After graduating from university, some of us might think that we are done with learning. But for Professor Er Meng Hwa, Vice President of International Affairs and Professor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE) at NTU, education never stops.

“In any company, every position is an opportunity to learn, and education is the best gift,” said Prof Er, speaking to some 65 alumni at the NTU Alumni Affairs Office’s inaugural Tête-à-Tête session on 18 May 2017, held at NTU Alumni House in Marina Square.

In 2016, Prof Er was the only Singaporean among 126 people honoured at an exhibition featuring the world’s most influential engineers, held at the Institution of Engineering and Technology in the UK.

Besides his engineering background, Prof Er also credits his success to constant readings of the I Ching—the ancient Chinese text that is the source for many ideas in Confucianism and Taoism. Over the past 20 years, Prof Er has drawn from the book many insights related to leadership and leading change.

BEING A PEOPLE-ORIENTED LEADER

For Prof Er, great leadership boils down to one thing: creating an environment where people can trust each other. Regardless of one’s position or title in a company, he believes that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity.

“I treat my colleagues with fairness and respect. In fact, I don’t call them my ‘staff’, because I’m just one of them,” he shared. “We all want to make sure that the school is functioning well, and to contribute our share towards producing excellent students for the nation.”

LEADING CHANGE

Change presents a challenge for leaders because it creates uncertainty, said Prof Er. When leading change, leaders should recognize the importance of making team decisions, he added.

“One important element in leading change is how you communicate your vision to your team, and thus show them the quality of your decision-making process,” he explained. Doing this well, he added, would also help to encourage the right attitudes among people who may remain sceptical about the change.

Audience members were inspired by the talk. “I enjoyed what he shared about the key traits of a leader, especially when he talked about leading change,” said Ms Ong Fang Zheng (ADM/2011). “It was exactly what I needed and why I came here. It reaffirms some of my principles, and guides me when it comes to building a team.”

“Professor Er’s sharing was very philosophical,” said Ms Joyce Chee (EEE/2013). The talk left her with insights that she could definitely apply to her career, she added.

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