

Feature Address
The Honourable Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP,
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Annual Administrative Professionals Symposium
MIC-Institute of Technology
5A Century Drive, Trincity Business Park, Macoya, Trinidad & Tobago W.I

“Unlocking Your True Professional Potential... ‘Who stole my Springboard?’
Friday April 28, 2023, 9:00 am-11:30 am

Salutations

- *The Honourable Lisa Morris-Julian, Minister in the Ministry of Education and MP for D'Abadie/O'Meara*
- *Professor Emeritus Clément Imbert, Chairman, MIC-Institute of Technology;*
- *Mr. Keith Toby, Deputy Chairman, MIC-Institute of Technology;*
- *The Celebrated Administrative Professionals*
- *Mr. Luke Quamina, Guest Speaker, Co-Founder and Director of the Legacy School of Leadership,*
- *Mr. Randy Monilal, CEO, Ag., Institute of Technology*
- *The Board of Directors of Institute of Technology*
- *Members of Institute of Technology Executive and Management Team*
- *Specially invited Guests*
- *Members of the Media*
- *Ladies and gentlemen*

Good morning!

It was the invitation of Professor Clément Imbert, Chairman, of the MIC Institute of Technology and the information brief which followed subsequently, which compelled me to accept and bring, the feature address at today's event. I was both surprised and heartened to learn that the MIC Institute of Technology, has hosted events of this nature since 2008 and has continued a

progressive mandate, *“to provide networking opportunities for Administrative Professionals to meet some of this nation’s inspirational national builders and to share in their experiences and the importance of workplace ethics.”*

While I must confess that I am honoured to have been considered and to have been provided with this opportunity to engage with an audience of professionals outside of my familiar space and setting, I had my personal reasons for wanting to associate with this symposium in honour of Administrative Professionals.

I vividly recall when the major role for women in organisations was that of a secretary and although that functionary was pivotal to the efficient functioning of the “boss”, the secretary was given no more recognition than that of a dispensable accessory, although usually she came into the office if not first but, certainly prior to the appearance of her superior, ensuring that all was not only in place and but nuanced for the personal comfort of her superior’s day. I also recall as if it were yesterday, the first time I perceived with pride the work of a secretary- it was back in the day when there was an organisation called the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and a very close family friend in the person of Barbara Carter won the First National Secretary of the Year Award.

As you must be aware, on April 26, 2023, two days ago, we joined with many agencies across the world to celebrate Administrative Professionals while in some other jurisdictions a week-long of observances occurred or is occurring. By way of history, it was only 72 years ago, that is to say within the lifetime of many of your parents, The International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP) formerly the National Secretaries Association, launched National Secretaries Week and I assume that its very name is indicative of the limited range of administrative functions which were then performed in business organisations.

But as world economies developed and businesses mushroomed, concomitantly, the scope of administrative functions within organisations expanded, which eventually resulted in a name

change from Secretaries Week to Administrative Professionals Week in 2000, to reflect the reality of the myriad administrative supporting functionaries within organisations and with the objective, of honouring and promoting the contributions, these professionals make to their companies and organisations.

As I pondered who would be categorised as an Administrative Professional, I turned to the very creators, The International Association of Administrative Professionals, which defines *“administrative professionals as individuals who are responsible for administrative tasks and coordinate information in order to support an office environment and who are dedicated to furthering their growth in their chosen profession.”*

Administrative workers/professionals, as you are aware, are the syllogistical links, who ensure that businesses, agencies and organisations, meet their objectives. Whether you are the executive assistants, the administrators, the secretaries, the business operators, the receptionists or the accounts collectors, you all play a vital role. In fact, I learnt from my research in preparation for this event that there are *“close to 100”* genres of jobs that fall under the rubric of administrative professionals.

Now believe it or not, in some quarters, questions are raised regarding the necessity and/or justification for celebrating our Administrative Professionals. Some are of the view that to single you out for special commendation may cause divisiveness within the organisation. In response to that view, others expound that your recognition lends to cohesion.

