

# MEETING OUR ALUMNI: Interview with Alumnus TENGKU MUHAMMAD KHALAF

February 2024

SIT Archives:	Hi Khalaf, please tell me about yourself.
Tengku Khalaf:	<p>I graduated from SIT in 2018 in Sustainable Infrastructure Engineering*, and ever since, I have been working for close to six years. I felt that my studies did not prepare me for working life but it gave me tools that I could use to adapt to working life.</p> <p>* Khalaf graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2017 with Highest Distinction. He went on to study for a master's degree, graduating a year later.</p>
SIT Archives:	Could you elaborate on that please?
Tengku Khalaf:	<p>I realise that whatever I learnt in school, it could be redundant when you start working because you would need to start from scratch. Nobody cares whether you have a degree or not. But the key takeaway from my studies was critical thinking skill. And... soft skills too, to interact with people. These skills are important to problem solving and how we respond to changing circumstances. These are not what we can learn from books.</p> <p>So what made me think this way?</p> <p>In SIT, we had to complete five modules within four months compared to four modules in six months in Poly. You can imagine the stress and pressure we faced. So from the start, we had to think on our feet, and figure out how we could meet deadlines.</p> <p>Hahaha, one key thing about school for me was how difficult it was, and I must make sure that I started right. There was no time to relax, just dived into the deep end fast.</p>
SIT Archives:	So studying in SIT was challenging for you. Why was that?
Tengku Khalaf:	<p>In Poly, no one prepared you for university... and it took little to just pass.</p> <p>But when I started in SIT, in my first trimester, I studied till 2.00 to 3.00 am. I was trying to catch up as it was five, six years since I graduated from Poly in 2009. I spent two years in NS, worked for two years before I applied and got into SIT in 2014.</p> <p>So for the first two semesters, I was staying up every night. In class I made sure I sat in front, asking all kinds of questions to catch up.</p>
SIT Archives:	Why were you trying so hard?
Tengku Khalaf:	<p>Well, when I was studying for my diploma... how shall I put it... Ok, I knew I wasn't going to get anywhere with my diploma.</p> <p>I worked two jobs and it dawned on me that I would either be a factory worker or someone who simply followed instructions. There was no decision making, I just toed the line. That was what a diploma in Engineering could get you.</p> <p>I was rejected when I first applied to SIT. I thought about furthering my studies overseas. But the cost was too much and I was not sure how I was going to repay the loan. I did the maths....</p> <p>So I decided to just work after graduation. I worked first in the aerospace industry and then I did project management in the construction industry. I realised that I enjoyed doing project management.</p>
SIT Archives:	How did you eventually end up studying in SIT?
Tengku Khalaf:	<p>While I was in my last job then, I met a friend of my cousin... we had coffee and he told me about a new course in SIT where he was working. I told him that my application was rejected. He then encouraged me to apply for this new course*. But of course, he said he could not promise that I could get accepted...</p> <p>I remember that he said that the course had something to do with MRT, I just assumed it was about tunneling or something like that.</p> <p>So I applied and went for the interview.</p> <p>I went prepared on tunneling and civil-related work since I was in the construction industry, I thought I would be alright.</p> <p>The interviewer was a Professor, and he was talking about Mechanical Engineering.... I thought to myself, ok lah... Then he asked me why I wanted to do this course.</p> <p>[Laughter], I told him that I was working in a construction company and wish to increase my knowledge in the field. But I really didn't know what to expect. I just let him know that I wanted a degree so that I could progress in my career.</p> <p>I consider my acceptance into SIT to be a great opportunity because I found out that I was one of the last few to be considered. While everyone was getting their acceptance letters in March, April, mine didn't come until May. School starts in August, and matriculation is in June. I thought I was not accepted.</p> <p>So when I received the letter, I told myself that I was given a second chance. I must not fool around anymore. I must just study hard... no girlfriend, no nothing, no anything (hahaha) And God is the best of planners.... I met my wife here, much to my surprise.</p> <p>Later I asked the Professor how I came to be selected. He told me it was because I had working experience and they saw in me that I really wanted to pursue my studies.</p> <p>You know my GPA in Poly wasn't that great. I've got a 2.7 score.</p> <p>So not to waste the chance given to me, I put in a lot of effort. So much so that for my exams, I was often the second person to leave the exam hall...</p> <p>* The course mentioned was Sustainable Infrastructure Engineering (Land).</p>
SIT Archives:	So, you finally found your passion?
Tengku Khalaf:	<p>Yes, indeed.</p> <p>Back then in my Poly days, I was young, didn't quite know what I wanted, and everyone was just having fun. But then, my work experience after Poly humbled me after I saw my friends getting to where they wanted to be, like furthering their studies, working, or getting married...</p> <p>My dad told me that he knew I could study... That brought tears to my eyes.</p>
SIT Archives:	How was your graduation like? Did your parents attend the event?
Tengku Khalaf:	<p>It was one of the few times that I saw my dad being proud of his children... My mom was as usual with her "Good for you", she was happy for me. All the hard work was really worth it.</p>