

Food

for

Thought



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By the end of this year I will be 54. In the old days, government servants retired upon reaching 55. By that standard, I will be saying good-bye soon. Oh, how time flies. My late father enjoyed his life as a pensioner doing 101 things he had wanted to do for the next 17 years. He succumbed to lung cancer only in the last two months of his life. New staff who join government service has no choice but to retire at 60 years old, that is if they are still alive. Everyone remembers PSIS Director (Sabak Bernam), Dzul kifli who actually collapsed in his office. Abdul Rani Hanafiah, PSP Director (Seberang Prai) also died as a result of a few health complications. Still, I signed up for 60. But, being one of those who started work before 1992, I am allowed to opt out anytime between 56 and 60, if I want to. The one thing everyone considers now is to hit the 30 year service to qualify the 60% retirement benefit. On top of that, there is a maximum golden handshake of 5 months. Should your last drawn basic pay is RM10,000 then your one-off bonanza comes to RM50,000 provided you have spared 150 days of your annual leave. You may consider it as all-expenses-paid Hajj or Euro-tour for you and spouse. I don't know any other country offering this kind of incentive.





Ang Saik Choon and the writer.

I have served polytechnic for 28 years. Many others have exceeded this period. To put it into perspective, let's say approximately 30 staff in POLIMAS have hit 25 years of service, which means they have a total of 750 years of collective experience. Even if 10% of their wisdom is passed down to others, imagine the benefits our system would gain. So, *calling all those over 50 years old from all polytechnics to put your thoughts and extensive experience on your respective websites for free.* I am sure everyone has some stories to tell. Let's share with those who will take over our role so as to shorten their learning curve.

Until recently polytechnics have scrapped out Certificate Level programmes. We used to have some numbers of lecturers with Diploma or Certificate qualifications from established technical colleges like Maktab Teknik in Cheras. Some have retired. These groups of lecturers were par excellence at practical work as compared to the newly minted university graduates. They were actually sourced from Technical Schools. We do realise that our graduates' advantage over other graduates is in the hands-on areas. The remaining experts are largely already reaching the near-retirement stage. To name a few; Saidon Md Saim (*welding*), Shahrudin Ngah Mat Yunus (*wiring*), Md Sabri Sulaiman and Abu Samah Md Diah (*power*), Samsuri Hussin (*woodwork*), Jumri Ramli (*survey*), and Zainal Zulia Zainuddin (*CNC machine*). Some of them continued to degree level and were upgraded to DH42 like Abdul Rahman Mohamad (*robotic*). Really, we must work out a proper transfer of skill-competency to the remaining young 'text-book' lecturers. It has to be done promptly. As I am saying this, Ang Saik Choon (electrical) has retired early this month. Thank you for all your contributions.

We are all aware that the nation is striving hard to achieve Vision 2020; where we are to become a high-income nation. The government has introduced many policies which include Economic Transformation Plan (ETP). The polytechnic itself has its own transformation agenda which is already in phase two. What about things on the ground? Overall, we need to increase the number of teaching staff to match the ever increasing number of students' enrollment. Secondly, the right number of staff with appropriate qualification should match the need of the programmes offered. For example, the two programmes in POLIMAS like Diploma in Town Planning and Diploma in Architecture need extra hands badly. Similarly goes for the English courses. The situation has been left unresolved for far too long. What happen to our no-nonsense Whitening Process? The management must see that the number of right people is on the right bus. Any other way is simply not right. The interest of our clients should override all other considerations. Furthermore, the present government salary scheme is at par, if not better than the private sectors. Should you factored in health, bonus, annual/maternity leaves and other benefits, the scheme is probably second to none. Therefore, it is most appropriate that everyone shapes up and delivers.

WORK DAY

Have you ever wondered why PLUS has never grown any fruit trees along its 800 km highway? Sure their core business is toll collection but imagine if we have 1600 km (to and fro) of local fruit trees along the road; durian, rambutan, mangosteen, jack fruits, mangoes, etc. Or perhaps having fruit trees at the R&R or wherever suitable. No, they don't. There must be a reason why. The simplest rationale is people will probably stop for the fruits and accidents might happen. Someone may climb the tree, fall and break his leg. Or even worse, people might fight over the fruits. In PTSS, they grow over 400 mango trees of the world-famous type, Harumanis around the campus. The price per kilo now is hovering around RM18.00 and doubles if sent overseas. Nowadays, you need to have connection to savour this fragrant and sweet so-called Perlis Delight. This year's season is just over and the Entrepreneur Unit earned over RM5000 in sales. Forget about planting Harumanis outside Perlis for it will be a vain attempt. So, why does POLIMAS choose to grow all types of trees but fruit trees? Both produce oxygen all right. Now, I feel like planting a lychee tree at the administration block of which I can see through the window. Anyone else like to join?

In our country, there are two different sets of work days. For the three states; Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, working days are Sunday through Thursday. In other states, it is from Monday to Friday. If I remember correctly, Johor has opted to join the majority states many years ago. Every week we have to put in a certain number of hours, hence we work from 8am to 5pm (minus lunch break). In Kedah, the office closes at 3.30 pm on Thursdays because we do not take time off for Friday prayers. Despite some obvious difficulties, these arrangements bring benefits too. For example, we can have meetings and other activities all day long on Sunday without interruptions from anyone. On Fridays, no one will contact us and we can concentrate on our job on Sunday. We can do all our banking needs on Friday because banks are open. With online banking, like Maybank2u, bills can be settled from the office. Even Automated Teller Machines are available in the campus. Therefore, no one should have an excuse to go to the bank during working hours anymore.



