



Mr Abu Bakar (centre, in blue) with his colleagues at a Keppel worksite. He recently graduated from SMU with an Executive MBA, which was made possible only after a former CEO wrote him a testimonial, as he did not have any degree qualifications. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

**POLYTECHNIC, ITE GRADUATES AND SCHOOL DROPOUT BECOME CEO, MANAGERS**

# Rising up Keppel's ranks without stellar academic qualifications

*PM Lee shares success stories of several staff who advanced via training, skill acquisition*

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**SINGAPORE** – Graduating from Singapore Polytechnic, Mr Abu Bakar joined Keppel Shipyard as an assistant safety officer in 1990. Today, he is the chief executive officer of Nakilat-Keppel Offshore and Marine, a Keppel joint venture in Qatar.

His story was one of several told by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of

Keppel staff who have risen through the ranks through training and acquisition of new skills, though they did not have stellar academic qualifications.

Mr Abu Bakar recently graduated from Singapore Management University with an Executive MBA, which was made possible only after former Keppel chief executive Choo Chiau Beng wrote him a testimonial — as he did not have any degree qualifications.

The Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review (ASPIRE) committee hopes to help more polytechnic and Institute of Technical Education (ITE) graduates tread the path charted by Mr Abu Bakar, with more emphasis on mastering skills and gaining relevant

qualifications along the way.

In his National Day Rally speech, Mr Lee said: “There are different ways to deepen one’s skills and knowledge, by learning on the job or going for higher qualifications as you work, progressively, or both. You should look for the best ways to learn. Learn what is relevant and apply that. Don’t go on a paper chase for qualifications or degrees.”

Mr Lee pointed out that Mr Abu Bakar did not need a degree to be promoted to a colonel as an operationally-ready National Serviceman, commanding an infantry brigade.

Other Keppel success stories Mr Lee highlighted included that of

Ms Dorothy Han, an ITE graduate who rose to lead 62 people in the pipe design section of the engineering department, and Mr Roy Lim’s, a secondary school drop-out who became one of two shipyard managers of Keppel FELS. The pair together manage 12,000 workers in Keppel’s two biggest yards in Tuas.

“Keppel illustrates that you can progress by acquiring deep skills and knowledge throughout your career,” said Mr Lee. “Pathway and opportunities to upgrade and to get better qualifications will remain open throughout your career.”

At the same time, employers must value staff and develop them to take on higher responsibilities. “With the right support at work, you can advance in your careers whether or not you are a graduate. This is the culture shift which we need,” he said.

Keppel Offshore and Marine’s (Keppel O&M) campus recruitment efforts include active collaborations such as internship programmes and regular talks at educational institutions such as ITEs and polytechnics.

Structured development schemes for new employees, ranging from those who have completed N-Levels to fresh graduates with diplomas or degrees, are also in place to provide them with the knowledge and skills to have a good head start in the company.

For example, the Management Traineeship Scheme is a two-year intensive development programme that Keppel O&M has for fresh graduates with diplomas or degrees, which comprises classroom training, job rotation and networking opportunities. Keppel O&M also has an Employee Development Scheme to sponsor employees who wish to further their education regardless of their educational level.

When asked what he thought of society’s fixation with academic grades, Mr Abu Bakar said: “There are some merits, although being too focused on academic qualifications can cause us to stereotype.”

“We all go through experiences in life and I believe it is these experiences that make a person complete.” **AD-**

**DITIONAL REPORTING BY LAURA PHILOMIN**



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