

OPENING REMARKS FOR YOUTH CONNECTIONS 2026 “CONNECTING TODAY’S LEADERS WITH TOMORROW’S CHANGEMAKERS” BY SANJIV RAJAN, BOARD & PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE MEMBER, SBF FOUNDATION

Date: 8 September 2026

Time: 2PM

Venue: Alive Atrium, 70 Bendemeer Road, #04-03, Luzerne Building, Singapore 339940

Good afternoon, everyone.

To our Youth Connectors, our students from Singapore Polytechnic, Temasek Polytechnic and Ngee Ann Polytechnic, our partners from Halogen, and the team from SBF Foundation — a very warm welcome to Youth Connections 2026.

It is wonderful to see all of you here.

This is the sixth edition of Youth Connections, and this year’s theme is particularly meaningful: **“Connecting Today’s Leaders with Tomorrow’s Changemakers.”**

I think the word *connecting* is important.

Because this programme is not simply about introducing young people to business leaders. And it is not about senior professionals giving career advice to students.

It is about something much more human — **two generations meeting each other, listening to each other, and perhaps changing each other’s perspectives along the way.**

I say this not just as a Board member of SBF Foundation, but as someone who has personally experienced Youth Connections as a Connector.

I volunteered because I thought I could perhaps contribute some experience, share what I had learnt in my career, and hopefully help a young person think a little more broadly about their future.

But what surprised me was how much I received in return.

The conversations reminded me of what it was like when I was younger — the uncertainty, the questions about what career to pursue, whether I was making the right choices, and sometimes simply wondering whether I was good enough.

And I realised something important:

Young people don't always need someone to give them the answers. Sometimes, they simply need someone to believe in their potential.

That is what I hope our Connectors will bring to this programme.

You are not expected to have all the answers.

You don't have to be a career counsellor.

You don't have to tell our young people what they should do with their lives.

Instead, share your own story.

Tell them about the opportunities you received — but also tell them about the setbacks.

Tell them about the decisions you got right — and perhaps some of the decisions you got wrong.

Tell them what you wish someone had told you when you were 18 or 20.

Because sometimes, a simple conversation over coffee, a workplace visit, or an honest sharing about your own journey can open a door that a young person never knew existed.

And to our students — I want to say something equally important.

Don't come into this programme thinking that you are here simply to receive.

You have something to give as well.

Bring your questions.

Bring your curiosity.

Bring your own experiences and perspectives.

Don't be afraid to ask the questions that may seem obvious to you. Don't be afraid to tell your Connector what you are uncertain about.

And most importantly, don't feel that you have to impress anyone.

Your Connector isn't looking for a perfect version of you.

They are here to get to know the real you.

The programme guide describes Youth Connections as creating opportunities for young people to expand their social and professional networks, build confidence and aspirations, and gain exposure to different career pathways.

But I think the real value goes beyond that.

A network is not just a list of people you know. A network is a group of people who know you, believe in you, and may be willing to open a door for you when the opportunity comes.

For some of our young participants, access to professional networks and career exposure may not come naturally. That is precisely why programmes like this matter.

But let me also emphasise that this is a **two-way exchange**.

Our Connectors may come into this programme thinking, "What can I give?"

I hope you leave asking, **"What have I learnt?"**

Because young people see the world differently.

They will challenge some of our assumptions. They will ask questions we may not have considered. They will remind us of what it feels like to approach the world with curiosity and possibility.

So, to our Connectors: **be generous with your time, but also be generous with your attention.**

And to our young people: **be courageous enough to step outside your comfort zone and make the most of these relationships.**

Over the next two months, there will be lunches and coffee conversations, workplace visits, career sharing and networking opportunities.

Don't measure the success of this programme by how many meetings you have.

Measure it by whether one conversation stays with you.

Perhaps a student discovers a career they had never considered.

Perhaps a Connector sees a young person's potential and gives them the confidence to pursue it.

Perhaps a relationship that begins here continues long after this programme ends.

If that happens, then Youth Connections has done its job.

So today, I would encourage everyone to approach this experience with **three things: an open mind, an open heart, and a willingness to be surprised.**

You may arrive today thinking that the Connector is the person with something to offer, and the young person is the person who needs help.

But I hope that by the end of this journey, you will realise that **both sides have something valuable to offer each other.**

To our Connectors, thank you for volunteering your time and experience. Your willingness to give back is a powerful expression of what a business community can do for the wider society.

And to our young people, thank you for having the courage to take part. Your future is not predetermined by where you start. It will be shaped by the choices you make, the people you meet, and the opportunities you have the courage to pursue.

Perhaps some of the most important connections you make in your life begin with something as simple as a conversation.

So, **start talking. Start listening. Start asking questions.**

And who knows?

One of these conversations may just change the direction of someone's life.

I hope it does.

Thank you, and I wish all of you a meaningful and memorable Youth Connections journey.