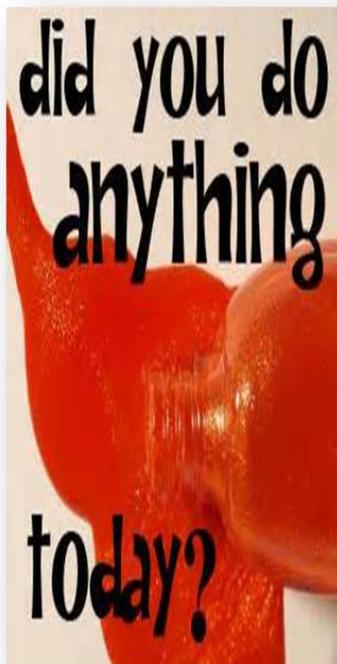
Do you not wonder how we are still wasting money nowadays? Sometimes we receive an email calling us for a meeting. A few days later, the same letter would be faxed to you. Still, sometimes you receive the instructions too late, causing you a lot of trouble to reschedule classes, buy air ticket at higher prices, skip your car service scheduled and to postpone other personal and family commitments. In some instances I have met officers who felt very frustrated when meetings are cancelled or postponed after they have booked the flight ticket. They can only claim their fare after attending the meeting.



How many times have we waited for sufficient quorum to start a meeting? If a meeting is delayed for 15 minutes involving 20 people, then the total lost time is 300 minutes or 5 hours. Assuming an hour of idling time costs RM100, then RM500 worth of productivity disappears into thin air. So, we must learn to respect other people's time. What about having a meeting for 3 hours which really should have only been an hour? Again, time is lost. A meeting should be held to find consensus over decisions so that it will be a shared responsibility. In Scandinavian countries, short meetings on the shop-floor of the factory may start at odd hours; 3.26 to 3.29 pm or 9.17 to 9.23 am. Why is it possible? It is simply because everyone synchronises their watches and clocks according to national standard time. What about us? The time on my wall clock, desktop computer, hand phone and wrist-watch are all different. Some people come in late for work on Sunday because our thumbprint clock gains 5 minutes over the weekend.



If you are an observer, you will see a lot of things that should not have happened. You wonder how among intelligent people, many common sense are not practised. When a meeting is over, how many people bother to push their chairs back under the table? Yet, the meeting is about implementing 5S at work. We should not be burdening the janitors, should we? When it comes to putting up notices, we fail miserably. We simply stick our bill anywhere we fancy. The notice board is our last choice. Why? Because it is full of out-dated news and information. I have seen someone putting up a notice, an invitation to recite *Yassin*, on the main door leading to the toilets at the hostel. He/she must have thought that it was the best place to catch prospective participants. During election time, have you not seen how political posters are pasted on road signs? Many years ago, I saw in the newspaper someone pasted his political symbol loud and clear on the back of a cow! I think it is disbanded now. More often than not, we do not have to think big to contribute. The little things we do collectively will help to make this place more pleasant and comfortable. Consider the following:



- Do you always park your car at designated areas?
- Have you ever picked up laid rubbish and throw it into a dustbin?
- Do you ride your bike without helmet in campus?
- Have you ever helped switch off the fan/light/air-con when you notice no one is around?
- Do you pick up phone calls promptly in your office?
- Do you report to the relevant authority should you see an accident waiting to happen, like an exposed live electrical wiring or broken ceiling?
- Do you advise students living in your area to behave and respect their neighbours?
- Do you greet visitors and make them feel welcome to our polytechnic?
- Do you always play truant during working hours?
- Do you always skip or go missing from your class?
- Do you always correct assignments and submit marks and evaluation on time?
- Are you a team player in your programme group, in the department or polytechnic level?
- Are you fond of complaining or writing poison letters?
- Do you always look forward to come to work?
- Do you always put your students' interest at heart?
- Are you showing good examples to your charges?
- Do you teach, guide, mentor, motivate and treat your students like your own children?
- Are you doing your best at the moment? If not, do you feel guilty about it?
- Do you think you deserve taking home your pay now?
- Above all, will you be able to answer to God later on?



If your score is not **20/20** then there is still room and opportunity for improvement! Why do we have to put everything right? Number one is because it is our own conscious choice to be an educationist. Being rich is not much of our concern. We have stakeholders watching our performance. Prospective students and parents may decide to go elsewhere if they feel we do not offer standard quality training. Prospective employers may close their doors if we produce incompetent workforce. Local universities may shy away from taking in our graduates because of the unpromising quality. MQA may withdraw their recognition if we slack down to their rules and requirements. In our second phase of our transformation plan we want to be at par with the best in the region, Asia. Who would want to collaborate with us if we are otherwise? What will be at stake? It will spoil part of the government's plan to produce 3.3 million workforce by 2020. Letting down the paymaster should be the last thing in anyone's mind.

