



“PREPARING FOR THE CHANGING GLOBAL WORK ENVIRONMENT”

Address

By

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of the Barbados Community College**

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Mr. Master of Ceremonies, Honourable Minister of Education Youth Affairs and Sport, Chairman of the Board of Management of the Community College Dr. Asquith Thompson and members of the Board, Principal of the Community College Dr. Gladstone Best and staff of the Community College, graduands, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: first, I would like to congratulate the graduands of the Barbados Community College on completion of their Associate Degrees, diplomas and certificates and other programmes of study and for the important strides that the College has made. I am impressed with the wide range of courses offered by the College. Here students have an opportunity to be exposed to a range of disciplines and the offerings clearly reflect the needs of Barbados in a number of areas. Indeed, the range of graduands today truly captures the mission of the College "to meet the changing education and training needs of the societies it serves".

As I looked at the range of offerings and the disciplines in which the graduands have completed their studies I recognize that there would have been a great deal of organization and planning in order to achieve this. I therefore congratulate the Board also and the administration.

The delivery of post secondary education is one of the most important stages in the educational ladder. It is at this point that those who are capable of going further are able to make determinations about their future careers and those who wish to consolidate in other ways on the gains they have made here make appropriate decisions.

It is higher education which has helped to develop the minds of our young, to instill in them general logic and reasoning skills, critical thinking skills, as well as specific skill relevant to the

country's needs and consistent with their abilities and orientations.

I will take this opportunity to offer graduands some brief advice on career choices, employee development, the opportunities offered by the CSME and some thoughts on preparing for the regional and global work environment.

Declining and Advancing Areas

As you the graduands move on to the next stage of your study or work career, you must choose carefully. Some careers are more dynamic than others; and skills needs are changing constantly. Some are in decline while others are in ascent. Since choices made early and in mid-career can be important, it is useful therefore for graduands to pay attention to trends in career development.

Self-Employment

In the current global environment also, do not ignore the idea of self-employment. We must condition ourselves to be entrepreneurial, to think of new projects and to consider working for ourselves and most importantly to be more disposed to working together. In Barbados we tend to aim at working for a large firm or we work for ourselves. Rarely do we get together to start a new business. The Barbados government has invested much time and effort in supporting the self employed small and medium sized business, so help is available. I am sure graduands can think of former graduates of the Community College who are presently self employed and are doing well.

Long Service

In your future careers, some will move from employment to self employment and most persons will change jobs several times as the world of business

changes and adapts itself to global forces. The days of working a lifetime in a single place will probably become the exception rather than the rule.

Professionalism

I will speak now about a few topics pertaining to employee development which I believe should be emphasized in any environment - and I speak as an employer and a CEO. The first is professionalism. One of the most important aspects of work, whatever the field, is to approach the job professionally.

That means doing the job well, whether or not you like your supervisor, or the person for whom you may have been recruited to do the job. It means that even if you are an expert and your advice has not been accepted, and you have been asked, in your professional capacity, to execute the task which you have not supported, you do it to the best of your ability because you are professional.

It also means that when you have observed an error, even if it shows you up, you take the responsibility for it and have it corrected immediately. It is better for it to be nipped in the bud than to leave the error, hoping that it will be overlooked. It may be discovered at too late a stage by which time damage to the company or the project may have resulted - or even some catastrophe may have occurred - if it is for example in the field of engineering.

One of the common issues in the workplace which can reduce the potential for successful group work is the question of who gets the credit. While organizations should be geared to giving recognition to staff based on their contribution, it is also important that individuals do not withhold their contribution because they fear not getting the credit they deserve. In fact, a little

pro bono work, often gives you the opportunity to show what you can do. If you want to get the credit before you offer your skills unstintingly - you may delay the opportunity to shine.

Job Flexibility

We have heard a lot about job flexibility. This is very important in today's competitive world. Knowledge is changing, therefore tasks will be modified and our responses to the changes needed must be quick, if not instantaneous. This means that job definitions must not be seen as the boundaries of work, otherwise this country's progress will be slowed. Employees must be willing to perform varying tasks at different times and employers need to reserve the right to reassign persons to perform jobs of different kinds in the company, both in the interest of cost savings and to achieve the more effective use of placement of skills.

Continuous Learning

Most of you will be at the beginning of your careers. In today's world, it is as important to master what you choose as a career as it is to be open to new knowledge. There is much more to know about every discipline than before and there are many new areas of knowledge being developed, so that depth of knowledge is becoming as important as breadth of knowledge. It is important to be multi-skilled, but you should try to master at least one skill. Even if you do not officially acquire more qualifications - and I do encourage you to do so if you can - you will need to keep up to date with new information in your field. Indeed, in many professional fields it is increasingly a requirement that graduates do continuing professional hours in order to retain their designations. Many professional organizations themselves provide members with the content for the hours study, others simply require that it be done

in order to maintain eligibility. This is after you have laboured to achieve the designation in the first place.

CSME

As the Caribbean becomes a single market, there is likely to be increased opportunity for graduates to move within the region. Already, there are pan-Caribbean companies operating in several islands across the region and a number of Caribbean companies will increasingly be operating across the globe.

In the environment that is the Single Market and Economy, potential employees and employers in the Caribbean can no longer confine themselves to looking within. It is the outward-looking businesses which have greater chances of success. Without calling names, if you think of the most successful businesses in Barbados you will see

that, for the most part, this is so. This is as true of businesses as it is of individuals. However, in each case there are hurdles to be overcome, and in many cases they can be overcome.

