



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

OFFICE OF THE CAMPUS PRINCIPAL

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Feature Address by the Campus Principal

Presentation College Past Students' Association Annual Career Guidance Seminar *"Beyond the PRESent"*

Presentation College, Carib Street, San Fernando
Wednesday 5th October, 2016 | 9:00am

Salutations

- Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, the Honourable Faris Al-Rawi
- Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries, Senator The Honourable Mr Clarence Rambharat
- Principal, Presentation College, San Fernando, Mr. Dexter Mitchell
- President, Presentation College Past Students' Association, Mr. Steven Samlalsingh
- Teaching and Administrative Staff of Presentation College, San Fernando
- Other Specially Invited Guests
- Students of Presentation College and St. Joseph Convent, San Fernando
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction & Welcome

- Good morning!
- I am truly delighted and honoured to be here in support of this Annual Career Guidance Seminar appropriately entitled, “*Beyond the PRESent*” hosted by the Presentation College Past Students’ Association! I must say that I am doubly honoured, not only because I am a proud son of the city of San Fernando, but because I am also a proud past student of this great institution. Indeed, what began in the 1930s in humble beginnings in the San Fernando Presbytery has blossomed into what we have today – a frontline secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago. I extend sincere thanks to the President of Presentation College Past Students’ Association, Mr. Steven Samlalsingh for inviting me and also for hosting this annual Career Guidance Seminar for our young minds. Let me also extend thanks to the Principal of Presentation College, Mr. Dextell Mitchell and the staff of Presentation College for inviting me.

A Personal Connection to Presentation College

- Ladies and gentlemen, Presentation College has had a profound impact on both my personal and professional life. This college sharpened my drive for excellence, and it is here that I began to learn about the importance of hard

work, commitment, dedication, social responsibility and discipline. Yes, just like many of you here today, I had to complete and endure challenging homework, several testing examinations and projects; but it is precisely these challenges that laid the foundation for my personal and professional success. I stumbled a couple of times but was able to benefit from the professional care of attention of my teachers, notably one Brother Ligori who cajoled me into doing extensive math exercises to counter my failing marks in Algebra and Geometry. His strong advice moved my marks in those subjects from a 30% average in the first term to 80% in the second and played no small part in my later academic successes.

- I would also like to give heartfelt thanks to the College and all others who taught me or with whom I worked for my one year as a high school teacher prior to enrolling at UWI. I make special mention here of Mr Bally who was a special inspiration and family friend and who taught Latin and English, Mr Conrad Mercier who gave us a roaring time in our Friday after noon Latin class in 3A Sp, Mr Sheppard, Mr Mungal and Brother Lawrence through whom I developed a love for Literature, Mr Capildeo Maharaj (Cappy) with whom I spent many a lunchtime in the staff room playing dominoes, and Mr Ramdath and the inimitable Roy Chong Kit for their professional and dedicated mentoring in Mathematics. An order of magnitude of thanks is due to Mr

Ramon Banfield, fellow student Anthony Lue Shue and fellow teacher Anthony Lee Mack for igniting and helping to nurture my love for electronics, a love that lead me to choose a career in Electrical Engineering.

[Presentation College, San Fernando – Producing Leaders for Trinidad & Tobago](#)

- Over the last seven decades or so, Presentation College, San Fernando has had the distinction of producing many of our national leaders including – the President of Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency Anthony Carmona, two former distinguished Prime Ministers, the Honourable Basdeo Panday and the late Honourable Patrick Manning, the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Faris Al-Rawi, former Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Euric Bobb, former Chairman of Petrotrin, Mr. Malcolm Jones, and, to show how PRES Excellence prevails across different sectors and professions, we also have distinguished internationally acclaimed soca artistes like Machel Montano and Kes Diefenthaler... the list goes on. Producing so many distinctive alumni is indeed an outstanding achievement that must be recognized and celebrated! I would therefore like to acknowledge all past and present staff and students, in addition to all parents and guardians who have supported the development of Presentation College, San Fernando and therefore have contributed to its significant success over the last 80 years.

