

Lawrence Wong: Mentors like PM Lee & ESM Goh have been helpful in preparing for next role"

Wong also mentioned how he was still unsure of what he wanted to do when he first joined the public service.

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Mothership, 16 January 2023

Speaking with Emeritus Senior Minister (ESM) Goh Chok Tong, as well as Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has been helpful in understanding the responsibilities, roles and challenges they faced while serving as prime minister, Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Lawrence Wong said on Jan. 16.

Wong, who is also Finance Minister, spoke as the keynote speaker at the Institute of Policy Studies' (IPS) flagship Singapore Perspectives 2023 conference, titled "Work".

He was responding to a question posed by the conference's moderator, Debra Soon, Singlife's Group Head for Brand, Communications and Marketing, who asked about the mindset he had and the skills he had to improve on as Wong changes to a "different job" and prepares for his "next job as the Prime Minister".

"There is a lot of things you can do to prepare...I think mentors play a very important role [as they are] people who have gone through it before," Wong replied.

Getting constructive feedback on speeches

Wong highlighted public communications as another important aspect, noting that this involves thinking "very hard" about what has been said and what can be done better in the different platforms he had spoken at.

"There is nothing like reviewing the speeches you give, [and] getting good feedback," Wong added.

He explained that while there is no shortage of people who will praise others for making speeches, there are "very few" who will give specific and constructive feedback on the points which can be improved on.

"So really, it's about finding people you can trust, people whose opinions that you value to give you constructive feedback, so that you can learn and you can improve, and that's something I do all the time," he said.

Did not know what he wanted to do in life when he started working

Wong further shared he had no idea what he wanted to do in life when he started working in 1997.

"I had no clue what was the job I might apply for," he added.

Neither his parents, nor those from their generation had gone to university. Among his cousins, he was one of the few who was able to do so.

He was therefore constantly told by his parents to be grateful for the opportunity to study.

"So for them (his parents), if you can get to university, good for you. If you can't, you go and work. If you want to go overseas to study, that's not even a possibility.

So you've got to look for your own resources."

Still wasn't sure what he wanted to do when he joined the public service

Wong said he was "lucky" to get a scholarship, and subsequently joined the public service.

However, he was still unsure what he wanted to do.

"I didn't get into the Administrative Service at the start. Then when I was asked which ministry I wanted to join, I put MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)."

Wong's next answer then drew laughter from the crowd.

"Nothing to do with my major which was economics and it was only because I enjoyed travelling. And the people at MFA wisely saw through that when they interviewed me and they decided I was not suitable... And therefore I didn't get that job."

He then started working as an economist in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) instead.

You go through a process of discovery about yourself while you work

This led to Wong's next point about undergoing a process of self-discovery while working.

"Some doors open, some doors close, other doors open, you learn more about yourself, you learn more about your strengths," he noted.

Wong opined that if a person applies himself to whatever he is currently doing, is conscientious and works hard, he will get to know better his strengths, abilities and passions over time.

Using himself as an example, Wong said:

"I found that I enjoyed doing public service work and that's why I eventually stayed on, and I've been staying on in public service all this while.

But even in public service, the jobs I do have varied from one job to another and my next job will be an even bigger job than my present job. So it's always about continuous learning and improving, and always wanting to do better."