

## Lawrence Wong name-drops Charles & Keith saga as example of unhealthy comparisons on social status

"In life, there is always a temptation to compare with others, and to see who is 'better'."

**Ashley Tan**

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The recent online debate about whether Charles & Keith is a luxury brand appeared as part of Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's speech about career progression and investing in human capital.

Wong was speaking at the Singapore Perspectives Conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on Jan. 16.

**"What is deemed 'branded'?"**

As technology advances and the nature of jobs change, workers face career disruptions and rising income inequality. As such, Wong proposed three strategies to overcome these challenges.

One of these is to invest in quality jobs, and ensure that all career pathways are "rewarding" and "viable".

Wong also highlighted the need to shift perceptions and embrace a "broader definition of what counts as 'good jobs'", as opposed to simply focusing on "paper qualifications" over skills and competencies.

"In life, there is always a temptation to compare with others, and to see who is 'better'," he explained.

Although some comparison can drive healthy competition and learning, these comparisons can also be motivated by the "wrong reasons", and shaped by the desire to acquire status and social prestige.

"We saw this recently when there was a social media debate about luxury bags," Wong said, referring to the recent online discourse surrounding the Charles & Keith brand.

He quipped:

"And what is deemed 'branded'? I mean, if you have not been following the debate, then just go online and google 'Charles and Keith'."

Not just bags, but schools and jobs

This idea of what can be considered "branded" extends to more than just fashion accessories.

The same can be said for preferences for top schools or jobs that supposedly "confer higher status in life", Wong said.

However, Wong described himself as a "realist", and acknowledged that such mindsets will not be easy to change.

Nevertheless, it should be recognised that everyone has their own strengths, and one should focus on self-improvement, Wong shared.

"But we should all try to appreciate and recognise one another for who we are. Because at the end of the day, everyone is different. We are each blessed with unique gifts and talents. There is no need to compare with others.

The only comparison we need to make an internal one, to focus on our own lives to keep learning, improving, and ultimately, to be better versions of ourselves."

### **What happened regarding Charles & Keith?**

Charles & Keith recently came under the spotlight after a teenager was mocked for referring to her new bag as a "luxury" one.

The girl, who goes by Zoe, later opened up about her family's background and situation, and talked about how her family did not have a lot of money when she was growing up.

Her confession gained overwhelming support on TikTok, and caught the attention of Charles & Keith's founders themselves.

Zoe's latest update on TikTok showed her unwrapping two bags, presumably gifted by the brand.