PAUSE

Key Messages to Students

- This Career Guidance Seminar is designed to help you choose your future vocation. However, I am wary of giving a whole lot of advice on how you should go about selecting and preparing for a career. I prefer to leave much of that to the many experts here today. What I would rather do, is to generally discuss the state of the job market and give some direction as to how you should plan the means by which you will earn a livelihood.
- I spent the last two days attending discussions on the Budget Speech that was read last Friday. That speech made it quite clear that the days of dominance of the oil and gas that we depended on for so many years are, at least for now, all but gone. Low production and low oil prices have resulted in revenue from taxation, royalties on oil, and profits from state enterprises, dropping from \$57 billion in 2014 to \$37 billion in 2016, a decrease of 35%!
- This country has a small economy, one that essentially exists on the earning of foreign currency (primarily \$US). We have been heavily reliant on oil and gas to bring foreign currency into the country. When, over a period of time, our foreign currency reserves drop due to lower foreign currency earnings or from using foreign currency to import goods and services we essentially become a poorer nation. Another way of looking at this is that the lower foreign currency

reserves limit our ability to purchase foreign goods and services. It manifests itself as a weakening of the local currency represented by a concomitant drop in the foreign exchange (FOREX) rate – currently, I am told, the \$US costs 8TTD (or 1TTD is equivalent to 12.5cents USD) at the Cambio booths at Piarco!

- What this all means is that it is essential that the loss in foreign exchange due to the fall in energy production and prices be compensated by other means – industries, business etc that export goods and services for foreign currency.
- In the context of the job market, what this all says is the following:
 1. Industries and businesses (entrepreneurial activities) that spend more foreign currency than they earn, weaken the economy. This includes groceries that sell foreign foods, automobile dealers, and even professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers who purchase their tools of trade as well as supplies internationally
 2. Entrepreneurial activities that earn more foreign currency than they spend strengthen the economy. This includes the energy companies and a few very small operators.
- If you comprehend my poor excuse of a description of national economics, then it should be clear that you would be doing yourself, your family and the nation a great deal of good by targeting foreign income earning as part of your career strategy. Since this involves selling goods and services internationally, to be

successful, these goods and services must generally be appealingly distinctive from goods and services that originate from other countries (if these do exist). The economists call this distinctiveness that attracts a potential buyer to select your goods or products over another, a “competitive advantage.”

- Competitive advantage can come through a range of activities – marketing, packaging, distribution, design, production, advertising, financing arrangements, legal arrangements, engineering and technology. The highest degree of competitiveness occurs when any or all of these activities contain a component of **innovation**. This competitiveness arises from the very definition of the word: a novel idea that has beneficial impact. The novelty is what distinguishes your goods and/or service from others.
- Consequent to all the above I now humbly suggest that you seek ultimately in your respective lives to either lead or participate in innovative entrepreneurial activities that are net foreign currency earners. This will most likely take the form of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). By way of example, I would like to point out that Germany has some 3.8 million SMEs, many of them family owned businesses, that earn the same amount of foreign currency as the 500 largest companies. This is in stark contrast to what obtains locally but we really should be doing the same here. My experience at the UWI suggests that we could.

- Your education will be one of your greatest assets in achieving this objective. Given your youth, inexperience and, possibly lack of resources, it will more likely than not be necessary for you to first take on a “regular” job before taking on this riskier venture. This could also serve as a cushion or buffer in the event that your more adventurous pursuits fail
- I advise caution in one regard – we have a culture in which workers generally treat their employment with scant respect, displaying lack of pride in workmanship, providing shorter hours than agreed etc. I beg and implore you to never adopt this attitude as it is one that literally impoverishes our country and our society. Treat EVERY job with respect, especially those that you take on a temporary basis until the right opportunity arises,.
- The advice I have given is further supported by the following observation. If you look carefully at Trinidad and Tobago, you would quickly realize that the market for some professions is close to saturation. It gets worse every year as more graduates hit the job market. Moreover, the job market is changing at a very rapid pace. As such, your educational base should be broad enough and deep enough to facilitate multiple changes in your career path. Your first job will almost definitely not be your last. Bear this in mind when you are looking for a tertiary level education.

- And finally, I ask that you remember that a good education should not only focus on academic qualification or certification, but should also promote a set of values that will help to shape our future leaders into responsible and exemplary citizens. It should inculcate the values of honesty, integrity, respect for human life, tolerance, generosity, kindness towards others and caring for the less fortunate. One of the great thinkers and leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that, *“Intelligence plus character is the goal of true education”*. I therefore submit that one of the greatest contributions that you, our young students can make to the development of Trinidad and Tobago is to ensure that character and courage are instilled in all that you do, in your personal and professional life, understanding that the strength of our nation depends on the strength of character of our citizens.

Concluding Remarks

- Dear students, there is an old Chinese proverb that says”
“A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in....”
- Today, your teachers, your parents, your guardians, your mentors will be molding the trees that will provide the “shade” for you to lead comfortable, responsible and successful lives. In time, it will be your turn to do the same for

the generation after you. I appeal therefore to all of you to take full advantage of the opportunity that will be afforded to you today. I hope that the advice I have given will be useful as you build your careers.

[] May you live long and prosper! I thank you!