

Address by Professor YAN Houmin, Dean of College of Business

President, Honoured Guests, Graduates and Colleagues:

Good morning to our graduates and a very special welcome to all family members here with us today. You, our graduates, have worked very hard to successfully complete university and earn your degree with us today. But you wouldn't have achieved it without the help of your families. They have given everything to make you what you are today. So let us acknowledge their efforts now, and thank them for the part they played in your success, with a big round of applause.

As some of you may still be looking for jobs, I am going to talk about something that might be useful to you: job hiring policy. What do top international companies look for in the people they hire? Let's start with a bit of a surprise: it may not be your knowledge or "expertise"!

Many people feel nowadays that EQ—emotional intelligence—is more important than IQ or knowledge about attaining success in their lives and careers. In this way of thinking, success depends on our ability to understand other people and respond appropriately.

According to Cambridge dictionaries online, "EQ is a measurement of a person's emotional intelligence. It equals their ability to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others".

Over the next five minutes I am going to look at the attributes that one top company is looking for when recruiting. And it turns out that EQ is an important part of the story.

Let's go to the international level. Let's look at technology companies. And let's go to the top. The multinational technology company we will look at is one you will all be familiar with: Google Inc.

In an interview with the *New York Times* Google's Senior Vice-President of People Operations, Laszlo Bock, recently revealed five key "hiring attributes". It makes for some interesting reading:

One: You don't know much, but you can learn

Two: You know when to shut the hell up

Three: You know when you're beat

Four: You're oddly proud of your mistakes

Five: You're no expert

A lot of this might sound a little bit strange. Haven't you just spent three years gaining knowledge that is supposed to be useful some day? Haven't you been encouraged to have a point of view and articulate it? Aren't you exhorted never to give up? Surely, you haven't been encouraged to make mistakes? And finally, aren't you now something of an expert having graduated in accountancy, economics and finance or whatever your subject may be?

But let's take a closer look. Perhaps what Google is looking for isn't so strange after all.

Their first attribute is: You don't know much, but you can learn.

It turns out that Google is looking for people who can think on their feet. To solve problems as they come up. The catch is that the ability to do so will depend on your existing knowledge. Otherwise how can you begin to understand a new problem? So, you need a good and expanding store of background knowledge to draw upon. And how do you get this? You need curiosity. You need to read.

Secondly: You know when to shut the hell up.

Now that sounds particularly harsh, and distinctly American, as we don't normally use such language in the university context! But what it means is that Google is looking for "emergent leadership as opposed to traditional leadership". This means

knowing when it is appropriate to get involved. In other words, “leadership” is not a fixed tool kit full of confidently learned skills. You need the ability to judge when to contribute. This takes EQ rather than IQ.

Thirdly: You know when you’re beat.

Again it sounds strange. In a culture like ours that prizes “problem solving” (and I submit that Hong Kong is strong on problem solving), surely you should provide solutions? Of course, Google still needs to find solutions. But the emphasis is on “what we can do together to solve problems”. So again, this is a matter of judging the context in which you work. Yes, you are keen to get involved but humble enough to step back and say, “I’ve contributed my piece, and then I step back”.

Fourthly: You’re oddly proud of your mistakes.

You are graduating from a leading Hong Kong business school. You were a success before coming to us, and you (rightly) see yourself as a success story now on your graduation. So why are we talking about mistakes? In Chinese culture where “face” is important, mistakes are avoided. But what Google is saying is that we tend to identify too strongly with events: we “commit the fundamental attribution error, which is if something good happens, it’s because I’m a genius. If something bad happens, it’s because someone’s an idiot”. What Mr Bock is looking for instead is “intellectual humility”, i.e. owning up to your mistakes.

And finally, number five: You’re no expert.

Now this is indeed a hard one to swallow. Hasn’t part of our mission over the past three years been to make you a subject matter expert? But it turns out that expertise is the least important attribute for Google hires. And why is that? Because if an employee has all the characteristics listed above (the ability to learn, intellectual humility, emergent leadership, etc) then 99 per cent of the time when faced with a problem, they’ll come up with the same answer as an expert. And for that final 1 per cent, they might say the wrong thing but they might also come up with something “totally new”. “And there is huge value in that,” says Bock.

It turns out that the Google shopping list is not so strange after all. Much of what Google is looking for is supported by what we call “critical thinking”. But I didn’t want

to start with critical thinking today—it is an over-used term—because I feared that it might have sent some of you instantly to sleep! In fact Google is looking for more than critical thinking. We might say: using critical thinking with emotional intelligence.

Some of you will know the career-search website indeed.com. According to their analysis, mentions of critical thinking in job postings have doubled since 2009. The site, which combs job ads from several sources, recently found that more than 21,000 health-care and 6,700 management postings contained some reference to the skill.

Where does the ability to think critically come from? It can only come from your background knowledge. For instance, your ability to understand the significance of data can only come from assessing its context. And how do you build up that contextual knowledge? We are back to curiosity. And that is fed by knowledge which comes from various sources including reading.

So, I should like to encourage you to do two things. Let’s call them two types of reading. Yes, be curious. Build up your background knowledge by following your interests; read the web, newspapers, magazines, even books! But also be aware of the potential role of EQ in your future work life (and life). Work on understanding context, understanding situations as they develop; “reading people” if you like.

So to go back to the beginning: EQ is our ability to understand other people and respond appropriately.

And what leading multinational companies like Google seem to be looking for is your ability to make appropriate contributions. EQ rather than IQ.

I sincerely hope that you will enjoy a successful working life with your future colleagues, wherever and whoever they may be. That you will be able to understand them, and that you will enjoy fruitful working relationships with them. Such understanding may be the foundation of your success!

Thank you and, once again, my heartiest congratulations to all of you, our graduating students. May you achieve fulfilment and happiness in your life!