



The Five Be Attitudes

Feature Address by

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To the

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Of the

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Introduction

Governor General, Your Excellency Dame Pearlette Louisy, Minister for Education, Human Resource Development, Youth and Sports – Honourable Mario Michel and Mrs. Michel, Acting Chairperson of the Board of Governors of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College – Senator Agatha Jn. Panel, members of the Board of Governors, Principal of the College – Dr. George Forde, Staff of the College, First Principal of the College - Hon. Leton Thomas and Mrs. Thomas, Permanent Secretaries in the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Youth and Sports – Ms. Esther Brathwaite and Mr. Henry Mangal, Pastor Sherwin Griffith, Graduands, Parents, distinguished invited guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Afternoon.

I am indeed honoured to have been invited by the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College to deliver the Feature Address at the 2006 Graduation Exercise of the College. It represents a coming back home for me, so to speak, although when last I participated actively in a Graduation exercise in this area twenty-six years ago it was known by a different name. It was a collection of ‘colleges’, with separate names and identities, and very little intermingling of populations. Today it is one College, with one name, and much more mixing of Division populations. In fact it was my reflection on that exercise, the period in which it was held, and what has transpired in the intervening years, that allowed me to put in context my address to you today.

The Period of my Graduation

When I graduated from what was then the Saint Lucia Advanced Level College in 1980, I had no idea what the future held for me or for Saint Lucia. I was a very green, eager graduate, who had just spent the better part of two years playing volleyball on the Court, going to every party that was organised, and of course, attending my Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and General Paper classes. A Level College for me was as much about the experience as it was about the academic education. At that point I had given precious little thought to what I wanted to do with my life. I knew I liked Biology and Chemistry, so I had tentatively decided to do a degree in Biochemistry, with the intention of moving from that to become a medical doctor. There was not much in the way of guidance counseling that took place and if your calling was not obviously medicine, law or engineering, then you were in that grey area where you could be easily persuaded, depending on opportunity and finance.

Saint Lucia was a different country to what it is today. We had just attained Independence and there was an expectant feeling in the air that things were going to change. Many of the things that most of you take for granted today were not even thought about back then.

We had no cable television and we had to depend on CBC Barbados for almost all of our television programming, which ran from 5.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m. daily. Compact Disc technology had not yet emerged, and we all listened to 33 and 45 rpm vinyl records and something called audio cassette tapes. The original Sony Walkman had made its world debut just one year

earlier but had not yet made its appearance in Saint Lucia. Rap music, which is so popular today, had also made its debut of sorts a year earlier when a group called the Sugar Hill Gang released a song called Rappers Delight, which became the first rap/hip hop single to make it into the US Billboard Top 40. My generation took its musical inspiration from a still alive Bob Marley and his Wailers. Mr. George Forde taught economics, Ms. Pearlette Louisy taught French, and Beverley Josie and Damian Greaves were my class mates. There were no FM stations, no microwave ovens, no cordless phones, no personal computers, no cellular phones, no fax machines, and it took days to get colour photographs processed. There was also no Crack Cocaine and no HIV or AIDS.

The world around us was also different. It was the period of the Cold War and the word communist was taboo. One year earlier, the West Indies had beaten England at Lords to become Cricket World Cup champions for the second consecutive time, and the period of West Indies dominance of World cricket was beginning to flourish under the leadership of Clive Lloyd. There was no World Trade Organization, and our bananas had virtually unlimited access to the United Kingdom, with little competition from Latin American fruit.

So, things were quite different in 1980 when I sat, not very far away from where you now sit, as a recently-turned seventeen year old, about to receive my graduation certificate in 1980. The world was my oyster back then, but I had no idea what sort of pearl I would find in it.

The World Today

Today, Cable and Satellite television bring countless channels of seemingly unrestricted programming to households around Saint Lucia 24 hours a day. The Video Cassette Recorder, which had not yet made its debut in Saint Lucia when I graduated, has now been replaced by the DVD player, which itself is now being replaced by Blu-ray Disc and HD DVD. Vinyl records are now used only by Dee Jays, audio cassettes have disappeared, and the CD player, which was such a big deal when it was released, has evolved into MP3 players and iPods holding thousands of songs and video, most of which can now be downloaded on the internet, rather than bought from a record store. Where in 1980 only one in every twenty households had a land line telephone, in 2006 one in every two households has a land line, and four out of every five households own a mobile phone.

