

GRADUATION ADDRESS UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

**ST AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
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By

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Please permit me to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the Chancellor and the entire community of the University of the West Indies for conferring on me the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws, and for considering me worthy of receiving such a prestigious honour. It is an honour which will forever be regarded as my most cherished as it represents your assessment of whatever contribution I may have made as payment for the space I occupy in this world. However, today's ceremony is not about me or I make bold to say, not solely about those of us who received honorary degrees. It is about the large number of graduands who toiled over the last few years to be graduates of this fine institution of higher learning.

When I was invited by Professor Brereton to address this graduating class there was one caveat which propelled me into immediate acceptance of the invitation, and that was that the address should be no longer than ten minutes bearing in mind the graduands' tolerance level for long speeches and the size of the graduating class. I wish to assure all here present that I intend to adhere to the imposed caveat, and not be the subject of contempt proceedings with its attendant consequences.

Graduands, this is your day, a day to bask in the afterglow of success with the satisfaction of earning a degree which validates the years of study and sacrifices made in your unswerving quest for self-development and improvement. This, I am sure, was achieved by relentless commitment and steadfast dedication to the fulfilment of your

lifelong dreams. The years of study must have been beset with obstacles and disappointments which only your inner strength and the support of family and friends made possible. The certificate which you will receive testifies that you have satisfied the examiners in your chosen field of endeavour. You have earned the right to place letters after your name; you have every reason to be proud of yourselves. However, in the midst of the back-slapping and celebratory high fives, I pose the question – where do you go from here? What lies beyond this moment when the euphoria has subsided? Are you prepared to face the challenges which you will encounter in a world awash with persons holding similar qualifications competing for too few positions in vocations which you expect will open doors to prosperity? In a highly competitive working environment only the committed and motivated survive. There is no room for drones and sluggards. Your upward mobility will depend in large measure on your capacity for hard work with dedication to duty being the vehicle which will propel you to the finishing line way ahead of others. Let excellence be the mantra which you repeat and concentrate on at all times. Never be satisfied with being just better than your colleagues or breaking even. You must be the best; there is no place in this world for mediocrity. Unfortunately too many are just content to accept jobs with attractive salaries, but with no prospects for further intellectual development. The qualification you earned today should be just a stepping stone for further personal career advancement. Regard it as the beginning of your achievements, and not the end.

However, in climbing up the ladder of self-improvement, be mindful that you do not sacrifice such time-honoured virtues as honesty and integrity on the altar of speedy acquisition of wealth and self-gratification with the end justifying the means. We live in a world which is moving at a frenetic pace driven by technology which changes so rapidly that what is novel today may be passé tomorrow. There is an overpowering urgency in every aspect of life which sometimes results in our losing focus on the core values which were inculcated in us and the perspective of life which we inherited. We tend to cut corners in the quest for quick financial gain. Suddenly we find that what was morally wrong yesterday is regarded and accepted as being right today. Our value system has gone awry with resultant confusion in the minds particularly of the young in

our society. They find themselves at odds with traditional values and present-day behavioural norms. It often requires great strength of character and firm belief in the creed by which your life is governed to withstand the pressure exerted by some of your peers to take the easy path to self-aggrandisement.

In whatever situation you may find yourselves it will be a learning experience. The course of study upon which you embarked during the years spent within the hallowed walls of this university will, with the benefit of hindsight, seem like child's play when compared with the lessons you will inevitably learn in the university of life. Be sure that you are as well prepared for this course of study as you were for your lecturers' tutorials. Life's lessons have no prepared texts; they are unpredictable and arise spontaneously requiring you to provide answers as situations confront you. As you traverse this turbulent course with all its vicissitudes and sometimes serendipitous moments, there will be successes and failures, happiness and despair. It will not always be smooth sailing; there will be temptations and diversions which may temporarily distract you, but the same grit and determination which you employed to great effect in arriving here today will ensure achievement of goals which you may have identified in your pursuit for self-advancement.

Before I release you from further boredom, just a few words of advice – be trail-blazers; be enterprising; open paths which no one has traversed before; conceptualise ideas which are innovative, and in doing so do not be deterred by the adverse criticism of others; persevere, and do not be daunted by setbacks; they are only bumps along the road which you have to surmount, and which are designed to test your faith and strengthen your resolve. Follow your dreams and make them a reality. Steadfastness, determination and belief in yourself will lead inevitably to the achievement of your lifelong ambitions.

Heartfelt congratulations, and may God bless you in all your future undertakings.