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SINGAPORE - Have the courage to be different: That was the advice Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung gave to graduates of Singapore Management University (SMU) on Wednesday (July 13).

"You have to make yourself different. Don't settle to be a cookie-cutter graduate," he told more than 2,600 degree graduates - SMU's largest graduating class - at the university's 13th commencement held at Suntec Singapore.

Already putting Mr Ong's words into action is entrepreneur and Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) Valedictorian Award winner Sharon Yeo, 23, who graduated from the Lee Kong Chian School of Business with a Bachelor of Business Management.

She is part of a two-member team that founded Protege, a mentorship software start-up company that helps organisations manage mentoring programmes. Since it kick-started in October 2014, the software has benefited around 100 mentors and mentees.

Watching her peers get jobs at banks and consulting firms and feeling the peer pressure to do the same was one of Ms Yeo's biggest challenges to overcome.

"I think that was when my purpose (for managing a start-up company) came in very strongly," she said.

Another fresh graduate aiming to pursue what he enjoys is SPH Magazines Salutatorian Award winner Lim Yi Sheng, 25, a Bachelor of Science degree-holder from the School of Information Systems.

His secondary school through junior college years saw him working odd jobs as a programmer and graphic designer to support his family, after his father lost his job.

Mr Lim was quick to realise his passion for software design and engineering in university, and is currently assisting a start-up called Travify, which offers travel itinerary planning services via an app.

He has also been hired by a global bank as a technology analyst - something that he sees himself doing for years to come.

"If you come from a rather poor background, you grow to have a chip on your shoulder. In (SMU) I channelled that chip into something really productive... It was here that I found a grip on life," he said.