

**SPEECH BY MR ALVIN TAN, MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF TRADE AND
INDUSTRY & MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND YOUTH,
AT SERVICE GOLD AWARDS ON WEDNESDAY 10 MARCH 2021, 3 PM AT
FURAMA RIVERFRONT HOTEL**

Dr William Wan, General Secretary, Singapore Kindness Movement,

Ms Kwee Wei-Lin, President, Singapore Hotel Association,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. A very good afternoon to all of you. Thank you for allowing me to join you at the annual Service Gold Awards.

Service Professionals Leading by Example

2. I would like to talk about three types of kinds: (i) “How kind”, (ii) “which kind” and (iii) “what kind”.
3. We are here to recognise hotel staff who have demonstrated strength, resilience and professionalism amidst the pandemic. Every year, we tell the stories of hotel staff who have gone above and beyond the call of duty. This year is particularly poignant given the personal sacrifices many of our hotel staff have made.
4. Before coming here, I got the chance to meet Mr Mohammad Nurul Amin Mohsinul Azam (Amin). We chatted for a while and I was very moved by his story. Let me share it with you:
 - a. Mr Amin is a Junior Supervisor from Conrad Centennial Singapore who consistently provides excellent customer service to hotel guests. Despite the lack of tourists over the past year, Amin has kept himself busy. Hailing from Bangladesh and being fluent in Bengali, he helped translate letters and signages in the hotel, while assisting the Front Office in communicating with Persons Under Quarantine from Bangladesh.
 - b. Even as he served guests with his signature enthusiasm, it was not easy for Mr Amin on the personal front as he has family back in Dhaka and has not been able to go back. He is also his family’s sole breadwinner and he shared that his mother had passed away at 90 years old. In spite of this, Mr Amin shared with me his single-mindedness to do well during this pandemic.

- c. Today, Mr Amin is one of the recipients of The National Kindness Award - Service Gold.
5. The Award was initiated by the Singapore Kindness Movement and the Singapore Hotel Association. It recognises hotel service staff who have displayed exemplary service and gracious behaviour in the course of their work, like Mr Amin.
 - a. Other awardees this year include Ms Felicia Ek, a Guest Services Executive from Mercure Singapore Bugis, who went the extra mile to soothe a hyperactive child occupied while the child was on Stay Home Notice at the hotel. Unable to make physical contact, Ms Ek called the child frequently to chat, and sent sweets and toys to keep her occupied.
 - b. We also have Ms Lim Cheah Yi, a guest services manager from Furama Riverfront Singapore, who went beyond her usual job scope to take on leadership roles in brand advocacy, physical security and office emergency response during the COVID pandemic.
 - c. This is “how kind” – kindness showed by Ms Ek, Ms Lim and Mr Amin to go above and beyond to set an example for society.
6. Related to this is “which kind”. COVID-19 respects no boundaries, creed and nationality, race or religion. It speaks to us that regardless of where you are, we should treat one another with kindness. These are just some examples among the countless stories of service, kindness, and professionalism that we have heard from the industry amidst these trying times. From being separated from your families across borders for more than a year to battling the uncertainty of serving guests on quarantine, I am sure that many of you here today have made many personal sacrifices to continue serving in your line of work.
7. The third kind is “what kind” – what kind of world we want to build for us and our future generations. But let me first share some statistics.

A Disrupted Tourism Landscape

8. COVID-19 brought about disruptions globally, including travel restrictions and border closures.
 - a. Visitor arrivals fell by 86 per cent in 2020, while tourism receipts declined by 78 per cent in the first three quarters of last year.
 - b. Hotel occupancy rates dropped from 87% in 2019 to 56% in 2020.

9. Despite this, the hotel industry stepped up to play its part in the fight against COVID-19. Hotels offered their properties for various purposes, including serving as Government Quarantine Facilities, Swab Isolation Facilities, and Stay-Home Notice Dedicated Facilities.
 - a. At the end of last year, more than 70 hotels had served as Stay-Home Notice Dedicated Facilities at various points in time, accommodating more than 160,000 Persons on Stay-Home Notice, with the support of over 2,300 workers in the industry. They also had to learn new skills to take on new jobs that had been thrust upon them.
10. As we entered Phase 3, hotels also saw an increase in locals going on staycations. This gave Singaporeans the opportunity to rediscover the service excellence and professionalism that are hallmarks of our hotel industry. This helped increase our local support and appreciation for the great work you all do on a daily basis, and instilled confidence.

Adapting to Adversity

11. I've visited a lot of different hotels together with industry representatives and I witnessed first-hand how adaptable the staff are and their positive attitude despite being redeployed to take on new roles.
 - a. For example, back-of-house staff were re-assigned to take on front office jobs, while hotel managers doubled up as servers at the hotel restaurants. At Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort & Spa, I even met a staff member who was redeployed from the event management team to assist with bartending at the hotel pool bar!
 - b. These are measures that our hotels had to undertake in order to open up and deliver a positive guest experience for their guests. I hope that Singaporeans who patronise our hotels also understand the challenging times our hotels are in and show them greater patience and understanding during this period.
12. Some hotels pivoted to cater to new demands, including offering work-from-hotel packages. Others took the chance to upskill and cross-train their staff during the lull period, reflecting the value the hotel placed on their workers.
13. Such commitment to self-improvement will continue to reap rewards.

14. We will continue to partner and support the industry even during these times, and to take advantage of the reputation and skills that hotel staff have acquired.
 - a. We mentioned at the recent Budget debate that we are extending the Jobs Support Scheme (JSS) to continue to help hotels retain local employees. In fact, the JSS helped to retain about 150,000 jobs at the height of the pandemic.
 - b. We also support hotels to harness technology and innovation to prepare for a digital future, through programmes like the Singapore Tourism Accelerator and STB's TCube.
 - c. We also have schemes like the Service Industry Transformation Programme and the Hotel Job Redesign Initiative which will also help hotels optimise manpower and create higher quality jobs.

Conclusion

15. In conclusion, we do not forget that it is the human touch that matters. This is the kind of society that we want to be – centred upon kindness regardless of where you are from.
16. Thank you to the hotel industry and all of you who have been critical nodes in the industry. I look forward to the awards ceremony.