



TikTok CEO Chew Shou Zi to NTU PhD students: 'Seek out the unknown'

He also shared his experience of growing up in an analogue world, launching his career into a digital one, and leading TikTok into an AI enabled future.

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Image via NTU/Facebook

TikTok CEO Chew Shou Zi delivered a 10-minute speech to Nanyang Technological University's class of graduating PhD students on Aug. 1, urging them to embrace uncertainty at a time of massive structural change.

From Yishun to Harvard

Chew was speaking at NTU's PhD conferment ceremony, where he called on graduates to use their expertise to make a meaningful global impact.

In his speech, he recounted his own history with education and technology, describing his journey from Yio Chu Kang to Hwa Chong to the London School of Economics and eventually to Harvard, saying that at each stage his educational journey broadened his horizons.

Chew also spoke briefly about how his father had introduced him to the world of tech with an early computer, which he admitted that he spent playing computer games rather than “coding brilliant software.”

He shared his experiences transitioning from growing up in an analogue world to launching his career during the digital transformation to running TikTok in an age of AI, emphasising that technology is not just about "hardware and code", but about unlocking human potential.

"It's about taking a single idea and giving it the scale to reach millions or billions."

Seek out the unknown

Chew credited the graduating class with having the ability to take very complex knowledge and turn it into something that enriches people's lives.

"Now, starting today, this mission belongs to you. It's time for you to take the lead."

Chew spoke about how the present moment was one of massive structural change, which he called a pivotal and exciting point in history, where change was not just constant but also exponential and compounding.

He said that if he were advising a younger version of himself — and by extension, the current crop of doctoral graduates — he would tell him to "actively seek out the unknown".

"You've just spent years earning a PhD, proving that you already know how to push the boundaries of human knowledge," said Chew.

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

Urging them to rely on their network of peers with whom they were graduating, Chew told the graduates that community is "what sustains us, reminds us of our purpose, and reflects back to us what we are truly capable of."