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Passion makes students see challenges differently

By Dr Megat Zuhairy Megat Tajuddin - November 24, 2024 @ 2:10pm

Three key attributes of those in STEM: problem-solving, analytical thinking, and attention to detail. NSTP FILE PIC

I was recently asked to give the opening speech at a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) competition for secondary schools in Sabah.

I assumed a speech had been prepared for me.

But this was not the case. "Just speak from the heart," I was told.

Standing at the rostrum, I took a moment to look at the eager faces of the students — nine groups of four participants each. They were accompanied by their teachers.

evident, even if they didn't fully recognise it yet.

I began by congratulating them on their participation. I told them that their involvement was not by chance. It was the result of passion, which fuels the desire to learn and the determination to overcome challenges.

Passion, I explained, doesn't falter in the face of obstacles. Instead, it grows stronger.

STEM is not an easy path. Many shy away from it.

The role of passion in my own STEM journey became clear as I spoke to the students.

Passion gives us a thirst for knowledge, the courage to embrace challenges as opportunities, and the drive to seek better solutions.

In my previous speaking engagements, I often highlighted three key attributes of those in STEM: problem-solving, analytical thinking, and attention to detail.

Engineers, for instance, are trained to tackle complex problems through logic and calculations. Precision is essential; in some cases, even a nanometre's error can lead to catastrophic outcomes.

I shared a personal anecdote to emphasise this point.

Despite my poor eyesight, I have a habit of spotting inconsistencies in documents — misaligned table borders, mismatched fonts, or uneven margins.

Striving for perfection in even the smallest details reflects a commitment to higher standards. Passion drives this pursuit of excellence.

Reflecting on my own journey, I told the students that I might not have become an engineer if not for the encouragement of those around me.

I'm forever grateful for the government's policy of expanding engineering education, and for the Public Service Department approval of my application for a scholarship to study engineering — my second choice — 32 years ago.

Choosing this field is one of the best decisions of my life.

To this day, I see challenges as opportunities to learn, innovate and contribute.

I closed my speech by sharing my hope for the students.

They will shape Malaysia's future, and perhaps even the world's. Passion will be their guiding light, pushing them to dream bigger and achieve more.

Thank you. Puan Nik, for making me speak without a script.

It reminded me of the power of authenticity. As we speak from the heart, we not only inspire others but also rediscover our own purpose.