in Yio Chu Kang, his early encounters with technology to eventually leading the social media platform.



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FAST

SINGAPORE: TikTok chief executive officer Chew Shou Zi on Saturday (Aug 1) urged doctoral graduates to "actively seek the unknown" and apply their "superpower" to address real world problems.

In a 10-minute speech at a graduation ceremony for PhD students at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), the 43-year-old Singaporean spoke about his upbringing in Yio Chu Kang and his early encounters with technology, his academic journey from Hwa Chong Institution to Harvard Business School, and climbing the corporate ladder to eventually lead the social media platform.

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The ceremony is part of NTU's 2026 convocation. This year, more than 14,000 students from the class of 2026 - the largest batch in the university's history - will graduate across 29 ceremonies.

A total of 575 graduates received their doctorate degrees across two ceremonies on Saturday, with Mr Chew addressing those who attended the first ceremony in the morning.

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Noting that the graduates are entering the workforce in a time of "massive structural change", Mr Chew said it is time for them to take the lead as they enter a new and uncharted era of artificial intelligence.

"We see it every single day, and an unprecedented big picture innovation era. This is a pivotal and exciting point in history - where change is not constant, but exponential and compounding."

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boundaries of human knowledge. Now, take that superpower and apply it to the messy, ambiguous problems of the real world.

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said.

The community will remind them of their purpose and reflect what they are truly capable of, added Mr Chew.

"So as you leave this university, keep that curiosity that first opened the map for you. Wherever this extraordinary educational passport takes you next, above all, remember to protect your creativity and to protect your joy, because you are the generation that will build the next era of positive innovation."

UPBRINGING AND CURIOSITY

During his speech, Mr Chew reflected on his roots and the "unexpected journey" that led him to the stage.

"Along the way, my own world has grown in ways that I could never imagine. And looking back at that path, I've come to realise that education is a lifelong passport. It keeps redrawing the borders of your world over and over again," he said.

His world when he was in primary school was "hyperlocal", he said.

"My universe didn't extend much further than my own neighbourhood in Yio Chu Kang, and the comfortable rhythm of my daily routine, and the familiar surroundings that I see every day.

"But eventually, I had this amazing opportunity to travel across the country from Yio Chu Kang to Bukit Timah to attend what is now known as Hwa Chong after my PSLE," he said, referring to the Primary School Leaving Examination.

"I know Yio Chu Kang to Bukit Timah is not that far, but choosing to go there completely pushed me out of my comfort zone," he added.

Making that leap sparked his intellectual curiosity that showed him that his potential could be as limitless as his imagination, and untouched by physical boundaries, the TikTok CEO said.

"In many ways, this is the same story of Singapore itself. Now we may be a very small island nation in our geographic borders, but through curiosity and resilience, we have always looked outwards and upwards and created an oversized global footprint."

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TikTok chief executive officer Chew Shou Zi attends a graduation ceremony for PhD students at Nanyang Technological University on Aug 1, 2026. (Photo: CNA/Ili Mansor)

He told the graduates that while he had not taken the same path as them, he too built his career on following curiosity and "believing that impact often means doing things differently than what everyone expects".

That belief started early in life, when his father bought him a 286 computer, which is a computer powered by an Intel processor released in 1982.

"I would love to tell you that I was using the computer to code some brilliant software and building the future, but the reality is I was playing computer games, a lot of it," he said, drawing laughter from the crowd.

"Still, spending all that time on that keyboard fuelled my love for technology. And as I left that desktop behind, my journey took some incredible, unexpected turns."

He attended the University College London studying economics, worked at multinational investment bank Goldman Sachs in London before pursuing a Master of Business Administration at Harvard Business School.

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"I was watching a massive shift in real time as major investments began pouring into innovative new ideas and early-stage technology startups."

It was eye-opening to witness how much life was changing, he added.

"Over time, that pull I felt towards technology when I was younger kept resurfacing and that's the beautiful thing about genuine curiosity. It's incredibly resilient. It always brings you back to where your passions lie.

"I dream of being part of world-changing technology, the kind of innovation that reshapes how people experience the world, and I didn't just want to watch from the sidelines anymore."

TikTok CEO Chew Shou Zi speaks at NTU Singapore PhD Conferment Ceremony | ...



"ONE OF THE GREATEST PLEASURES OF MY LIFE"

He followed his calling and soon realised that his background in finance served as the "perfect bridge" to tech entrepreneurs, and helping them scale their ideas led him to where he is today.

After attaining his MBA from Harvard, Mr Chew worked as an intern at Facebook before joining a venture capital firm to lead its investments in Chinese tech giants that included JD.com, Alibaba, Xiaomi and later, ByteDance.

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company and industry".

Mr Chew said on Saturday: "Today, running a global company that enriches lives by fundamentally reshaping how everyday people express their creativity, find their communities and discover joy is one of the greatest pleasures of my life."

Growing up in an analog world to launching his career during the digital transformation, to leading TikTok in the age of artificial intelligence taught him that technology was not just about hardware and code, but also about unlocking human potential.

"It's about taking a single idea and giving it the scale to reach millions or billions, if you're lucky. It's removing barriers between us and giving everyone with a story to tell the global stage to connect with others," he said.

"I believe that is the real impact of your field: the ability to take very complex knowledge and turn it into something that enriches people's lives."

"The world is yours and I can't wait to see what you do with it," he said, as he congratulated the graduates.

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Source: CNA/ng(nj)

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