Notably, various sociologists inform us that recognition has a positive impact of both a normative and a psychological dimension, on the basis that if one recognises another person’s contributions, that recognition leads to positive reinforcement and the positive attitude often engenders productivity and positive traits in that other’s work attitude. Those sociologists further opine that those who fail to experience adequate recognition, i.e., those who are depicted by

their peers or the society as lesser, will find it much harder to embrace themselves and see the fruits of their labour (whether products or projects) as valuable.

Although I do not have any qualifications in the field of sociology, the view of those sociologists find favour with me and therefore, having the benefit of their expert views, I support the view that recognising the works of the professionals, is indeed commendable, as we do not often enough say to ourselves and to our colleagues, *“good job”, or “you have done well” “we appreciate you”; “we value you!”*

But while the national community and international business world have accepted that it is mandatory that they set aside a designated time – that is the last week in April of every year- in the hurly burly business matrix, to celebrate the importance of your functions to an effective organisation, as professionals, you in turn, need to continuously evaluate whether on the individual level, you have earned that commendation or whether you are just detached or happy-go-lucky, making up numbers in the organisation, doing a *“wuk”*-(if you excuse my colloquialism but somethings are better appreciated in dialect!) and if you may be considered to be one of those hapless professionals then it begs the question, which is asked by this year’s theme.

“Who stole my Springboard?”

Contemplating on your theme though, I first asked myself why springboard?

My daughters while growing up were competitive swimmers, therefore I am well familiar with a Springboard, so I thought *“ahh! but that’s a bit heavy and cumbersome to steal and additionally it is affixed to the ground”*. Then I remembered that very often in these times, the spectacular news of occurrences orchestrated by man in pursuit of greed may lead one to conclude even if only fleetingly *“that it is not only with God all things are possible!”*. I quickly erased my scepticism about the stealing of a springboard and conceded, I could see a springboard being stolen even if purely for mischief!

But on a more serious note, in exploring your theme, the metaphoric elements in it could not be ignored. Defining the word, “*springboard*”, the Oxford Dictionary, tells us that it is a “*strong, flexible board from which someone may jump in order to gain added impetus when performing a dive or a gymnastic movement*” and Collins, in similar terms, tells us that a “*springboard is something that supplies the impetus or conditions for a beginning, change, or progress; and can be a point of departure*”. Those definitions certainly debunked my original characterisation of it being purely an inelegant plank supported by a fulcrum!

With these definitions came the synonyms, impetus, momentum, movement, motivation, change, all of which are words, associated with advancement, progress and success both on a personal and organisational level.

Looking again at the analogy with the Springboard, we must admit that while we may not be recognised professional swimmers or divers, in the likes of our national sport personalities George Bovell (III) the third or Dillon Carter or Melissa Nanan, we are often forced to navigate the waters of life and dive into the deep end to seize an opportunity or to stave off the negative impacts of a threat or challenge. I dare say in the currents of life, we may all have already shown how effective our springboards have been. But as effective as our springboards have proven in the past, providing us with the agility, or the impetus to perform those varied dives in life, be it, a Forward Dive, Backward Dive, Reverse Dive, Inward Dive, Twisting Dive and Armstand Dive, we must appreciate that like the professional divers and swimmers we have to be and remain highly motivated, always well trained and we must always be prepared. Taken from another angle, being stagnant in life can lead to unproductivity, demotivation, loss of fitness (whether physical or for purpose) and redundancy.

I think, too often, it is easy for us to escape our responsibility for realising our potential by asking the question “*who stole my Springboard*” while robbing ourselves of the precious little time we have on this planet seeking out and identifying all manner of villains- our bosses, our supervisors

as the culprits- without recognising that just like the algorithms, which, once they understand our psyche, will feed us with tons of information to support any view (misguided or otherwise) which we may hold, so too, the scheming part of our minds has the ability to provide all the justifications and scenarios to support us in the belief that someone stole our springboard.

