

Valedictorian Speech for Ceremony C09 - 12 July 2026 Sunday (10:00am)

Koh Guo Xuan

Bachelor of Engineering (Industrial and Systems Engineering) with Honours

Professor Teo Kie Leong, Dean, College of Design and Engineering; Mr Seow Min Yuan, Group Vice President of Global Logistics and Warehousing, STMicroelectronic; Distinguished Guests, Fellow Graduates, Parents and Friends; Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Guo Xuan, and it is a privilege to be delivering this valedictory speech on behalf of the Industrial and Systems Engineering Class of 2026.

Before we go any further, let me invite our graduates to look to your right and to your left and take a moment to congratulate the person beside you.

Four years of optimization, of code that refused to compile, of statistics and mathematics that tested not only our minds but our patience. I won't pretend it was easy. Each of us carries our own memory of how hard it was. However, through it all, we overcame all the trials along the way and finally are entitled to call ourselves industrial engineers. We have finally done it!

But now that we have this title bestowed upon us, I would like to address what it actually encompasses.

In standard engineering textbooks, an industrial engineer is defined as a professional who designs, optimizes, and manages integrated systems. I don't know about you, but that definition sounds extremely boring to me. So I want to redefine it today.

At its very core, I believe an industrial engineer is someone who possesses the skillset to navigate the unknown effectively. In other words, to the parents who are still unsure what their child's degree actually does, we are basically fortune tellers.

And to prove it, let's put that skill to use right now.

Picture your life's success as a distribution — a curve consisting of every possible future you could end up with. And here's the best part: its shape is drawn by your beliefs and your effort. Doubt yourself and coast, and the curve caves in. Be ambitious and put in the work, and it stretches far beyond what you once thought possible. In short, your probability of success is a function of your beliefs and diligence.

Building further on that concept, let's introduce the element of luck. Luck lives in the tail of that distribution, or better known as the rare opportunity that changes everything. And here's the part I love most: the more you show up and put yourself out there, the more chances you give

yourself to reach it. Getting lucky stops being a question of if, and becomes a question of when. Your lucky break was never a gift you wait for; it's something you make far more likely.

Combine the two, and you can bend the odds in your favour. In other words, you create your own luck.

But of course, none of us bent those odds alone.

To our professors — thank you for the guidance, and for patiently answering even our most ridiculous questions.

To our friends — thank you for the late nights, the shared panic before every deadline, and for turning four hard years into ones we'll actually miss.

And most of all, to our families — thank you for standing by us.

And if you'll allow me one personal moment.

Mum, Dad, there are no words to encapsulate how grateful I am, but I just want to thank you for raising me up and teaching me what grit really means.

To my siblings — thank you for always looking out for me.

And to my girlfriend — thank you for being my number one supporter through all of it, even when I didn't believe in myself.

It's because of all of you that we walk into what comes next a little less afraid.

Because make no mistake, the world we're graduating into refuses to sit still — AI, whole industries rewriting themselves faster than any syllabus could keep up with.

I know that can feel quite daunting. But hear me out: out of all the graduates out there, we, as industrial engineers, were built for exactly this.

We spent four years learning to stay calm and think clearly even under the most complex stochastic processes. So when the world grows uncertain and others begin to panic, that is not where we falter. That is where we are at our finest. That is us, in our element, playing on home turf.

So don't be afraid of the uncertainty ahead. Wherever life takes us next, keep showing up, keep doing the work, and keep believing in what's possible.

Remember, the odds were never fixed. We create our own luck.

Thank you, everyone, and congratulations, Class of 2026.