With the good has also come the bad. Crack cocaine has destroyed and is continuing to destroy the lives of scores of Saint Lucians. HIV/AIDS, which was discovered six years after I graduated, is now responsible for 318 person years being lost per year in Saint Lucia. Gang violence, much of it prompted by the drug trade, and also not an issue in 1980, has reared its ugly head in our country, and homicides now account for over 1,500 person years being lost each year. The real threat of Global Terrorism has violently replaced the exaggerated threat of Global Communism. The World Trade Organization, the emergence of the United States as the only world super power, and the creation of mega trading blocs like the European Union, have radically changed the rules of global trade and reduced our banana farmers and our banana industry almost to an irrelevance. And to add serious insult

to injury, the West Indies team is now at the bottom of the ladder in world cricket.

The world of work in which you are venturing, some for the first time, some reentering, is simultaneously exhilarating and challenging. Competition is intense and the fittest and the most adaptable are the ones who stand the best chances of survival. In effect, it is Darwin's Law of Natural Selection taken to an entirely different level. However, despite the many challenges, I do not believe there are too many of us who would trade living in the present times for life in the past.

Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, summarized it most eloquently when he said "The past is a good place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there".

The Be Attitudes

Therefore, my address today will focus on the attitudes that I believe you should cultivate and adopt in order to make the successful transition from Sir Arthur Lewis Community College student to Saint Lucian worker and world citizen. Because I will propose five key attitudes, I have exercised some poetic license in titling my address The Five Be Attitudes. I promise you, however, that this will be not be a Sermon on the Mount of Fortune.

Be World Class

The first attitude that I recommend you adopt is to Be World Class.

As the holder of a tertiary level qualification, you now find yourself in a privileged, minority position in our society. The percentage of the Saint Lucian population that has received an education up to the Secondary School level is surprisingly only 14.1%. A recently concluded Survey of Living Conditions and Household Budgets in Saint Lucia indicated that households in Saint Lucia with household heads who had secondary and higher levels of education were NOT poor. This is a very revealing statistic that puts in proper context the significance of the Universal Secondary Education (USE) of which we can boast today, and the education that you have been fortunate to receive. The esteemed economist after whom this College is named was the one who stated that “the fundamental cure for poverty is not money but knowledge”, and we can find no more eloquent and practical evidence of that hypothesis. Therefore, by progressing this far with your education you have ensured that no household that you head will be poor. Isn't that a great statistic? That is one of the most fundamental benefits of your education and that is why it was absolutely necessary to ensure that every child born in Saint Lucia is given the opportunity to obtain a secondary school education.

However, lest we become complacent and believe that by achieving USE we are now on the same platform with our competitors, here are other data. According to information from a document from the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network, prepared by the World Bank in conjunction with Caribbean stakeholders, the Gross Enrolment Rate in tertiary education in

Saint Lucia stands at 14%. The average for the Caribbean is 12%, so Saint Lucia is above average in the Caribbean.

However, juxtapose that with statistics coming out of a recent study by UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) entitled Education Trends in Perspectives – Analysis of the World Education Indicators. In the twenty OECD countries, which include the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Spain, Germany and France, every second young person currently begins studies at the tertiary level. In other words, 50% of the young people in these countries enroll in a University, Polytechnic or College. In Argentina, the Russian Federation and Chile, this proportion reaches 62, 61 and 54% percent respectively. Approximately one out of every three young persons enters a tertiary level institution in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Uruguay.

Fifteen years ago, or better yet, twenty-six years ago when I graduated, these statistics were not relevant, because at that time, my competition was in Saint Lucia and maybe, just maybe, the wider OECS and Caribbean Community. So, all I had to worry about, or so I thought anyway, were the handful of Saint Lucians who had received a tertiary level education. However, this is no longer the case. Your competition, my competition, our competition is now not just the OECS and CARICOM, it is the wider global marketplace.

When you offer your skills in the market, you are competing with a global workplace. If I want to develop a web site for my business, I am not confined to sourcing my web designers from a Saint Lucian or a Caribbean

market. I can establish contact with a global workforce of web designers, email them my content, communicate with them via email, or now, thanks to Voice over IP technology, use inexpensive Skype or Vonage lines to speak with them, and I can get my website designed and published, with absolutely no input from a Saint Lucian workforce. Similarly, as I found out recently, I can publish a world class magazine in Saint Lucia or anywhere else for that matter, using content from professional writers based at points all over the world. That is the nature of the market in which you and I now live, and that is your competition. A large proportion of the workforce with which you are competing sends one out of every two of their young people to receive a tertiary education. In China and Brazil, the number of students in tertiary education institutions doubled between 1995 and 2003, while in Malaysia and Egypt, it tripled. We have made significant gains in Saint Lucia in recent years, but we still have some way to go.

