



Chris trekking on Cheung Chao Island, Hong Kong.

## Chris Wei

### Tell us about the company you work for, South Pole?

South Pole develops and implements comprehensive strategies that turn climate action into long-term business opportunities for Fortune 500 companies, governments and organizations around the world. We have developed projects, as well as designed innovative tools across finance, climate action API's, and emission reductions and compensation strategies to help clients reach their carbon mitigation and Net Zero goals.

### Can you tell us about your job scope and experience at South Pole as a Senior Business Development Associate?

As a business developer and key account manager, my job scope includes developing new business opportunities and managing client relationships. I help build bridges between companies and climate action. Working in the commercial

team at a leading climate solutions provider is fun and rewarding. I am delighted to work with like-minded people and tackle one of the defining challenges (i.e. climate change) together.

### What is the biggest challenge that you have faced at your current job?

Sometimes, convincing companies to take climate action can be challenging. In numerous Asian companies, the top management is unaware of the importance of decarbonization. Decision makers often do not understand why their organization has to demonstrate climate leadership in the industry.

### What are your views on Singapore's and the world's efforts to combat the climate crisis?

Although we are making progress, Singapore and the world still need to prioritize climate change in their agenda.

On one hand, I am happy that climate change is no longer an alien concept to society compared to several years ago. Many companies and governments have realized that sustainability will benefit the planet, people, and their profits. For instance, the Singapore government has implemented a carbon tax a few years ago and has since increased the carbon tax to further encourage decarbonization. We are also witnessing breakthroughs in decarbonization technologies such as hydrogen, direct air capture, and renewable energy.

On the other hand, I am worried that we are running out of time and might lose this battle. We are not treating climate change with the same urgency as we did for COVID-19. However, the consequences of climate change could be much more severe than the pandemic. Hence, both Singapore and the world should act extensively and immediately.

### What do you think is the most important skill set for your current job?

Effective communication is definitely the most critical skill. Externally, I need to understand client needs in sustainability, educate them on the importance of climate action, and advise them on the next steps in their climate journey. Internally, I need to liaise with different departments (e.g., consultancy, accountancy, legal departments) to deliver quality work to clients timely. All things require me to be an effective communicator!

### How do you combat climate crisis fatigue amidst the bleak IPCC Climate Change Report and the news of rampant greenwashing and climate inaction?

Recognize the facts, assess opinions objectively, and act accordingly. Climate change is a fact. This human-induced effect imposes risks to the planet. Nevertheless, it also brings immense opportunities. Companies and societies that decarbonize will win the future. For instance, electric mobility and renewable energy are booming industries.

As for news on greenwashing and climate inaction, some of them are valid. But I personally feel other critics are perfectionists in an imperfect world. They attack companies committed to climate action and ignore laggards hidden in the dark. Hence, assessing opinions objectively is a must.

We are indeed facing a big challenge. Overcoming this challenge will bring sustainability, innovation, prosperity, and social justice. So, stay positive and act now!



**Were there any specific events while you were in NUS, such as an interaction or a class, that led you to pursue a career in climate change?**

I was fortunate enough to be the student liaison for Dr. Sylvia Earle during an event. She is a renowned oceanographer and has dedicated her life to marine conservation. I had some of the most inspiring 1-on-1 chats with Dr. Earle. I was impressed by her commitment and this made me determined to pursue a career in climate change.

**You took part in many exchange programs during your time in NUS (Winter school at ETH Zürich, Summer Research Program at Hong Kong). How have they helped influence your career path?**

Participating in exchange programs reassured me that climate change is a global issue. Before those exchange programs, my understanding of climate change was local and rather theoretical. In Hong Kong, I investigated whether mangroves are important to mitigating climate change by collecting soil samples from a mangrove in Hong Kong. At ETH Zürich, I studied how to optimize the use of daylight and combat climate change with classmates from different parts of the world. It was wonderful to experience the commitment to climate action and sustainability regardless of race, nationality, gender, color, and background.

