

## Admission of Advocates and Solicitors

In semiotic terms Covid-19 is the signifier. It conjures the image of pestilence, lockdowns, social-distancing, and many more images in this complex milestone. The full meaning of what it signifies remains to be seen, but you are the first lawyers to have been admitted to the Bar by means of video communication. That is itself another signifier. It signifies, paradoxically, remoteness as well as connectedness – you are all at home and yet in court. The sign that draws the Covid-19 signifier and the signified situations of remote hearings together to generate its meaning, indicates that the practice of the law will change from this point on.

Even though the pandemic is not over, people all over the world are talking about a reset that this pandemic will inevitably activate. But resets are for old people – people who have been through a different era. You are not in that category. You are the vanguard of a new order. Resets imply discarding an old practice, one that is ingrained in an old order. You are the batch of lawyers admitted in the midst of the pandemic. You are not resetting to a new era. You are present at its birth. You are a batch of lawyers as original as fresh, home-made barley. But whether it is a reset or just starting fresh there are two important things to remember. First, starting fresh means that you have no accumulated reserves to draw upon. You lay your own path, charting by the stars on your own, and imagining that which is beyond the visible horizon. Secondly, starting fresh will not be on a completely clean slate. And you must therefore make choices – what should you invent, what should you keep, and what to discard?

New things are often attractive and they stir an excitement that comes with mystery. Your own imagination will always have an allure as with all things that comes with human vanity. Therefore, you must avoid the folly of mistaking beauty for truth. By all means innovate and embrace new ways, but never lose sight of the timeless virtues of honesty, diligence, and humility. Covid-19 emphasises three other lessons – social responsibility, patience, and compassion.

These are the amalgam of one meta-lesson – beware of vanity, and repudiate it. The moment you think that you are the best of the best, or merely better than just one other person, you will have succumbed to it. It will have built a wall that blocks your ability to learn. Starting fresh means that you need to learn a lot on the way; only vanity and sloth will stand in the way.

Vanity makes you think of yourselves when you should be thinking of others, as is your duty and responsibility to do so as an advocate and solicitor in discharge of his duty.

Therefore, if you chart your course accordingly, 30 years or more later, you will look back to this day, knowing that you had heard the call of duty – and have answered it.

Congratulations on your admission to the Bar

Choo Han Teck

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