We constantly hear of the Information Super Highway, which is supposed to be the great leveler. Many say that it is the medium through which all can compete equally – the proverbial level playing field. However, for the overwhelming majority of us in Saint Lucia and the OECS, this highway is a one-way street. We choose only to receive from it. To extend the highway analogy, all we do is buy the fast high technology cars that speed along the highway. We do not put any of our own high-tech cars on it for sale.

We have to use that Information Super Highway and our newly learned skills to create wealth and opportunity. You have the opportunity to market your skills, your abilities and your services to a global audience, without ever leaving Saint Lucia. Advances in technology now make it possible for

you to establish a company, give it a world-wide presence and expose it to a global audience over the World Wide Web, get yourself a foreign telephone number and foreign address to facilitate easier communication with your global clientele, and collaborate with colleagues and suppliers all over the world to offer a service to a market that is confined only by the boundaries of your imagination and creativity. More than any other generation, you have the capacity and the ability to be world class in what you do. You can choose to use the Information Super Highway either to download songs and to chat on Messenger, or you can put your own songs and books on it for sale and use its facilities to collaborate with others like you to create opportunities.

Be Inquisitive

My second Be Attitude follows on from the first, and that is to Be Inquisitive. Regrettably, our education system does not encourage us sufficiently to be inquisitive, to ask questions, to challenge what we see and hear. We are taught to learn what is presented to us, exactly in the manner that it is presented. But who is to say that what we are being taught is the absolute gospel or that it is the only answer or solution. The world is evolving, technology is changing the way in which we view things, and the analytical instruments at our disposal are becoming more accurate, more sophisticated and more user-friendly. Therefore we should use these facilities to learn and not just to be instructed.

I know some of your lecturers will cringe at what I am suggesting, but I want to encourage you to challenge the logic of what is being taught to you

and what you see around you. Although you are graduating today, your education has just started. Learning is a life-long experience and each segment of that experience provides you with building blocks to move on to the next segment. Your tertiary education should have armed you with the aptitude, discipline and analytical skills to continue the learning process whether or not you are in a formal education setting. But to gain the most from your learning experiences you have to be inquisitive. Instead of simply asking why, you should also ask why not?

Let me offer one example.

The next time you find yourself caught in a shower of rain, you should look carefully at the droplets and ask yourself why is it that rain drops are always spherical? In fact, how many of you actually know the shape of a raindrop? That shows you just how inquisitive or observant you are. Why do raindrops not form themselves into a triangle? When you can answer the question why is a raindrop not square or triangular, then you would have taught yourself about surface tension and the way in which surface molecules associate with each other in a manner that no lecturer or text book can. A thorough understanding of this process and continuous feeding of your inquisitive mind may take you on a path to a breakthrough in discovering a new method of delivering medicine to targeted cells in the human body, using carrier molecules that move more easily across membranes.

You must challenge what you see around you, for it is only in challenging that you will find the real answers. This is how we learned as young children, by asking questions, often to the annoyance of our parents and later

our teachers. Unfortunately, too often they responded by telling us that we were asking too many questions, but there is no such thing as asking too many questions. Curiosity is only harmful to cats in fairy tales. We should ask as many questions of ourselves, our parents, our teachers and our environment as we need in order to understand. In challenging what we see, we will understand better, and we may just find a new and better way of doing something.

Our country has produced two Nobel Laureates, and we have made that statement so often that I believe it has lost much of its significance. We say it almost with the same matter-of-factness that we claim to have two airports or two Pitons. However, Sir Arthur Lewis and the Honourable Derek Walcott showed Saint Lucia and the world that Saint Lucians are capable of being the best in the world. Why should it stop there? Why should we be content with having produced only two Nobel Laureates? Not meaning any disrespect to our Nobel Laureates, but what do they have that some of you do not? Why should you not be dreaming of being a Nobel Laureate in physics, chemistry, literature, medicine, physiology or economics? Why should you not aspire to be the most sought-after nurses, the most creative draftspersons, the best computer technicians, the preeminent electricians, the greatest midwives, the most productive agriculturists, the most successful managers, or the most courteous and efficient hospitality employees in the world? Why can't our Qualified Teachers go on to transform our education system into the best of its type in the Caribbean? If you think world class, act world class and constantly challenge what everybody else takes for granted, like Sir Arthur did in economics and Hon. Derek Walcott does in

his writing, you will be world class and able to compete with the best of what is out there.

