

They Took On Full-Time Work and Part-Time Classes – Their Perseverance Won Them an Outstanding Resilience Award

Not everyone's learning journey goes smoothly, and 41-year-old Celeste Ling Yueh Er has faced significant challenges over the past four years. First, her marriage ended, and she returned to the workforce as a waiter to fight for the custody of her children. While taking on the role of a single mother, she decided to pursue further education to gain a better professional standing. She stepped back into the classroom, all while working part-time and taking care of her children. In just two years, she managed to complete a Master's degree in Business Administration while juggling work and family responsibilities, finishing half a year ahead of her classmates.

Her unwavering resilience not only allowed her to fulfill her dream of obtaining a higher academic degree but also earned her the Chairman's Award for Resilience from the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), which is given out for the first time.

Funded by the Chairman of SIM, Ms Eileen Goh, the Chairman's Award for Resilience aims to recognise students who graduate within a year or have already graduated. These students have excelled academically in their Bachelor's or Master's degree courses from local or overseas universities while working full-time jobs. Award recipients are nominated with strong recommendations from their current employers and receive a prize of SGD 3,000.

Celeste, currently a Senior Associate Executive Officer in the Technology and Research Development team at Alexandra Hospital, shared in an interview on Thursday, August 17, after the award ceremony, "This award holds great significance for me. It not only acknowledges my efforts but also embodies the teachings of my mother."

Her mother had been the sole breadwinner of the family, raising her and her three siblings. "She worked hard and never complained, emphasising that she was luckier and happier than many others," shared Celeste.

While pursuing a part-time Master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Birmingham through SIM, Celeste found herself with little energy to study after work, and weekends were spent completing assignments and attending classes. As a result, she had less time to spend with her three children, aged 17, 15, and 8 years old, respectively. In order to complete her studies as soon as possible, she chose to do her dissertation first, managing a busy schedule of work, classes, and thesis writing.

"At times, I was exhausted and tempted to rest and not study. But my colleagues, friends, my mother's advice, and the strong support from my superiors all motivated me to press on."

After completing her secondary education, Celeste pursued Food Science and Nutrition at Temasek Polytechnic. She worked in various fields including retail and administration. After taking a four-year hiatus to care for her youngest child, she re-entered the workforce in 2019. Initially, she faced challenges in her job search, with few responses from her job applications. With a friend's introduction, she began working as a waiter in a restaurant located within a hospital. Inspired by the service-oriented attitude of healthcare workers, she decided to pivot into a role in the healthcare industry. With a strong recommendation from her supervisor, she enrolled in the Master of Business Administration programme at SIM-University of Birmingham, even without a Bachelor's degree.

Celeste remarked that the Master's programme at SIM was highly flexible. Lessons were conducted by lecturers from around the world, which allowed her to broaden her horizons. "While the degree is important and it gave me more confidence in job seeking, the learning

process is even more crucial. For instance, when facing challenges now, I don't react impulsively but instead, organise my thoughts and find effective ways to address them."

Now, having overcome challenges and reaping the rewards, she plans to spend more time with her family. She tells her children that everyone's learning journey is different and poor academic performance now doesn't equate to lifelong failure. Just like her, they can return to school and learn new things later in life. She also encourages her colleagues and friends to pursue further education.

During the award ceremony, SIM Chairman, Ms Euleen Goh, mentioned that the award supports enthusiastic learners and acknowledges the spirit of perseverance in the face of adversity.

Another two recipients of the SIM Chairman's Award for Resilience are Terence Tian (29 years old), who pursued a Bachelor of Business (Management) from SIM-RMIT, and Nur Dyana (25 years old), who pursued a Bachelor of Applied Science (Aviation) from SIM-RMIT.

Terence shared that during his younger years, he was more focused on having fun, which resulted in less-than-ideal O-level examination results. At the age of 17, his father passed away due to an illness. The following year, he retook the O-level exams but was still unable to gain admission to a polytechnic and so entered ITE. However, during his time at ITE, he had a turning point, excelling academically and continuing to achieve excellent results at Temasek Polytechnic. He said, "I promised my parents that I would work hard to let my mother enjoy a comfortable retirement, so I had to study hard."

He noted that both working full-time while studying part-time, and studying full-time while working part-time, require significant determination and perseverance. When working full-time, exhaustion from attending evening classes would carry over to the next day. However, when studying full-time, he could take a break from working during exam periods. This helped alleviate some of the physical and mental strain. "Part-time studies demand better time management and greater persistence."