

New leadership style needed in a 'networked world'

05:55 AM Jan 23, 2010

by Esther Ng

SINGAPORE - A new style of leadership - one that hinges on chemistry and respect for the individual - is necessary in this interconnected world.

"For that to happen, leaders have to respect each individual in their own right. Leadership is no longer a 'one-way relationship' in which ideas and planning are the ambit of leaders, and others following like 'clone armies in Star Wars'", said Foreign Affairs Minister George Yeo.

"In this day and age, clone armies are weak armies."

Kicking off the first of the Fullerton-SJI Leadership Lecture series, Mr Yeo, who is an old boy of St Joseph's Institution, said the old hierarchies of lecturing people do not work in "this networked world".

Instead, being a leader means one must expect a certain degree of "messiness" and "unpredictability".

He cited how Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping likened opening China to "opening a window and swatting a few flies".

Mr Yeo mentioned that he had to "swat flies" on his Facebook but even though this took up his time, he persisted because the alternative was to shut down the account.

A speaker from the floor said great leaders break rules and set new rules, and asked if the current crop of leaders would stay in their comfort zone and "respect rules".

Mr Yeo replied: "Leadership is contextual, certain periods call for different kinds of leadership... (but) you cannot exercise leadership if you want to remain in your comfort zone. Change is always difficult."

"Leadership means moving to new areas, causing discomfort to others and to yourself, persuading them that it's all worthwhile," he added. ESTHER NG
