

# Entrepreneurs and service staff are valued: Poll

A COMMON gripe among employers is that Singaporeans shun work that gets their hands dirty.

A survey by The Straits Times, however, throws up a surprising finding: It suggests Singaporeans have a healthy respect for those who do such jobs.

They tend to value entrepreneurs and jobs either requiring manual labour or in the service industry over white-collar ones.

Some 501 respondents of working age were asked to pick the jobs they respect or value more out of five pairs in a more light-hearted section of a survey on job perceptions.

Each job pairing compared how people felt about certain job traits.

It turns out that Singaporeans may not be as conscious about prestige and job image as some might think.

Asked if they respected a self-made entrepreneur with no degree or an economist with a master's degree more, an overwhelming 81 per cent plumped for the entrepreneur.

Calling this a positive sign, economics professor Hoon Hian Teck of the Singapore Management University says those who dare to take the plunge should be celebrated, as innovative start-ups will be a key job generator in the future.

Association of Small and Medium Enterprises president Chan Chong Beng, 59, says people tend to recognise the gumption needed to be an entrepreneur, especially in Singapore where "there's very little tolerance for failure". Mr Chan, who dropped out of university to start his business, says: "When you are an entrepreneur, the future is always uncertain. You have to admire those with the guts to think differently."

In another job pairing where respondents had to choose between two types of blue-collar jobs, 62 per cent said they would respect a cleaner over a factory worker, which is also a finding that will surprise some observers.

Office cleaner Abdul Kabir Mohamed Mydeen, 51, says friends asked why he switched from being a medical orderly to a cleaner earlier this year. His response:

"Why not? A cleaner is a very good job. Without us, offices will not be clean, toilets will not be clean, Singapore will not be clean."

Others feel the survey's findings paint an overly rosy picture of an occupation which has hogged headlines for stagnant wages and lack of appeal to locals.

Executive director of the Restroom Association (Singapore) Emerson Hee notes that cleaners are more likely to be viewed as making a public contribution compared to factory workers, whose perceived contributions are restricted to their company.

But many toilet attendants still do not feel respected or appreciated for their efforts, he says.

Madam Lim Ai Lee, 78, who won an award from the association last year for keeping Queenstown Polyclinic's toilets spick and span, says some people leave toilet paper on the floor and ignore her when she asks them to use the bins.

The survey respondents' respect for more manual or frontline

jobs is also evident in other pairings. Between a waiter and a clerical assistant, 61 per cent value the service job over the white-collar job, which pay roughly equivalent amounts.

Some 70 per cent also value a machine operator over a clerk.

Labour MP Zainal Sapari, who champions low-wage workers, is heartened that Singaporeans appear to value the work done by workers in service sectors.

But there is a distinction between the jobs people appreciate and the jobs they are willing to do, he notes.

Adds sociologist Paulin Straughan: "We respect those who are doing the hard work, but would rather not have to suffer those work conditions ourselves."

One reason is that the pay is not attractive enough. This is supported by survey findings that Singaporeans are not averse to working in blue-collar jobs if the pay is right.

Only 32 per cent agree or strongly agree with the statement "regardless of salary, a white-collar job is always better than a blue-collar job".

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**Mr Abdul Kabir Mohamed Mydeen switched jobs to become a cleaner.** ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN