Some 120 alumni and guests gathered at NTU’s spanking new Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine @ Novena Campus on 20 July 2017 for the 41st Distinguished Alumni Forum. Speaking on the theme ‘What is Success In Life?’ were Mr Henry Tan Song Kok (NBS/1988), Chairman and Managing Director of Nexia TS Public Accounting Corporation, and Mr Kong Fern Chiang (NBS/2002, TIP/2008), Founder and CEO of Four Media Private Limited. Both speakers are prominent businessmen who have taken their companies beyond Singapore’s borders to break into the vast Chinese market.

The session began with Mr Tan sharing about success versus significance. Citing the example of a friend who has spent 20 years in South Africa helping the less privileged, Mr Tan said, “Making a difference to one person, one family—it may not sound successful, but it is significant.”

By Mr Tan’s measure, success or significance is based on meaningful outcomes. However, the second speaker of the evening, Mr Kong, challenged the notion of success as an end point. In his opinion, the journey towards success is equally, if not more important than the destination.

“I made a lot of mistakes during the course of establishing my company,” Mr Kong shared. However, he treated each mistake as an opportunity for growth, noting that “If you find yourself not making mistakes, you’re not trying something new.” Having such an attitude kept him going and helped him to become who he is today, he said.

Mr Tan’s personal mantra was to be nice and to treat people with respect. “Who wouldn’t want to work with a nice person?” he asked rhetorically, emphasising that camaraderie and trust were intangible but critical elements of running a successful business.

Mr Kong’s mantra, on the other hand, was to “keep trying.” In his opinion, by persevering and continuously stepping out of one’s comfort zone, success will come naturally. “So when things get tough, I always tell myself to keep trying—and keep drinking!” he said, to laughter from the audience.

Both Mr Tan and Mr Kong agreed that being able to quickly adapt to foreign business cultures is a key ingredient for success when it comes to venturing into overseas markets. They also called for greater unity among Singaporean businesses exploring abroad, saying that such enterprises should band together and leverage one another’s strengths to claim a bigger slice of the global pie.

Mr Sherwin Goh (SSM/2017) appreciated the profound insights that were shared during the forum. “Everyone has their own definition of success, but the speakers are older and wiser, and they have broadened my perspective on what success in life means.”

Also impressed by the meaningful discussion was Mr Tan Peck Chuan (EEE/1990), who remarked, “This evening’s forum is lovely because it establishes a connection between different generations of alumni. The speakers, by sharing their success stories, are giving back to the NTU community.”