

Manpower Minister Tan See Leng Gave \$1 Million of His Own Money to Support Women Pursuing STEM Careers

Written By **Jade Kong**

Women in STEM. That's it, that's the tweet.

Minister of Manpower Tan See Leng has donated \$1 million dollars to better support women pursuing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

His decision was announced at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) on Thursday (7 April) at a forum commemorating the first anniversary of NTU's Promotion of Women in Engineering, Research and Science (POWERS) programme.

POWERS is a programme that helps close the gender gap in STEM by recruiting and empowering women in these fields.

Motivations Behind the Donation

Mr Tan cited his interactions with women in the STEM field, especially in the pharmaceutical, medical and chemical engineering sectors, as the main motivation behind his endowment.

“Growing up, I had the privilege of being taught by many inspiring female teachers and as a medical student, continued to be mentored and tutored by some of the finest minds who are accomplished women clinicians as well.”

Mr Tan also talked about watching his mother go through hardships through sickness to raise him as one of the inspirations for giving back to women and levelling the field in sectors where there is an obvious gender disparity.

The scholarship is named after Mr Tan's late father Tan Seow Chiap. When asked why it was named after his father rather than his mother, Mr Tan talked about how equality is not simply a women's issue.

“For Singapore to become a truly fair and inclusive society, we require a whole-of-society effort to shift mindsets on gender roles, challenge biases and break barriers that limit women's potential and contributions.”

In a Facebook post later, Mr Tan restated his position.

“Us men, as husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, colleagues, and friends to women must do our part,” he wrote. “We can start by showing our support for the women in our lives, and be there for them as they pursue their aspirations and reach their fullest potential, be it at work or at home.”



What Does This Entail?

Scholarships up to \$50,000 annually will be awarded to women in STEM degrees in NTU, as well as mentoring programmes for female STEM undergraduates and incubation programmes with a thousand-dollar grant.

The struggles of women in STEM are oftentimes brushed aside. Affirmative action and support for them is also [looked down upon](#). Hence, this is a good step into acknowledging women in STEM need support and tangibly acting on levelling the playing field.

Chairman and managing director of ExxonMobil Asia Pacific, Geraldine Chin, talked about her personal experience with almost missing out on a key position because of her gender.

Her bosses had doubted her capabilities and commitment because she just returned from maternity leave and the role required a lot of travel, until they actually consulted her on her opinion.

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“Let’s not assume that young mothers will not take up the challenge of a job that will take them away from home because each individual is different,” she emphasised.

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