

Speech given by Guest-of-Honour, Ms Debra Soon, Managing Director, Television, Channel News Asia, Media Corp Pte. Ltd at [the Awards Day, CHIJ St Joseph's Convent](#) on 26th March 2011

Good afternoon ladies, I am going to ask for some help here and to ask you about 3 women whom you may or may not have heard of. Those of you in the audience please put up your hand if you have heard of

- 1) Elizabeth Choy
- 2) Hillary Clinton
- 3) Lady Gaga

All three?

There are only 2 points I want to make today, and I will use these 3 women, to demonstrate the 2 points that they share in common.

1) USE YOUR VOICE! Don't be afraid to speak up for what u believe in!

[Elizabeth Choy](#) – she was a war heroine. She had a privileged background but she smuggled medicines and money to the British Prisoners of war. The Japanese caught, tortured her, stripped and whipped her... she recovered to share her story and went on later to be an educator, teacher, and also started the school for the blind. She believed in serving others, and was not about to let anyone stop her.

She also made history – as the first woman to become a representative in Singapore to the Legislative Council in 1951. In other words, an MP at the time. She used her position to speak frequently on behalf of the poor and needy, and campaigned for the development of social services and family planning. *“My values are quite changed. I am no more materialistic, even to this day. Never mind if I have no mansion, no diamonds...still I'm happy.”* The transcripts of her full interview are available at the Reference Room of the National Archives of Singapore.

[Hillary Clinton](#) – you all know, she tried to become President of the US – and has gotten the furthest. 18 million people voted for her to represent the Democratic Party. She said, “There are 18 million cracks in the glass ceiling.” As US Foreign Secretary – she has done the most for women and girls worldwide. “She's shattering glass ceilings everywhere”. – In 1995, she was the wife of the then US President, Bill Clinton, and known as the First Lady. She spoke at a conference on Women organised by the UN in Beijing. Everyone was afraid that she would speak, and there was a tug of war in the Clinton Administration, with many people hoping she wouldn't go as they were afraid the visit would jeopardize America's relations with China. But in the end she went, in what has been called a very successful trip and said: “As long as discrimination and inequities remain so commonplace everywhere in the world, as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked, underpaid, not schooled, subjected to violence in and outside their homes – the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world, will not be realised.” It marked a turning point for her, for her career and her position on the World Stage.

Today - Hillary Clinton is 63 and is the second most admired woman in America after Oprah Winfrey.

- She believes in hard work! 19 hour days in 2 years, 465,000 miles, visiting 79 countries.
- She worked to combat human trafficking in the mid-1990s – she has used her position and influence to improve women's positions worldwide!

For example, in Cambodia, by helping to put sex slavery and prostitution on the government's agenda. 2) Yemen, she was the 1st secretary of state to visit in 2 decades. Yemen is a country where a man can marry a girl of 9, and she was very public in taking up the cause of Nujood Ali, who was forced into marriage at 10 and is fighting for her divorce and her right to go to school. Her visit, undoubtedly, helped to put the issue of women and children on the agenda in Yemen.

Lady Gaga.. - She was quoted in a recent interview with Vanity Fair, demonstrating the power of conviction and speaking out in what you believe in, :“to be exactly who you are and to feel unafraid.” She too is using her position and fame to help others, and said:“ **Turning my fame into something that is positive and this makes me feel good about my life**”.

Speak up and be heard. Don't believe anyone who abuses you, tell you that you are not good enough, smart enough, pretty enough or rich enough. That is what being in this school taught me. My teachers were great, and true to our values. Some of them may have challenged us, called us crabs, lobsters But it was all to spur us to self belief, to try our best and be our best!

You also learn not to do it rudely, shrilly or confrontationally, and it doesn't mean rebelling and breaking rules.

But knowing that as young women, you have power. And how to use it. It will take time for you, to find your comfort zone and your identity, but remember, whoever you are, you can do it. Whatever problems you face – whether it be money, a family situation, abuse, don't keep quiet. Find your voice, share your problems and find a solution.

Don't let anyone negative get you down.

2) The power of HARD WORK to achieve whatever you want.

- Stefani Germanotta aka Lady Gaga, also, in the same Vanity Fair interview, said it was “blood, sweat and tears, dancing, music, whiskey, pummelling the streets, playing every venue I could get my hands on. I don't in any way associate my past with anything other than the hunger and the starvation for success that I still feel.”

Success and achievement come out of HARD WORK and BELIEF, belief in God, in family, friends and most important in SELF - that you can do anything and everything.

Whenever you read about successful women – the key thing – is HARD WORK.

My story is not so compelling – let's just say every day I feel responsible for the 400 people working for me. And for bringing news and information and insights to 30 million people around Asia. It's important to believe in what you do, your product and your mission. To soldier on despite problems, detractors and people who wish you ill. Ignore them. Trust in yourself. I am confident because you are convent girls, that you would have been schooled in the values which matter and that these will ground you through your lives. Let's hope you've listened and absorbed the lessons your teachers have taught. Because then really, you will be able to conquer all!