

Expelled at 20, returned to poly at 24, now...

HOW do you prove that you are not a lost cause after being expelled from a polytechnic for flunking your exams?

In Mr Veenoth N Balakrishnan's case, he waited four years before rejoining the school, and fought tooth and nail to eventually emerge among the top students in his cohort.

Mr Balakrishnan (below), 27, will be getting his diploma in accountancy and finance from Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) at the end of this month with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.76.

This is a far cry from 2002 when he was expelled from the polytechnic for having a GPA of just 0.7.

"At that time, I was very disruptive in lessons – disturbing my friends, talking in class, rebelling against the teachers," said Mr Balakrishnan, who was 20 when he first left NYP.

Second chance

His mother had begged then-deputy director of the School of Business Management, Mr Lee Tong Nge, to give Mr Balakrishnan a second chance. Mr Lee refused.

Mr Balakrishnan claimed that Mr Lee had said he would only give him a second chance after he had proven himself in the army.

Yet, Mr Balakrishnan was unrepentant and did not take Mr Lee's words seriously.

After being expelled, he took on a full-time job as a waiter at a cafe in the Marina Mandarin Hotel before enlisting in the army in 2003 when he was 21.

That was when everything changed.

In the army, Mr Balakrishnan developed a keen interest to join the air force. However, he was told that he could not do so as he did not have a diploma.

That was when he realised that he had to get an academic qualification if he wanted to succeed in life.

Remembering Mr Lee's offer but worried that he would not be able to catch up after two years in the army, Mr Balakrishnan took up a private accountancy course as a refresher – to "start his engine for poly life".

He studied part-time for six months while he was in the army. He was an armed combat instructor then.

But that was not all. He also achieved glowing commendations for his good conduct in the army.

Armed with certificates from the army and the private school, Mr Balakrishnan approached Mr Lee for a second chance in the school, some four years after he was first expelled.

He was given the green light, but he had to start his course as a year one student.

It was not an easy decision. At that time, Mr Balakrishnan was 24 while most of his peers were 17 or 18.

While it was a challenge for him to cope with school life due to his checkered past and status as a "mature student", he soon learnt to adapt.

The accountancy modules that he took up in the private school also enabled him to understand his topics better.

"I learnt that the best way to learn is through teaching, so I taught my peers what I know," Mr Balakrishnan said.

With his stellar grades, Mr Balakrishnan was offered a job with the Singapore Institute of Retail Studies (SIRS) by Mr Lee, who is now the director of SIRS, after his course ended in February this year.

Mr Balakrishnan is working as an assistant administrative executive there. So what does he hope to do in the future?

"To work for an MNC (multi-national company) so I can expand my horizons and see the world," Mr Balakrishnan said.

– Audrey Tan Ruiping,
newsroom intern



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AUDREY TAN