

# PPR&D, Sand Castles and Advice



▲ Alvin Lee, showing his toy for making sand castles to PPR&D students.

**“A** certain person stepped into his bath tub and he saw water flowing out of it; another was sitting under a tree when he saw an apple falling down from the tree; yet another person saw steam coming out of a boiling kettle and pushing the kettle lid with it.

“All these people saw what everybody saw. The big difference is that they saw it differently... they saw it with an inquiring mind and they put their knowledge to good use,” declared Alvin Lee, guest speaker at the Product and Process Research & Development (PPR&D) Certificate Presentation ceremony.

Alvin himself, too saw something - he saw stretches and stretches of sandy beaches all over the world, he saw a child struggling to build a sand castle with a pail and a spade. He put the two facts together and hey presto, he saw a market for a toy to help children build better sand castles.

It was such a simple idea that nobody was interested in it! As one company whom he approached said, “If your idea is so good, it would have been in the market long ago!”

The fact was that no such toy was in the market - and Alvin was convinced that such a toy was long overdue.

he was sure that there is a big market out there, not only in Singapore, but all over the world.

So he gave up his ‘General Manager’ job in Jakarta, flew off to America - the ‘land of opportunities’ and managed to sell his idea to a plastic manufacturing company. To cut a long story short, the toy sold extremely well when it was launched at the New York Toy Fair in February this year. It is now on sale in major retail stores in Singapore.

Alvin hopes to start a product/business development company in the future to help Singaporeans bring their innovations into the international market. “There is a very wide gap between the time an idea is conceived and the time it reaches the market. During this time there are a lot of real and imagined fears, such as fear of someone copying your idea, fear of being cheated etc. .... I hope to help innovators through this difficult period ....” he disclosed.

The PPR&D certificate was given to the third batch of more than eighty third year students who have completed the programme on 17 May 1997. The programme was set up in 1994 to expose SP students to R&D techniques thus beginning the nurturing process of creating graduates for applied research and developmental work. A total of 37 projects were completed and they ranged from robots, to coloured contact lenses to low fat ice cream. ❖

## Hey Students - take note!

*With one success story behind him Alvin is well placed to offer some advice to Singapore Polytechnic students. (Alvin graduated from Singapore Polytechnic in 1978)*

- *“First,” he said, “don’t look down on small or simple ideas because a small idea can turn out to be big business. Similarly, never underestimate the importance of the smallest invention for it may some day become the most useful item in the world.*

- *As a student, you should not confine yourself only to your area of studies. Try to widen your areas of interests. If you are an engineering student, go and find out something about business studies or the arts.*

- *If you have an idea or have created a product, don’t despair if nobody seems interested in it. Don’t forget that Singapore is a small place. Take your product to the world. The world is your market.*

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- *When you are applying for a job - don’t be attracted by the job simply because it pays you a \$100 more than another job. It’s more important to know what you can learn from the company.*

- *Be prepared to roll up your sleeves and dirty your hands.*

- *Outside of your work, you should have a hobby, a passion. It can be anything — but it should drive you and involve you. Intelligence is not everything. You must have passion as well. Once you’re at work, there will be no more teachers. That doesn’t mean that you don’t continue to learn. In fact you are your own best teacher.*

- *In whatever you do, do it well. No job is ever too small; no task too unimportant and no work too trivial. A small job done well is far better than a big job done average. So give your all in everything that you do.*

- *Finally, never say you’ll give something a try. You’ll not succeed if you say that. There’s no such*