What is certain, is that if countries as large as the European countries have seen the need to form themselves into one market and to allow their people to move across borders, our tiny islands of the Caribbean have no choice but to integrate if we wish to survive and to be competitive. In terms of the self-employment, there will be a market of 7 million people (13 million if we include the non-English speaking Caribbean).

Barbados is well-positioned to market its services abroad and institutions like the Barbados Community College which have helped to create the skills have contributed to making this possible. There is a word of warning here however. Because we may be

more competitive in services than in goods, we, in Barbados, must not believe that our neighbours are less competitive in services than we are, or we may have an unpleasant surprise - for they too are upgrading their skills. They too have their community colleges.

Regional governments have already agreed to permit the movement of UWI graduates across the region and to permit certain classes of employees - including the media, artists and performers. It is proposed that this be expanded to include additional categories of workers and it might be in the interest of the educational institutions to try to influence what is included in the next round.

What Will the World of Work be Like in 20 Years?

Already, it is quite common, in many countries, including right here in the Caribbean, for employees to work in one jurisdiction and live in

another - commuting by plane (and in bigger countries by train) on weekends to their homes. It is happening right here in the Caribbean already.

Already, they are being assigned tasks in various countries across the globe. They work in teams with strangers brought together on particular projects in particular places. The employee of tomorrow is therefore likely to be much more footloose than the employee of yesterday. This will have implications for the way in which we prepare ourselves for the global world market.

In addition, Barbados can be the beneficiary of the outsourcing trend, where you work from at home, on jobs across the globe. Medical transcription is such an activity. I see that it is listed on the curriculum here. We may not be able to become like India or China, but we can start where we can.

Despite protests reported in the US media, outsourcing is likely to continue, as research has shown (research by Global Insight for example) that more jobs are created in the US than are lost as a result of outsourcing. Improvements in technology are extending the level beyond manufacturing to other workers - and this is beyond Call Centres and medical transcription - to white collar occupations. We must be ready to take advantage of this trend.

Role of Technology

This College is positioning its graduates well for the world of tomorrow. I see that many of the courses require computer knowledge. It is very important to use computer technology to deliver non-computer courses.

Today, everything from books to medicine is now available on line so that computer literacy has

become extremely important to our survival and to our success in non-computer based subjects. However, we need to go further and apply this approach to technology. We need to ensure that we do not find ourselves technologically challenged, so that when we buy the digital equipment which is part of the make-up of almost every type of gadget, be it a vehicle or appliance or high level equipment, that we have developed the skills locally to service these equipment units. This applies from the least sophisticated gadget to the most sophisticated equipment. The trend - buying another is costly - ecologically (as we watch our dumps grow) and in terms of foreign exchange usage.

Most importantly, we must teach ourselves to get the most from the technology. Many of us use only 10% of its power - be it computers or other equipment. There is another 90% of its capacity which goes untapped and which we must tap into if

we want to be on the cutting edge. If at the college level of our lives - your lives - we do not tap into the 90%, it is most unlikely that this will happen in middle age. Do it now or you may always be using 90% capacity.

Software development is an area in which we may need to consider emphasizing again. We tend to think of software as something we buy once. This is not so, for sophisticated software - and you can check with the banks and financial institutions and maybe even with hotels - with every purchase there is an annual maintenance service charge and upgrade charge, so you are not just buying into the first round of sales but several future rounds. Very often the buyer becomes captive and turns automatically to the software supplier the next time around because the cost of switching to a new supplier requires a major and costly shift of the entire system and its interfaces. I suspect that

much of this accounts for India's success. The purchaser becomes captive, so that the first sale guarantees many future related sales. This is an area which, were we successful in developing it, could bring significant long-term committed business.

This institution has been a fine example of a successful process of diagnosing the training needs of Barbados and in some ways of the wider Caribbean. It has helped to position itself to meet many of those needs. The health services, pharmacology services, nursing, graphic design and hospitality areas are outstanding examples of the College's initiative. The College has been able to identify needs and fill gaps, and without competing with the University, has lifted the skills base of our people.

What the Community College as an institution has done in the country, is an example for its students of what they as individuals can do as employees of today and employers of tomorrow, as they explore the wider world. That is, identify the opportunities - in whatever field - and take advantage of it - and do so promptly.

Before closing, I would like to leave two simple thoughts with you.

Firstly, What we need to focus on now and in the future is the quality of our output. This must be high- in what ever area - whether it be fine arts, health services, health inspection, legal services, languages, social work or whatever field. For the quality of our output is not influenced only by qualifications (and I speak again as a CEO) but by the accompanying attitudes: by the manner of delivery, by adaptability, by willingness to learn

on the job and to learn from others, willingness to take instructions, to persevere in the face of hurdles, by our ability to develop self confidence and operate with integrity. These factors determine the total quality of our output.

Secondly, the services that you have been trained to provide will need to be delivered competitively. Globalization and the opening of markets will mean that we have to fight as hard to keep the local market as to get in to the foreign market. Do not count on consumers having loyalty for your music or your design or your other services based on the fact of its local production. In the crunch, it is the cost and the quality that will matter. Therefore not only must the quality of our goods and services be top class but we must be giving good value for money if we are to survive in this competitive world. There are such things today as "value for money" audits which aim to identify not

only whether the quality of the product is high but whether or not you are producing it at several times the cost of your competitors.

Together these factors "Quality output" and "value for money" mean that the quality of our graduands must also be top class in a total sense, not only in an academic sense.

I congratulate the principal and staff for their commitment to this fine institution and for the results they have obtained. In congratulating again the graduating class of 2005 for your outstanding achievement, I urge you to continue to aim for excellence. Set your standards high. High achievement in the global market requires it. You have made a good start. I wish you every success in the future.
