



PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Identify your strengths

Firm up the foundations of your career before embarking on an MBA

BY SURESH NAIR

WHEN Mr Toh Meng Kiat decided to take up a master's degree in business administration (MBA), he chose the University of Bradford (UOB), drawn by its scope and modules.

Mr Toh, who holds a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in Building from National University of Singapore, says: "The mode of study, location of classes and class schedule suit my preference. What's also important is that the local school supporting this degree is MDIS (Management Development Institute of Singapore), which is a recognised organisation in territory education."

He adds that MDIS' "schooling environment supports and allows the student to focus on studies rather than spending time managing administrative and logistical stuff".

"MDIS has a campus which provides the usual tertiary campus facilities such as a library, student services and even accommodation for international students. It has full-time lecturers on top of the partner-universities' staff. The institute also has a team focusing on 'product development', analysing the current and future trends in field of study and working with universities internationally to offer their courses in Singapore, as well as regionally," he adds.

Mr Toh, who started his two-year MBA programme last April, says that developing close bonds with his classmates — most of them senior managers — makes a "positive difference in career-life".

"By establishing good relationships, you will be able to learn in terms of organisation management, whether the field is the same or different," says the 38-year-old sales support consultant in a multinational firm.

Juggling act

The father of two boys, aged six and three, says family support, especially from his homemaker-wife Joan, 37, has been invaluable.

"We're a simple family and we live within our means," Mr Toh says. "It is a balancing act between family time, personal development and financial attainment. There is no formula to it. It may change in proportion from life stages, but it should always be understood and kept up."

"Because of family and work commitments, the tendency to give up is sometimes great," he says. "But always have the end in mind. I've always reminded myself why I took up the MBA in the first place. This will strengthen the endurance and discipline to finish the race. Most importantly, I have the support from my family. Without it, no amount of endurance or discipline will see me through."

Lessons in academic life

"There are many channels to achieve financial stability and personal development. One of the most common paths is academic education," says Mr Toh.

He feels that for those who choose this path, getting the first degree is of utmost importance, while the field of study is not as critical.

As to what the younger generation can learn from his experiences in his academic pursuit, he suggests spending two to three years identifying one's strengths by exploring a wider range of jobs. He feels that being a management trainee in a single organisation is a good start, as one is exposed to various areas of the business.

He says: "The aim is not to choose the job you like, but to study in which areas your strengths can be amplified."

"After you learn to know yourself, spend the next five to seven years 'deep-diving'. At this stage, excel in your respective areas fast and start doing what you can, above and beyond. Not a single high-rise building can be built from the sky down. This stage is for you to strengthen your foundations and if possible, start building on other areas."

"Once you reach a stage of extreme capability, capacity and confidence, it is time to prepare yourself as a junior manager at the management level. To support this aspiration, you

About the programme

The University of Bradford MBA provides students with the knowledge and skills of key business functions that will position them favourably in the workforce and open the doors to new job opportunities.

At MDIS, there are day-time (for Singapore and international students, to be completed in 15 months) and evening programmes (for Singapore students, to be completed between two to six years) aimed at highly motivated managers who wish to equip themselves with the essential business and management skills required in the increasingly competitive, diverse and dynamic business environment.

Bradford's MBA programmes are consistently ranked among the top 10 in Britain, top 30 in Europe and top 100 internationally by the Financial Times 2012. In addition, the Bradford University School of Management holds the 'Triple Crown' Accreditation from AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA.

can either engage in courses in specialist management or general management. A Master of Science and Master of Business Administration are among the choices you have to make, along with other professional qualifications."