

## **‘Young people in today’s society lack a sense of adventure.’**

### **How true is this of your society?**

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The stereotype of Singaporean youths as those that are obsessed with the paper chase and driven by societal pressures to conform to conventional notions of success is one that is all too familiar by now. From the day we were born, we are immediately thrown into the never-ending rat race for grades and high-flying careers like lawyers and doctors. As a result, many young people often follow such a trajectory at the expense of their dreams and passions, which may not fit into the mould of what it means to be ‘successful’ in Singapore. Many still disfavour careers in the arts and non-profit sectors; the fear of going down the untrodden path is one that is still pervasive among youths today. Yet at the same time, attitudes are changing, and over the last few years, young people are beginning to step out of their comfort zones. Some have even taken it upon themselves to explore uncharted areas and challenge the norm. More than that, with the increasing need for innovation and experimentation in today’s fast-paced world, institutions like schools and the government are also encouraging youths to be more adventurous in fields like technology and design. Ultimately, I believe that the sense of adventure is cultivated in youth and it is the youths who are at the forefront of creating new possibilities for Singapore; thus, it is untrue that there is a lack of a sense of adventure in the young today.

It is first necessary to acknowledge that many young people today still lack a sense of adventure and are uncomfortable with going against conventional narratives of success. Singapore has always been a highly-competitive economy whose top priority is to secure a talent pool and reliable workforce to ensure that stability is not threatened and that we are always ahead of others. As a result, this has translated into educational policies that place greater emphasis on science, technology, engineering (STEM) subjects and less so on the arts and humanities because of the perception that these are less lucrative careers.. Recent years have seen the government attempting to encourage the reverse through the establishment of schools like School of the Arts (SOTA). Even so, controversy erupted this year when it was reported that fewer SOTA graduates were opting for careers in the arts, drawing criticism from local poet Alfian Sa’at, among others. Clearly, the prevalent attitude that one should follow conventional life trajectories and aim for stability, while not harmful in itself, can hinder many young people from pursuing their real passions. This creates a fear of exploring the unknown and also further reinforces the perception of Singaporeans as risk-averse or even ‘boring’. It is also problematic when such narratives end up pressuring our young people into choosing to lead lives that are perhaps less authentic and full of untapped potential. Evidently many young Singaporeans are still afraid of chasing adventure due to the societal pressures imposed upon them and such a mindset is highly pervasive even until today.

However, in recent times, attitudes have also been changing and there is greater space for young people to step out of their comfort zones to explore on their own. This is perhaps most commonly seen in the rising trend of youths taking a gap year, where more and more students are choosing to hold off on their studies for a year to pursue a slew of activities such as travelling, internships and volunteering. The rationale behind this is simple: to just go out there and try out things that one might not have had the chance to do. The belief that young people should make use of the time they have to pursue their dreams and passions is one that lies at the heart of the idea of the gap year and it is increasingly adopted by students in Singapore. For example, the Straits Times featured a graduating junior college student who chose to take a gap year in order to take up an internship and improve her coding skills before enrolling in university. She cited her reasons as wanting to ‘gain

industry experience' and 'widen her horizons' first before going back to school and she believed that the gap year would be an extremely valuable life experience. Evidently, an increasing number of college students are more and more willing to take an adventurous path which may have been thought to be preposterous a decade ago; young people today have a greater desire to explore the world beyond school and work, and this craving for adventure has pushed them to seek opportunities to widen their horizons in their own ways.

Moreover, young Singaporeans are also becoming increasingly daring in exploring uncharted territories and challenging norms in many different aspects. The shifts in attitudes and greater acceptance of unconventionality has encouraged numerous passionate individuals to step out of their comfort zones and delve into the unexpected and unknown. Perhaps the most recent example of this would be Chef Han Li Guang of Labyrinth; he was a banker who decided to quit his job in his 30s and pursue his lifelong passion: Food. Starting all over again, he enrolled into culinary school and became an apprentice for world-class restaurants like Garibaldi, before setting up his own fine-dining restaurant in the Esplanade. His love for adventure and all things unconventional pushed him into the field of molecular gastronomy and he developed his own brand of Singaporean cuisine, termed 'Mod-Sin' where he reinvents classic local fare using experimental cooking techniques. His accomplishments have been recognised by many and in June 2016, Labyrinth was awarded one Michelin Star. This is a clear example of a passionate young individual who defied the traditional mould of what it means to be successful in Singapore and in embarking on his culinary adventures, did so with great success, and put Singapore on the world map. Evidently, young Singaporeans have shown themselves to be unafraid of adventure and those who dared to explore the unknown have paved the way for even more innovation and even more possibilities in the near future.

Ultimately, in light of the changing landscape of today's world, the state also recognises that cultivating a sense of adventure among young Singaporeans is just as crucial to our growth and development as a country. Institutions like the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and Economic Development Board (EDB) are working hard on this, with the establishment of initiatives like Blk 71. Blk 71 is essentially an office hub modelled after Silicon Valley and it is where over 500 startups are gathered; with the success of start-up culture in many Western countries, the government is also encouraging young Singaporeans to innovate and explore uncharted territories in the STEM domain. Furthermore, the new STB campaign #PassionMadePossible also focuses extensively on Singaporean game changers who dared to pursue their dreams, with Chef Han and world-renowned sneaker designer Malcolm Ong being some of them. Clearly, the government recognises that it is vital for youths to have a sense of adventure because it is a key ingredient for constantly upgrading ourselves as an economy and country.

In conclusion, while prevailing social narratives still discourage young Singaporeans from exploring new frontiers, the past few years have seen many individuals step up and defy such expectations. The desire for adventure, is arguably just as Singaporean as it can get.

**Comments:**

*Fluently written with well-presented and developed arguments. While knowledge on the topic was demonstrated, some parts could have clearer details to make the point more convincing. Your essay seemed rushed at the end and lacked explanation of some points.*