**If you could go back in time, what would you have done differently as a university student?**

I would pursue a second major in Economics. The economics modules I took in my minor were fascinating. They were not only fun, but also significantly improved my understanding of our society. I also met some of the best

professors, including Prof. Zhang Yang. In her classes, Prof. Zhang used interesting examples to illustrate how principles of economics shape people's decisions in everyday life. Moreover, I would argue that climate change is ultimately an economic problem. Economics can well explain causes, consequences, and impact of human-induced climate change. Understanding economics will help society assess the best decarbonization pathway to pursue.

**Did you imagine yourself pursuing this career when you were younger?**

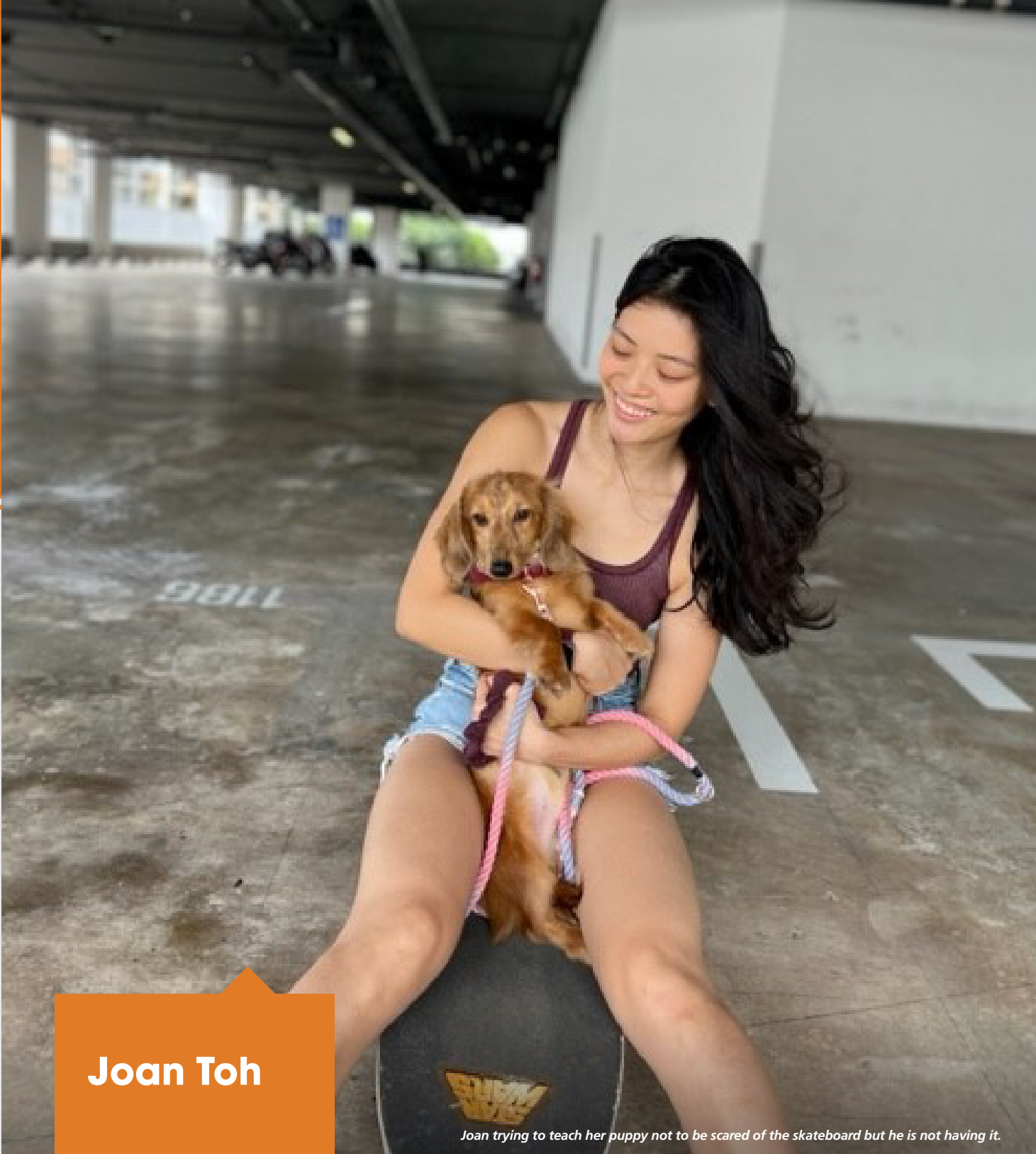
Yes, I have been passionate about sustainability since young. I grew up in China and hence witnessed rapid urbanization. While I was generally amazed by the improvement in life quality, the scale of environmental pollution and social issues was daunting. For example, I was sick of the hazy days when I was a student. The extent of industrial waste and polluted natural resources was also disturbing. This is why I chose a career in environmental sustainability.