Be Persistent

The third Be Attitude is an even simpler one, and that is to Be Persistent, do not give up. Too often we view our successes or lack thereof in very short term horizons. I am amazed at how often we throw our arms up in the air and abandon an assignment or a project because it is too hard. There is nothing wrong with failure. Allow me to use two very different examples to illustrate my point.

The first involves Thomas Alva Edison, the inventor of the incandescent light bulb. Back in the late 19th Century, scientists had been trying without success to invent an electric light bulb. People had been using candles and gaslights to light their homes, but the latter were very smoky. So Edison boldly announced that he would invent a safe, inexpensive electric light.

In pursuit of his goal, Edison performed one thousand, two hundred experiments, spending \$40,000 in the process, a fortune back then, to fulfill his ambition. He sent assistants to the jungles of the Amazon and the forests of Japan in search of the perfect filament material. After one explosive end to an experiment, it is said that one of his assistants chastised him for wasting all of his time and money in search of an impossible, risky dream. Edison responded that he had not failed for the 999th time, he had merely discovered 999 ways how not to make a light bulb. In 1879, Edison

succeeded using carbonized filaments from cotton thread, which in effect is ordinary cotton sewing thread that has been burned to an ash. The light bulb burned for two days. The invention of the electric light bulb took the greatest amount of time and required the most complicated set of experiments of the man who also invented the phonograph, the world's first power station, and the concept of film reels for motion picture cameras. The important lesson, however, is that Thomas Edison viewed failures and disasters as learning opportunities, and so should you.

My second example is simpler and more of an every-day occurrence to which you can relate. How many times have you watched a child learning to walk, a toddler? What is the common theme of any child learning to walk? The child tries and falls, often flat on its butt. However, the child gets up and tries again and again and again, every time but one with the same result. It falls. Do we ever say to the child that it should stop trying or that walking is too hard and that it should give up? Does the child stop trying? Did any one of us stop trying? No. We continued to pick ourselves up and we tried until we walked. So why is it when we grow older we do not carry that same determination and persistence with us in our everyday lives? Why do we want to give up after one or two hard falls? Somewhere in our socialization we have lost the drive and determination that compelled us to walk as toddlers, and we have to regain that attitude. Because something has not been done before or we have not done it does not mean that it is impossible.

Modern day society has fooled us into believing that there is such a thing as an overnight success. So, if we do not succeed after one or two tries, we

stop. I am sorry to have to debunk that myth for those of you who might hold it, but there is no such thing as an overnight success.

When we watch Brian Lara bat so effortlessly we do not always appreciate how hard Lara has had to work to get where he is. Those of us who play cricket want to bat like Lara every time we hold a bat in our hands. Brian Lara had to wait his turn patiently for three years after making his first class debut and could not get selected in the West Indies team until Viv Richards retired from international cricket.

Michael Jordan, who went on to become arguably the best basketball player of all time, played not second, but third fiddle while on the University of North Carolina basketball team, because there were two other players, James Worthy and Sam Perkins, who at that time were considered to be the stars of the team. Even our own Derek Walcott, who made his published debut as a writer at the age of 18 years, did not make his breakthrough until the age of 32 years with a collection of poems titled *In a Green Night*, and it took another thirty years of excellence and brilliance in Literature before he was recognized by the Nobel Foundation as the best in the world.

Eddie Cantor, an American entertainer who many people considered to be an overnight success, once said that it took him twenty years to become an overnight success. What looks like overnight success is almost always the result of years of disappointment, diligence, discipline, dedication, and determination.

Be Professional

My penultimate Be Attitude is to Be Professional. Where I sit as Head of the Public Service in Saint Lucia, having to interact with people from both the private and public sectors, this is one of the attitudes where I believe we need to invest significant time and effort.

Professionalism will be extremely important to you in whatever your chosen field or career. It will determine how people view you, how your colleagues interact with you, how effective you are at accomplishing your tasks, and how far you progress.

It is perhaps the most multi-faceted of all the attitudes that I speak of today. Being professional means being the best that you can be, never settling for okay or good enough. You should never complete a project knowing that you could have done more or that it could have been better. Whenever you complete and deliver an assignment or a project, you should present it knowing that there are no grammatical errors, no typographical mistakes, no half-baked analyses, no positions that you cannot defend, and no effort that you spared. Everything that you present as your output, your product, your work, should convey to the world the image of yourself with which you would be proud to be associated.

Being professional means always being prepared, always trying to bring out the best in the people with whom you work, being a good team player yet able to work efficiently on your own, being punctual, responding promptly

when written to, and displaying courtesy towards the people with whom you interact.

