



FROM DIPLOMA TO DEGREE: Miss Wanda Hu graduated from Temasek Polytechnic in 2008 and went on to get a degree.
 TNP PICTURES: GARY GOH

DEGREE V DIPLOMA HOLDER

Poly grads take different paths to success

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THEY are both graduates of Temasek Polytechnic who chose different paths after receiving their diplomas.

Miss Julia Yeo headed out to work with her diploma in retail management in 2009. Her senior, Miss Wanda Hu, who graduated a year earlier, pursued a university education.

Some five years later, they are earning the same salary – about \$3,000.

But neither has any regrets about the paths they followed.

Miss Hu is a product manager at Armaggeddon, a company specialising in gaming gear, and Miss Yeo is a store manager at Uniqlo.

For Miss Hu, 24, getting a degree has always been a priority.

With a polytechnic GPA of 3.8 and a scholarship, she pursued a degree in business management at Singapore Management University.

She said: "I was really sure that regardless of what I was doing in poly, I wanted to go to uni."

"It's the only way for me to expand my options."

Despite being at her job for about six years – beginning from a part-time job during her polytechnic days – she said her degree has allowed her to move up the ladder quickly. She was paid about \$2,500 when she started working full time in late 2011.

She said: "I honestly don't think I'd be able to get my current pay and position if I had worked straight after poly."

The issue of the importance of a degree has become the latest online buzz, after National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan said at an Our Singapore Conversation dialogue last Saturday that Singaporeans do not need to be university graduates to be successful.

Responding to a participant who said more university places should be set aside for Institute of Technical Education and polytechnic graduates, he said: "You own a degree, but so what? You can't eat it. If that cannot give you a good life, a good job, it is



SATISFIED, TOO: Polytechnic diploma holder Julia Yeo rose to be a store manager at Uniqlo.

meaningless."

Miss Hu said while she agreed with Mr Khaw, a degree is necessary to secure managerial positions.

"It's true that without a degree, we can still get jobs. But in terms of the type of job, pursuing your interest or expanding your options, having the degree then becomes really important.

"It enables us to make more of ourselves."

She added that her company, being a small and medium enterprise, allows diploma holders to hold managerial positions, but only after accumulating

Glass ceiling for diploma holders? To a 'certain extent'

IS THERE a glass ceiling for diploma holders in managerial and executive jobs?

Recruitment consultancy Robert Walters Singapore said there is, to a certain extent.

Ms Gwen Lim, a manager at the Human Resources Division, Robert Walters Singapore, said that unfortunately, there are times where intellectual capability and communication skills become correlated to the academic background of professionals.

As a result, diploma holders face limitations in their career progress.

"However, we have witnessed companies who are willing to sponsor the degree or master's programme of existing employees in an effort to build talent capability in the long run," she said.

On the other hand, Mr Anthony Ung, country manager of JobStreet Singapore,

said the concept of a glass ceiling diploma holder is untrue.

"A glass ceiling implies that no matter how hard an individual works, he or she will not be able to get to where he wants to be.

'Generally untrue'

"This is generally untrue because in many cases, experienced and high performing individuals without the relevant certifications are able to reach high echelons in a company.

"Granted that a degree gives individuals an advantage, this advantage is severely diminished the longer an individual stays in the work force," he said.

– Kerri Heng

years of experience.

But for Miss Yeo, 24, her promotion to a store manager was swift, taking no more than two years.

Starting out as a retail assistant, she rose through the ranks, becoming a senior retail associate then an assistant manager, before her current position.

She said: "I never expected to rise so quickly. I was hesitant and timid at first, thinking I couldn't handle it because I didn't have the leadership skills.

Training and guidance

"But with training and guidance from senior staff members, I learnt."

Her salary has also changed significantly from when she first started working – "about a \$2,000 difference".

She earned about \$1,300 when she started.

Although she initially wanted to get a part-time degree, she held it off, uncertain which field to pursue. Now she is adamant that she no longer needs a degree.

She said: "If I were to continue studying, I'd pick up Japanese because it'll help in my work."

But that's not to say she already considers herself successful.

"There's still a lot for me to learn. I'll consider myself successful only when I work my way up further."

Miss Hu shared the same sentiment.

She said: "My interest is in gaming and so I'm fortunate that I get to do what I like.

"But there's a lot more room for what I'm doing to grow. When it does, I'll be in a better position and, of course, my pay would be a lot higher as well."



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– University grad Wanda Hu