**Do you have any advice for your juniors who are also looking into pursuing a career in helping to combat the climate crisis?**

Be passionate about climate change and be confident in your abilities. Solving the climate crisis requires all levers to find solutions. You can contribute whether you are good at communication (business development and marketing), analytics (climatetech), consulting, finance (climate investments), advocacy (NGOs and governments), or others. Get involved early - Let us create a sustainable future together!



*Chris (middle) on holiday with his colleagues in Sydney.*



## Joan Toh

*Joan trying to teach her puppy not to be scared of the skateboard but he is not having it.*

### **Can you tell us more about what you do as a Product Manager in SP group?**

I manage the SP app, leading the implementation of new features and enhancements in the product roadmap. One of the things users can do is monitor their consumption of utilities and pay their bills. Users can also learn about sustainability through our GreenUP feature, where they can participate in challenges and pick up bite sized information on how to be more sustainable.

### **Can you share any success stories or examples of how the sustainability features on the app have positively impacted users' behaviours and contributed to environmental goals?**

We have features to help track consumption as well as targets based on individual household consumption. The Energy Saving Challenge encourages users to reduce their energy consumption monthly. We also have Green Goals that sets targets for the entire nation based on our SG



Green Plan 2030, and further breaks down these targets to the district and individual levels of consumption. Users are also able to take the Carbon Footprint Quiz to measure their level of carbon emissions from different aspects such as utilities, transport and food. They are able to also set targets and track their monthly carbon emissions. Hopefully these tools will educate and enable our users to take steps towards becoming more sustainable.

**What challenges have you encountered in implementing sustainability features on the app and how were they overcome?**

The biggest challenge is always getting users that are less concerned about sustainability to be aware about it. Along with this, how might we simplify the concept of carbon footprint emissions to our users to make being sustainable more relatable to their daily lives. Many users also believe that their individual effort does not make a difference, but if you take a look at overall electricity consumption in Singapore, households actually accounted for more than 15% of consumption in 2021. Collectively, consumers can do a lot.

**What do you find to be the most meaningful aspect of your job?**

Getting to be a part of user research to gain more insights about our users. Often through research, we get to understand how people perceive sustainability so we can identify and address the barriers faced by users. For

example, understanding that users care a lot less about sustainability but a lot more about cost of living, we can reframe their perspectives to let them understand the impact of consumption on cost of living. Another insight is that language and tone play a big part in how we communicate to end users. As subject matter experts, we often don't realise that end users don't have the same knowledge on a certain product as we do. Carbon emissions are perceived as abstract and difficult to understand, so we have to pick something more tangible and relatable like "trees saved" to quantify it for our users.

As a product manager, I also get to interact with stakeholders from engineering, marketing, customer service and designs. I enjoy getting many different perspectives and also working together with a team that genuinely cares about user experience and what we are building.

**What do you like to do in your free time?**

I'm a kinaesthetic learner, so I like activities that allow me to move and interact such as sports, playing the piano and even building Lego.

**Which part of your NUS experience was the most memorable to you?**

It has to be staying on campus in UTown! I got to spend most of my time with friends. I also got to interact with a lot of new and like-minded people, making my learning experience at NUS very memorable!



Joan (middle) at her Residential College 4 friends' wedding.