

SPEECH AT THE FACULTY OF LAW, U.K.M. ELEGANT LAW NIGHT

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By

Dato' Abdul Hamid Mohamad
Chief Justice, Federal Court, Malaysia.

You might have heard of my slogan: "Buat Kerja. Bukan Buat Kenduri." Do we "buat kerja" or "buat kenduri" this evening? It looks like "buat kenduri". It sounds like "buat kenduri". Correct? If it is "buat kenduri", I should not be talking about work. But, if I were to do that, I am sure you will be very disappointed. However, as is usual in law, there is always a hybrid. I will treat tonight's function as a hybrid between "buat kerja" and "buat kenduri".

Since I get invited to speak quite often before similar audience and on similar occasions, I always worry about repeating myself. But, I am consoled by this incident. In late 1970's, the Law Lords from England, including Lord Denning and Lord Diplock visited Malaysia. During the visit, Lord Denning delivered a public lecture at the University of Malaya. Lord Denning told a story about how the post of the "Master of the Rolls" was misunderstood by non-lawyers. Taking out a piece of paper from his coat pocket, he read it. It was a letter from an Indian gentleman who had just graduated as an engineer from a British University. The letter concluded something like this: "I hope you will consider me for a suitable post in your company". Obviously, the gentleman must have thought that the "Master of the Rolls" was the Chief Executive of the Rolls Royce company! Of course we had a good laugh. But, when the laughter died down, Lord Diplock who was sitting beside Tun Suffian whispered to Tun Suffian that Lord Denning had been telling the same joke for the past twenty years and had been carrying the same piece of paper wherever he went.

So, I have a precedent to follow, nothing less than that of Lord Denning's. That is in addition to what your professors and lecturers have been doing year after year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Soon, you will complete one phase of your life and will be embarking on to another phase which I call "the real life." You will find it very different from your student life. You will find that things you never thought were important, are important. You will find that, at times, you will have to be pragmatic rather than idealistic. You will find that, most of the time, you do not have the right to choose your boss but you will have to put up with him. You will find that knowing the law is not enough if you do not have the clients. You will find that, most of the time, you will be dealing with people, all kinds of people, rather than the law. You may feel that you in a strange surrounding. But, soon, pretty soon, without even realizing it, you will find that you have adjusted yourselves and are quite comfortable where you are. Call it the "survival instinct", if you like. In fact you have

done that many times, for example, when you first went to school and when you entered the university.

One of the first things you will learn when you start working is that you will know how much you don't know. But, don't worry. You will learn, provided you are willing and prepared to learn, from anybody, including your office boy. But, what is dangerous is to be "ignorantly confident". In legal practice, no matter how long you have been at the job, whether as an advocate and solicitor, a legal adviser, a prosecutor or a judge, you will always come across things that you don't know. It is a continuous learning process.

In working life, there are times when you are required to do something by a certain dateline that you think is impossible to do. Under such circumstance, you have no choice but to somehow do it. Often, it will be done. Once, when I was a Deputy Registrar, at about 9.00 a.m. I was called by His Royal Highness Raja Azlan Shah, then Chief Justice, Malaya. He wanted me to draft a speech for him and he wanted it by 12.00 noon the same day. I asked him whether he could give me until 4.00 p.m. because I had about 20 chamber matters fixed before me that morning. He replied: "If you have no time, make time". Somehow, I did it and he was very pleased with the speech. Of course, I got more "assignments" after that.

One advice that Allahyarham Tun Suffian gave me which I try my best to follow until today is this. He said: "If you have a choice between a bombastic word and a simple word, choose the simple word. If you have a choice between a long sentence and a short sentence, choose the short sentence. If you have some doubts, delete. No matter how long or how well you write, if people cannot understand you, it serves no purpose."

You may want to join the Legal and Judicial Service. To get into the Legal and Judicial Service now, you will have to compete with thousands of your contemporaries. Certainly, the service will only choose the best.

What do they look for? Let me give you some tips. First, they will look at your academic credentials. In so doing, besides your grade, they will pay particular attention to your spoken English. Whether we like it or not, the language of the profession, whether in the public or the private sector, is English. It is more so in the private sector. They will see how you present your ideas or your case. After all, you are a lawyer, words are your ammunition and speech is the means. Of course, such requirement is not necessary if you were a veterinary doctor because a veterinary doctor does not even have to convince the dog or the cat before injecting it or putting it to sleep. They will then look at your extra-curricular activities. They will look for someone who is assertive, outgoing and confident.

If you decide to practise, after you are called to the bar, I suggest that you work as an assistant in an established firm first and get some experience before you go on your own. There is too much risk if you start on your own without any experience in practice. Furthermore, do not be too easily tempted to accept an offer of partnership, especially by one-man firm unless you know that the firm's accounts are in order.

Don't try to get rich quickly. I remember a lawyer who, on the day he was admitted to the bar, boasted that he would be a millionaire in two years. Well, I don't know whether he did become a millionaire in two years but I know that he was suspended in about two years.

Law practice covers a vast area. Not everybody is suited for everything. If you are too timid and you cannot stand the pressure of litigation work, stay in office and do solicitor's work. If you like the limelight, you enjoy arguing on your feet and you think you are good at it, try litigation. Even in litigation, you will find that you may be better in one thing, and not so good in another. You will find out quite soon what you are more suited for and you should make full use of it. Even now you may already have some rough idea what kind of job suits you best.

The fact that you are a graduate in law does not necessarily mean that you will have to practise law for a living. After all, graduates in philosophy do not earn a living as philosophers. There is no limit to things that you can do. But, whatever you do, you will find that the discipline, especially the ability to analyze, to think, to apply and to make decisions, which is part and parcel of working life, is useful.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me not worry you all too much on this happy occasion. Challenges and problems there will be in whatever you do. Face them as they come. Be honest, but not naïve and work hard. There is no short cut to success. From my experience, I can say with confidence that, in the long run, it pays to be honest and to work hard.

My wife and I thank you very much for inviting us to this dinner. We wish you all success in whatever career you choose.

Dengan lafaz Bismillahir rahmaanir rahim, saya dengan sukacitanya merasmikan majlis Elegant Law Night, Fakulti Undang-Undang Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Thank you.