

Static 1 INDIVIDUAL – OPEN

FIRST PLACE

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TITLE OF SUBMISSION: Increasing Our GST

SUMMARY: To Build a Stronger and more Unified Singapore, we should increase our G.S.T.

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In the past 58 years, students in Singapore have recited the National Pledge during their morning assembly, pledging themselves to be "one united people, regardless of race, language or religion" in order to achieve "happiness, prosperity and progress" for our nation.

Today, it would seem that Singapore has reached such a state of prosperity and progress with stable governance, a strong economy, a world class airport and port and so much more.

We have made great progress in our growth and development even in times of crisis. An example is COVID 19 where we came out stronger. However, as new challenges appear, how can we ensure that we continue to grow? How do we work towards a stronger and more unified Singapore?

For me, I feel that if we want to achieve this, we must increase our GST!

"G" stands for 'Graciousness'. Kindness, courtesy and consideration for others can be something Singaporeans can work on to become a more gracious society.

During the June Holidays, my aunt flew back to Singapore from Perth to visit my grandfather and mother with my one-year-old cousin in tow. She lamented about how Singaporeans did not bother to offer help when she was struggling on a public transport with the handling of the pram and the baby. In fact, a group of teenagers even cut her queue at an eatery while she was calming her crying baby. She even claimed that it was the tourists who had offered her assistance rather than the locals.

I think it is time for some Singaporeans to change the "it's none of my business" mindset and think beyond themselves and learn to be more gracious in their actions and words.

"S" stands for "solidarity". The need to stand united is crucial for Singapore's growth. We have made good progress in strengthening multi-racial and multi-religious harmony. We have become more inclusive, ensuring that those with physical disabilities have better access to buildings and facilities through enhanced infrastructure. It is also a good time to consider those whose "disabilities" may not be as apparent.

My brother has autism. He might look like a typical teenager but he is highly anxious and emotionally volatile. Although he is considered "higher functioning", his peers cruelly made fun of him and targeted him for bullying. It was only when his teachers explained his condition to the classmates when some of the bullying and teasing

stopped. Some. There were still classmates who would still purposely trigger him. He had multiple meltdowns and fell into depression. He was eventually transferred to a special school for autism and will graduate from there soon. My parents are worried about how the 'mainstream' society will respond to him when that happens.

I feel that we should raise awareness about such special needs in our community so that we can respond better. I can remember this quote by Mr Tushman from the movie "Wonder" - "He can't change how he looks. Maybe we should change how we see."

Singaporeans should start to work on understanding people who have special needs. If we truly seek to be a unified country, then we need to show our solidarity with everyone and not just a select or privileged few.

Finally, "T" is for thankfulness". With the progress made as a country throughout all these years, Singapore has become a symbol of success. Despite this, many others want the government to do more. Yes, there may be room for improvement, but we should be thankful for the things we have rather than always demanding more.

For example, when there is a train fault on our MRT lines, we are understandably upset and inconvenienced and many would voice their displeasure. Yet, when the MRT is working normally, no one seems to affirm their efforts.

Society should stop to reflect and be thankful for what it has. If not, everything we have will never be good enough because of this sense of entitlement. We need to get rid of this trend before this attitude becomes a habit.

Increasing our Graciousness, Solidarity and Thankfulness (GST) is my recommendation to build a stronger and unified Singapore. This must start from a very young age - like how students have to recite the pledge every school day. It is something that must become a habit from young so that it will be part of how they grow and will soon become a part of who they are. I am certain that this is the kind of GST that Singaporeans would not mind increasing.