It's all about the attitude

ZOOMING off to faraway lands for a lark, dropping studies to pursue a passion and fumbling to live a dream. Car and cash are dashed — young Singaporeans are living for today, and tomorrow will come when it does.

“People dream, they do. They display a certain check which is impossible to ignore — from the university student who works two jobs so that she can get off on a holiday, to the young intern who rolls his eyes when asked to stay in office for an extra hour. Youngsters such as Ms Lim Xiao Lin, 20, who says: “Everyone on the street seems to have a degree these days — I choose not to be one of them.”

She found her junior college course “too boring” and decided to drop out. She dances for a living these days.

“My Mum was upset when I wanted to drop out of JC. They kept saying ‘it’s only two years, how will you get a job?’ and stuff like that,” said Ms Lin, an assistant dance teacher at LaValla-ACJC College of the Arts. Her parents are both 53 — her father, a polytechnic diploma holder, is a civil servant and her mother a housewife.

Ms Lin now has a three-year degree in interior design and works as an intern. She works hard — about 35 hours a week and gets riled if anyone asks her to whiz away her time and should get a “proper” education and job.

“I’m more serious about my life than they are. I thought about it very carefully and made a commitment, a decision which will affect my whole life,” she said.

She is not bothered about saving up to buy a car, or even a condominium apartment and is happy with a number of young Singaporeans who are adamant that they are not going to be raised by the opinions of others.

Mr Ming Kang, 22, was determined to write a book, never mind if she could not find a suitable publisher. Rather than feeling dejected and letting the manuscript gather dust, she went ahead and got the book published herself.

She is the author of 6 Years Of Parrot, a collection of short stories, and a compilation of poetry and artwork.

“It’s quite simple, I want to be a writer whose book people will pick up just to read even if they get nothing else out of it,” said Ms Lin.

A senior executive of a media company told The Straits Times about a series of interns who were not very serious about their work.

Less said the better. “I think it’s because I don’t have the money’,” said Mr Lin, who has opened up many opportunities to him.

He was just 18 when he wrote an essay so compelling it was him a sponsored place at the Global Brief Forum last year, and made him the right attitude to work with.

All because “I looked at what I could offer people in exchange for what I wanted. I took the trouble to sit down, research and write that essay.”

He said: “A slightly disadvantaged situation could make you say ‘oh, I can’t do this or that because I don’t have the money’.

But I think it’s how I maximise what I do have in place of what I do not have — I force myself to be innovative.”

He is not keeping this knowledge to himself either; currently writing his own budgeting book, Mr Ming is now an youths’ coach, which addresses career and work issues among students and out-of-school youths.

MAXIMIZE WHAT YOU HAVE

“A slightly disadvantaged situation could make you say ‘oh, I can’t do this or that because I don’t have the money’. But I think it’s how I maximise what I do have in place of what I do not have — I force myself to be resourceful.”

STUDENT WANG HONGJUN, 18, who grew up in a family of four that had to get by on a household income of about $1,000 a month

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

“Everyone on the street seems to have a degree these days — I choose not to be an also-ran... I’m more serious about my life than they are. I thought about it very carefully and made a commitment, a decision which will affect my whole life.”

MISS LIN XIAO LIN, 20, (pictured right) who chose to drop out of JC and now dances for a living, on her decision

She counts among her successes a polytechnic student who was very motivated as an intern at Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) — Ms Pang Siew Moi, 22.

“The would do things like coming in early before everyone else in clothes for a fashion photo shoot — without being told to do it.”

On Monday, she is the fashion editor of Female.

Her job is just one place that is on the lookout for such Chuztup.

A Straits Times report in September said that more local and multinational companies are seeking to tap the go-getting attitude of young Singaporeans.

The trend is across industries.

The banking and finance, IT, sales and marketing, and business consulting sectors have all stepped up their recruitment drives.

Human resource managers were quoted as saying that being young is seen as an advantage because it is likely to translate into fewer family concerns, a more adventurous outlook and work ethic.

Factors that account for the right attitude include age and family background, which play a role in developing the right attitude to work, said Mr Wang.

To make his point, the intern recited a song that he composed.

And just in time, he also wrote down a few tips on how to maximise what we have.

The wrong kind of attitude

MR WANG stands out, because not all aspiring managing directors have the same veneer.

Employers say that while youngs here have a great deal of attitude, it is often the wrong type.

A senior executive of a media company told The Straits Times about a series of interns who had been let go from their jobs because they had no idea how to handle people.

He said: “The great depression is my future depended on it. These youngsters, the law said the future is theirs.”

Then again, this type of comment is exactly what youngs’ parents and employers are hearing.

One such intern said people in their 30s and older are also not too happy about how better behaved youngs were in their days.

It is the generation gap, he insisted, adding that he was eager to work and want — just that he was not too sure how to handle them.

To make his point, the intern recited a quote: “The young now have luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and are now tyrants.”

The quote was spotted by Greek philosopher Socrates in 450BC.
How this C came about:
ABLE to abseil tall buildings on a single rope! Dance on bartops without a care in the world! They are out, they are proud, and they fall very far from the tree.
Sure, it used to be owning a car that their parents aspired to, but with all the lifestyle options now available to them, Singapore's youths are setting their sights higher than ever. With new freedoms that their predecessors did not enjoy, they have also grown a bit more comfortable with showing some Cheek, Globalising and appropriating lifestyles from other countries? They are going for it, and we show you how.

> MONTHLY DIGEST OF STATISTICS SINGAPORE
Lifestyle survey from 2002 to 2004, on leisure activities of 4,168 Singaporeans and permanent residents by the Institute of Policy Studies.

> ACTIVITIES THAT YOUTHS DO
Aged between 15 and 20, single (532 respondents)
No. of leisure hours per week: 19.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV/reading</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet surfing</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Going to movies/shopping</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Football and other ball games</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indoor entertainment (e.g. bowling)</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting libraries</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hanging out at cafes</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cycling, skateboarding, in-line skating, frisbee</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jogging</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting places of interest</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer or religious work</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Going to disco, lounge/club</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attending arts events</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attending enrichment courses</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adventure sports (e.g. rock climbing)</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual water sports (e.g. wakeboarding)</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
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<td>Sell</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
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WHERE THEY TAKE PLACE
Most activities engaged by youths are conducted near home or town centre as opposed to the city area. Be it shopping, movies or libraries, most youths prefer Toa Payoh over Orchard Road!

WHEN THEY TAKE PLACE
Most youths prefer to engage in more passive pastimes such as watching TV and attending enrichment courses on weekdays. They engage in more active sports and activities only during the weekends.