

# Fulfilling basic requirements: SME@University

## EDUCATING CEOs OF

**SMEs:** Opportunity to learn new skills, communicate and exchange ideas with other businessmen

**S**PEAKING at universities is always an honour, but it is even a bigger delight for me to stand on the podium to educate CEOs and business owners who have never set foot into universities before.

Last week, I made my inaugural visit to Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang (UPM), where we had our SME@University programme. This programme, which commenced in 2011, connects SME business owners from all walks of life on varsity grounds, and gives them the opportunity to learn new skills as well as communicate and exchange ideas with other business owners. This SME@University programme started off as a pilot project in UKM with the objective of training SME owners to have the right skill sets in management, leadership, marketing, and communication skills.

Various modules are structured to help prepare entrepreneurs in confronting economic challenges and inculcate these CEOs of SMEs to develop insights on creative marketing, branding, innovative business networking as well as what it takes to become world-class CEOs.

Since the pilot programme at UKM, I'm proud that today SME@University has taken up, with four other universities, namely UPM, UiTM, UIAM and UMK, a proud branding of SME@UPM, SME@UiTM, SME@UIAM and SME@UMK.

I anticipate that in the next three years of implementation, some 300

SMEs will graduate through this programme.

If I can excite you, this programme is not just another mundane training course. This dedicated three-month training is incorporated with some fun elements as most trainers believe that it is in playing that we retain the education. We use the approach of semi-coaching, semi-consulting and the trainers themselves are industry players and field experts.

The programme module covers human resource and asset development, leadership and management, practical training on finance and accounting, innovation, entrepreneurship as well as business networking. To top it off, a sequence of case studies, field learning and specialised

courses are also offered — guided by the varsity's leading lecturers. Without wanting to boast, our participants usually long to attend classes every weekend, and look forward to the next! I salute their desire to seek knowledge and their zest to wake up early every weekend for 10 consecutive weeks to attend

the classes at the Universities! These are whom I call 'Genuine Entrepreneurs' ... they have the passion, the drive and the determination to stay on course in the quest for success in the business world.

I am the first to admit that it's never an easy task to juggle between studies, managing a family and running a business. Some 'students' came as far as Batu Pahat and Kota Baru to join this programme. Come hell or high water, they slogged every Saturday without fail to fulfil the requirements of this programme. It is also fascinating to see that through programmes such as this, the entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds have established a close bond with each other regardless of skin colour, faith and religion. It's heartening to learn that relation-

ships are made and business networks are enlarged by huddling everyone in one room for 10 weeks! I am truly touched by the tenacity of the students to complete this programme and if not for their strong will and determination, I would not be standing at the podium to present the closing remarks.

Upon completion of this programme, the 'students' will have a clear understanding on what it takes to be a domestic, regional and global player ... to be World Class CEOs! In fact, these 'graduates' will indeed be ready to take on the global market as they have been equipped with the current trends, customer expectations and latest technologies to cope with the ever-dynamic global business landscape. I hope the programme will inspire them to fine tune and sharpen their business plans, reap bigger profits and be more competitive in the business world.

I truly believe that the ingredients of success in any arena are determination and perseverance. Success in life doesn't

come easy. In fact, many say success is 99 per cent hardwork and one per cent luck. Of course, there are many failures and hurdles for one to endure before one can taste the sweetness of success. After all, one has to go through the rain first before one can see the rainbow!

Sometimes, I have an itch to be a student again as I know that education is not age-sensitive. Sydney J. Harris, the late American journalist once said, "The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows". Are you ready to join me to make the big move of becoming a student again?

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**Hafshah Hashim Speaks**