Jack Welsh, the former Chairman and Chief Executive of General Electric who guided that company to years of success in markets all around the world, against extremely stiff competition, identified three acid tests that he puts any new applicant through before considering them for a job. I must admit that I agree with his filters, and want to share them with you very briefly, because they are additional components of the package that you will need in order to be professional.

The first component is one of integrity. Simply put, this means always speaking the truth and always keeping your promises.

The second parameter is intelligence, and this is different to education. It is fed by a strong helping of the curiosity that I spoke of earlier, and it leads to you being the sort of well-rounded individual with the range of knowledge that is required to work with and lead other intelligent people in our sophisticated world.

The final test is maturity, and this has nothing to do with chronological age. A mature person can withstand pressure, handle stress and overcome setbacks. Also, when victories occur, mature people can enjoy their successes with joy and humility. Finally mature professionals respect the emotions of others, they feel confident and not arrogant, and they have a sense of humour, even about themselves.

These are the qualities that you will require to Be Professional in today's world.

Be Responsible

The final advice that I want to leave you with is that you must always Be Responsible. To paraphrase Luke 12:48: to whom much is given, much will be required.

You live in a world that is rapidly evolving; sometimes it seems at too quick a pace. Images and information fly all around us, in music, in books, in videos, and on the internet. Not all of this information is useful, some of it is counter-productive.

Popular culture has glorified the 'Gangsta' element. Today's cult heroes carry names like DMX, Snoop Dogg, Elephant Man, P. Diddy, G Unit, Foxy Brown and L'il Kim. 'Fiddy' Cent tells us to 'Get Rich or Die Trying', Ja Rule and Ashanti belong to a group that called itself Murder Inc., Elephant Man encourages us to do the "Gangster Rock", Ding Dong shows us how to do the 'Badman Forward Badman Pull Up', and Bounty Killer, the Warlord, a major spokesperson for one of the mobile service providers, tells us that 'a Killa is a Killa' and advises all 'to get out of town when them sight killer' or be prepared to feel pain from the '9 miller'.

Nowhere in there do any of the icons of the music world show us how to do the Student Slide, the Lecturer Lean, the Technician Twist, the Nurses Nod, the Manager Move, or the Graduate Groove. Rarely do they praise the

work of the teachers in our society or encourage the students to study hard and complete their education. The culture that we have now adopted ‘bigs’ up the bad man or the ‘gangsta’ way as the best way, sometimes the only way.

The choice is yours which path you decide to follow. You can go merrily along on a path that leads to quick and easy money, false values, promiscuity, irresponsibility, with a complete detachment from what is going on around you and in your society. This path may bring you wealth, it may cause you to gain immense popularity in certain circles, and it may even bring you pleasure. However, there is a distinct difference between pleasure and success. An old, somewhat graphic Danish proverb paraphrased says that “after pleasant scratching comes unpleasant burning”. I am not advocating a life of denial of the pleasures of life, absolutely not. I merely want to discourage you from enslaving and sacrificing your morality and your values to the pursuit of that pleasure.

I am hoping that instead you will Be Responsible and choose to follow a life where YOU decide who should be your role models. Remember, you have been blessed with the precious gift of an education – a tertiary education. This should empower you to be able to make the right choices, to determine your destiny.

It should arm you with the courage to reject the hollow destructive life of the drug dealer or the drug user. You should be able to understand that it is unacceptable to strike your partner, under any circumstances. You ought now to have the capacity to settle your differences with your neighbour or

your friend amicably and in a spirit of compromise, not in a fit of violent rage. Your exposure to higher learning should fortify you to make the appropriate decisions about relationships and sex so that you do not contract HIV/AIDS. Finally, your tertiary level education now qualifies you to be a mentor, an inspiration, a role model to help those younger and less fortunate than you to aspire to greatness, to pursue excellence.

The onus is on every single one of you to play an active and responsible role in the development of our society, our country.

Conclusion

You, the 2006 Graduating Class of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, have the opportunity and the potential to Be Great, to Be Excellent. Your horizons are limitless. You should go out and be the outstanding citizens of Saint Lucia. Let us demonstrate unequivocally that the country that produced two Nobel Laureates, the State that presided over the 58th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the island whose Pitons were designated a World Heritage Site, and the nation that next year will play host to a semi-final in the third largest sporting event in the world, is also capable of developing the best citizens and a very competitive and efficient human resource base.

I started my address with a reflection on the past and I am ending it with an outlook on the future, and it is perhaps fitting that I conclude with another quote from Thomas Jefferson who said “I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past”.

Graduands, the world is your oyster. Go forth and grow pearls.

I thank you.