



OPENING OF THE INAUGURAL MAXWELL CHALLENGE

Welcome Remarks

The Global Competition for Mediation and
Advocacy Excellence

Lim Tat

Chair, Maxwell Challenge Organising Committee

27 August 2026 · Maxwell Chambers, Singapore

Good afternoon, everyone!

It is my great pleasure to welcome all of you to the inaugural Maxwell Challenge.

Now, every competition has a first edition. But an inaugural competition is special.

It carries a certain excitement, a little uncertainty, quite a lot of planning, and - if I may say so - an extraordinary number of WhatsApp messages, emails, spreadsheets, revised schedules, re-revised schedules, and people asking, "Are we sure this is the latest version?"

So - if you are feeling nervous this morning, please take comfort: the organisers have been nervous for much longer than you have.

But that is also what makes today meaningful. You are not merely participating in a competition. You are helping to launch something new. Years from now, when the Maxwell Challenge has become a major fixture in the mediation calendar, you will be able to say, "I was there at the beginning." Depending on how well you perform during the next few days of this competition, you may say it loudly - or very quietly - but you will be able to say it.

The Maxwell Challenge was created to give students and young professionals the opportunity to experience mediation not merely as a topic in a textbook, not merely as a clause tucked away at the end of a contract, not merely as something lawyers recommend after litigation has become too expensive and everyone is exhausted, and certainly not as a performative role-play where the objective is simply to satisfy an assessment rubric.

It was created to allow you to experience mediation as a craft.

And mediation is a demanding craft. It requires preparation, discipline, judgment, imagination, humility and courage. It requires the ability to speak - but also the wisdom to stop speaking. That second skill, as many lawyers will tell you, is the more difficult one.

- In litigation, we often ask: who is right?
- In arbitration, we often ask: who has proved the case?
- In mediation, we ask something slightly different: what can still be done?

That is a powerful question. It does not ignore rights. It does not dismiss legal merits. It does not pretend that conflict is simple. But it asks parties, advocates and mediators to move beyond the narrow question of who can defeat whom, and to consider whether there is still a way to solve the problem.

That is why competitions like this matter.

TO THE STUDENTS AND PARTICIPANTS**The real skills of mediation advocacy**

You will be tested on many things over the course of this Challenge. You will be tested on your preparation, your understanding of the problem, your ability to represent your client, your ability to persuade, and your ability to think on your feet.

But you will also be tested on things that are harder to mark on a score sheet.

- Can you listen carefully enough to hear what is not being said?
- Can you advocate firmly without making settlement impossible?
- Can you protect your client's interests without turning every conversation into a battlefield?
- Can you disagree without being disagreeable?
- Can you help your client understand not only the strengths of their case, but also the risks, costs, uncertainties and human consequences of continuing the dispute?

These are the real skills of mediation advocacy.

A good mediation advocate is not a weaker version of a litigator. A good mediation advocate is a different kind of professional. One who understands that persuasion in mediation is not only about pressure. It is also about credibility, timing, tone, empathy, options, risk analysis and trust.

And trust is central to mediation.

Parties do not settle simply because someone tells them to be reasonable. In fact, telling people to "be reasonable" is often the fastest way to make them completely unreasonable. Parties settle when they feel heard, when they understand their alternatives, when they trust the process enough to move, and when the outcome offers them something better than the uncertainty ahead.

That is the work you will be practising in this competition.

TO THE ASSESSORS AND EXPERTS

Thank you. Your presence gives this competition its depth and credibility. Many of you have given your time generously despite busy practices, full calendars and, I suspect, several unread emails waiting impatiently in your inboxes.

Competitions like this depend on volunteers who believe that professional skills are not transmitted only by lectures. They are transmitted by example, feedback and conversation. For many participants, your comments may be the most valuable part of the entire experience. A well-timed piece of feedback can stay with a young lawyer or mediator for years.

Please be kind, but not vague. Encouraging, but not decorative. In this competition, we do not need feedback that says, "Well done, very good." when the performance is mediocre. That is what we say when we cannot remember what happened or want to be politically correct.

What students need is practical guidance: what worked, what did not, what could be sharper, what could be more thoughtful, and what they should try differently next time.

