Top grad’s unconventional choices

WHILE most of his peers spent their holidays last year racking up work experience before their final year at university, Mr Tobias Chen (right) was busy preparing for his wedding.

The change of pace certainly did not do him any harm: Mr Chen, 27, graduated top of his cohort and was valedictorian of this year’s Bachelor of Business Administration class at the National University of Singapore.

“My wife and I decided that if we wanted to have a memorable wedding, and honeymoon, we would have to hold it at a time before both of us started work,” he told The Straits Times after the commencement ceremony at the university yesterday.

He married Ms Grace Goh, who works at the Attorney-General’s Chambers, last April in a ceremony in Okinawa.

In another unconventional choice, Mr Chen did not follow the usual business school graduate into the banking industry but opted to place a premium on his family by going to work as a business analyst at Shell.

“Now, I get to leave work at 6. Bankers don’t get to go home until what, 2am?” he said.

Mr Chen was born in Nanjing, China, to an engineer father and a teacher mother. The family lived in Florida, in the United States, for two years before moving to Singapore.

He failed the Primary 6 entrance exams to Chongfu Primary School when aged 12 and was enrolled in Primary 5 instead, so he is two years older than most of his peers.

Mr Chen said: “I spoke with an accent, I still do, but at that time, my grammar was bad and my vocab was horrible.”

Sheer hard work turned things around for him. He read extensively – from books by popular children’s author Roald Dahl to Reader’s Digest and newspapers.

“There’s no special trick, just hard work. Thankfully, I did well in my PSLE,” added Mr Chen, who went on study at Raffles Institution and Raffles Junior College.

He hopes to start a company with his friends later on but is now focused on building analytical and management skills.

“I want to make my career progression slow and steady. I think it will give me a good foundation for the future,” he said.

“I was thinking of setting up an education company or a consulting company, but there are no specific plans yet. Right now, the possibilities are infinite.”

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