

Create value in the world

Learning plus performance is the foundation of success.

By HUBERT A. INGRAHAM



The Rt. Hon. Hubert Ingraham. PHOTO: GUYTN OTTLEY

The Rt. Hon. Hubert Ingraham received an honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) from The University of the West Indies for his contributions as a politician. This is his guest speech to graduates on Friday, October 26, 2018 at the 4pm graduation ceremony for the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I begin by acknowledging the great honour and expressing the deep appreciation I feel at receiving the award of an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of the West Indies. I am truly humbled by your recognition. Thank you.

I want also to congratulate my fellow honourees: Mrs. Paula Lucie-Smith, Mr. Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Mr. Winston Bailey (Shadow) and Professor Dermott Kelleher, each so accomplished and each so deserving. Congratulations colleagues.

Graduates: Today belongs to you and it is to you that I direct my thoughts this afternoon.

During more than 35 years in public life it has been my good fortune to have had the opportunity to address many graduating scholars. Each time I have done so, I have seen graduates who are fired up, as I am sure you are, to use their newly acquired certificates, diplomas and degrees to take on and conquer the next stage of their lives.

Let me be among the first to congratulate you for having successfully graduated from our premier regional tertiary educational institution. You are leaving UWI, St. Augustine well equipped with a liberal arts education. Today you join a long list of highly accomplished individuals.

I trust that you have gained, also, a clear understanding of the value of life-long learning; making you your own best teacher in the years ahead.

As you set out to make your contribution to your countries and indeed the world, I want to give you a bit of advice that I hope will help to make your effort more successful. Firstly, your degree is only an indication to the world that you have the capacity to acquire certain knowledge and skills. It is left to you to actually demonstrate in the real world what attaining your degree means. It is only in this way that you will honour your degree, justify faith in the mission of this university and enrich the lives of others.

Secondly, know that your degree is a guarantee of nothing. You must now leverage all of what you have learned at The UWI with real life experiences, to create real value in the world. Learning plus performance is the foundation of success.

Thirdly, you are armed with the widest assortment of tools – many beyond our imagination not so long ago. Some of us stand aghast as traditional text books and print encyclopaedia have given way to electronic books, electronic libraries, Google and Wikipedia and as traditional lecture halls are increasingly replaced by virtual ones. Computer-generated distance learning is quickly changing the face of formal education.

Walking through the terminal in Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport recently, a billboard from Spectrum Enterprise caught my attention. It read:

“We live in a remarkable time, when the promise of digital technology to genuinely improve human lives has accelerated in unimaginable ways. Enterprises expect to collaborate across numerous locations and schools can connect their students with insights from around the world. Health care providers can deliver patient care over digital connections. And connectivity is so intertwined that we take it for granted, turning wonders into daily expectations. There is an optimism that is exciting and awe-inspiring. Digital technology promises to make a meaningful impact on humanity.”

Digital technology can only fulfil that promise if it is embraced in a most positive way; for even as connectivity has increased exponentially over the past three decades, it appears that individuals, nations and regions of the world have become more disconnected.

Increasingly, we retreat into silos of race, gender, class, nationality, religion and politics.

Knowledge is now more abundant and easier to access, but wisdom, somehow, seems diminished and harder to embrace.

We, in the Caribbean, have small open economies. Many, like my home, The Bahamas, are highly – even increasingly – tourist dependent. Tourism, by its very nature, is not only subject to the fickle preferences of travellers but also to the vagaries of climate change and natural disasters.

Agricultural economies face similar if different challenges. Others of us, like Trinidad and Tobago, have the advantage of large oil and natural gas reserves, however they also remain vulnerable to fluctuating oil and gas prices that have in the past, and can again in the future, play havoc with an economy.

Indeed, we all share the common reality that our open economies remain highly susceptible to external shocks both natural and man-made.

You should be mindful therefore that you are citizens of a region where economies have been hampered by low growth, high unemployment and heavy government indebtedness arising from the lingering effects of the recent Great Recession.

This regional burden and challenge is now falling to you and you must contribute to addressing it. I believe that you are gifted, knowledgeable, astute and driven. Collaborating with each other and with those now seeking to address our many challenges is our best path to producing just the solutions we require for future success.

Keep in mind that you come from a region which has produced world class people in many fields. We have made our mark on the world stage.

We compete above our size in the world of sports, where gold, silver and bronze medals are now expected from Caricom nation athletes at world championships and at repeated Olympiads. In literature and economics, Nobel Prizes have been won by sons of the English-speaking Caribbean on three separate occasions. In the arts, whether in music, theatre or motion pictures, Caribbean actors and artists garner critical acclaim, helping to unite people of all languages, races and creeds. We have a great legacy of which we can be proud.

Still there remains much to be done. It is now your turn to add to our legacy. You can and you will.

I am happy to share with you some of the wisdom I learned as a student of life at what some may call my "school of hard knocks". I was not afforded the privilege which you have enjoyed of a traditional education in secondary and tertiary institutions. I completed secondary school qualifications as a student of an evening institute and I articulated in the law chambers of a Bahamian law firm. I became a voracious reader; a habit I continue to practice today.

I came to politics from a genuine desire to effect change for the people in my little settlement in North Abaco – Cooper’s Town – in The Bahamas. Over time my community grew and expanded to include my whole island and eventually my whole country.

I learned early that service was a most satisfactory endeavour. So I recommend it to each of you; for St Francis of Assisi’s words continue to be true: “It is in giving that we receive”.

Some of my greatest satisfaction in life has come, not from holding high office, but rather, from the small incremental successes I was able to influence that have made life better for more and more Bahamians over the years – access to better equipped schools and health care clinics, to potable water, to electricity, telephone, cable television service, the internet and cellular telephone service now available in all our 30 populated communities spread over 700 islands and cays extending across some 80,000 square miles of sea.

In closing, graduates, I recall that the motto of The UWI is a “Light Rising from the West”. As graduates of an institution founded in response to our region’s quest for advancement and change, you are the newest bearers of that light, signaling a new day for the Caribbean.

Allow the light of your education to shine. Use it to elevate the human condition and illuminate new pathways to progress for all our people. We need your energy. We need your ingenuity. We need your light.

I congratulate you once again for your academic and professional achievement. I call on each of you to excel in the next stage of your development.

Godspeed.