At Maxwell Challenge, we do not shy away from tough love. Our assessors are here not simply to encourage you, but to challenge you. In practice, clients, courts and tribunals seldom congratulate you when things become difficult - they expect you to rise to the occasion. We hope to help you develop that resilience.

TO THE COACHES AND TEACHERS

Thank you for preparing the teams. I know how much work sits behind a competition performance. The students stand up and speak for a few minutes, but behind those few minutes are hours of coaching, rehearsals, strategy discussions, late-night revisions, and probably at least one moment when someone said, "Maybe we should change our entire approach."

That is all part of the learning.

TO THE ORGANISERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Thank you for doing the invisible work. Every successful event depends on people whom nobody notices unless something goes wrong. Timetables, rooms, name tags, problem papers, assessors, food, registration, technology, reminders, emergency fixes - all these things must somehow happen smoothly so that everyone else can simply say, "What a well-organised event."

In particular, I want to thank Karen, our indefatigable Competition Director. Karen has carried an enormous amount of the planning, coordination and detail behind this inaugural Challenge. These events do not happen because someone has a nice idea. They happen because someone is willing to turn the nice idea into a working schedule, a working problem, a working team, and a working competition. Karen, we are deeply grateful.

I also want to thank the Ministry of Law, Maxwell Chambers and its CEO, Jiun Ean, for their leadership for the vision behind this competition.

Maxwell has become one of the world's premier dispute resolution centres. I cannot overstate what a privilege it is for our students and participants to be here. Throughout the competition, you will be conducting your mediations in the very rooms where international arbitrations and mediations are heard every day. In a very real sense, you are stepping into the environment in which many of you may one day practise.

But - buildings alone do not create a dispute resolution culture. People do. Programmes do. Training does. Opportunities like this do.

The Maxwell Challenge reflects a larger ambition: to make Singapore not only a place where disputes are resolved, but a place where the next generation learns how to resolve them well.

That is a very Singaporean thing to do. We do not just build an airport; we build an airport that wins awards. We do not just have hawker food; we debate which stall is the best with the seriousness of constitutional litigation. And now, we do not just host mediations; we train people to mediate, advocate and resolve disputes with skill, integrity and professionalism.

THREE SIMPLE REMINDERS

First, compete strongly. This is a competition, and there is nothing wrong with wanting to win. Mediators may speak warmly about collaboration, but I have noticed that in mediation competitions, everyone still checks the results very carefully. So yes, compete. Prepare well. Think hard. Give your best.

Second, learn generously. Watch other teams. Listen to the experts. Learn from your mistakes. Learn from moments of discomfort. Sometimes the most valuable learning comes not from the moment when everything goes according to plan, but from the moment when the other side says something completely unexpected and your carefully prepared strategy quietly leaves the room.

Third, build friendships. One of the great gifts of competitions is the community they create. The person sitting opposite you today may one day be your colleague, co-counsel, opposing counsel, mediator, client, judge - or, if fate has a sense of humour, your boss.

So be gracious. Be curious. Meet people. This is not only a competition; it is also the beginning of a professional network.

And let me say one final word about the spirit of mediation.

Mediation is sometimes described as an "appropriate" form of dispute resolution. But I have always thought that word is too modest. Mediation is not simply an appropriate dispute resolution process relative to litigation or arbitration. It is a different way of thinking about conflict. It reminds us that justice is not always delivered only through a decision imposed from above. Sometimes, justice also lies in dialogue, understanding, repair, practical compromise and the dignity of being heard.

That is why the work you are doing here matters.

You are learning not only how to argue better, but how to resolve better. Not only how to analyse disputes, but how to help people move through them. Not only how to win points, but how to create value.

So, to the first cohort of Maxwell Challenge participants: congratulations!

You are part of the inaugural class. Set the standard high. Be professional. Be brave. Be thoughtful. Be respectful. And please remember that in mediation, unlike in exams, listening to the other side may actually improve your result.

I wish all teams the very best. May you compete strongly, learn deeply, make new friends, and leave this Challenge with sharper skills, broader perspectives and a deeper appreciation of what mediation can achieve.

**Lim Tat**

Chair, Maxwell Challenge Organising Committee