- **I make the clarion call to you today to debunk that notion and to accept that NO ONE CAN STEAL YOUR SPRINGBOARD because YOU ARE SAFEGUARDING IT JEALOUSLY!**
- **YOU may have mislaid it, YOU may have misplaced it, BUT YOU VOW TODAY TO RECLAIM IT!**

Now I know some of you may be thinking:

- **Is she for real?!!!**
- **Or borrowing from the words of a Caribbean Leader at last week's Crime Symposium "Is she living on Mars?"**
- **She must be naïve!!!!**
- **She hasn't worked in my organisation with those vampire-like bosses who have sucked from me all my enthusiasm and zeal with their unjust actions, like:**
 - Denying deserved promotions
 - Not assigning good talent to a desirable, highly visible project for which the individual applied
 - cancelling weekly meetings designed for staff development,
 - Engaging in, inequitable salary increases,
 - Engaging in malicious gossip,
 - Not allowing me to share with co-workers and managers the credit for projects successfully executed, or
 - Wrongful criticism or chastisement for the errors of others...just to name a few.

Admittedly all of the above and occurrences of such a nature may and can lead to lower organisational commitment and engagement. According to the Harvard Business Review in the 2019 article **The Value of Belonging at Work** :

“If workers feel like they belong, companies reap substantial bottom-line benefits. High belonging was linked to a whopping 56% increase in job performance, a 50% drop in turnover risk, and a 75% reduction in sick days. For a 10,000-person company, this would result in annual savings of more than \$52M. Just imagine, what success may exist to smaller organisations.”

In another, Harvard Business Review article 2022, the viewpoint blamed **“Quiet Quitting to Bad Bosses, Not Bad Employees”**. The authors outlined that:

“in their survey, the least effective managers have three to four times as many people who fall in the “quiet quitting” category compared to the most effective leaders. These managers had 14% of their direct reports quietly quitting, and only 20% were willing to give extra effort. But those who were rated the highest at balancing results with relationships saw 62% of their direct reports willing to give extra effort, while only 3% were quietly quitting”.

Those details certainly confirm that we must foster an organisational culture of treating employees and co-workers in a more conscionable manner. There is no denying that leaders who are skilled at motivating their staff have higher employee retention, see more success in their businesses, and have teams that believe in their vision. But that is at the organisational level.

Again I ask what about my personal springboard?...Don’t I owe it to myself to realise my personal potential- my personal success?

To the dive and swim coaches, their personal success may mean medals won by their charges at meets, to others it may mean placing in the top 10, locally, regionally or internationally...by all means it may mean recognition.

But I ask again how do I define my personal success?

The renown, American educator and adviser to various presidents of the United States of America Booker T. Washington (1845-1915) defined the barometer of personal success in the following words:

“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he or she has overcome”

The prolific author, H.G. Wells, asserted that riches, reputation and power are by no means indicators of success but that the ratio between what we might become and what we have become is the only accurate indicator of success.

Success, in other words, results from realising our potential.

It is the Divine who gave us that higher gift in the form of our potential and what we do with that potential is the demonstration of our gratitude.

For the Christians I recall *the Parable of the Talents Matthew 25 verses 14:30*

For the Hindus I recommend the verse of Chandogya Upaishad which reads

“As one not knowing that a golden treasure lies buried under his feet, may walk over it again, yet never find it”.

For the Moslems/Muslims I commend the teaching, that Allah has given us all enlightenment, some more than others, but those with greater enlightenment are to use it for the achievement of greater discernment for the betterment of all.

The award-winning scholar, teacher, and author, G. Richard Shell of the Wharton School, of the University of Pennsylvania, notes that:

“success begins with self-awareness; it progresses through excellence in practice and demands a lifelong commitment to the highest of integrity”.

So just like the swimmer, the diver or the gymnast who must ardently practice and use their physical springboard to advance their success, we too, as professionals, have to not only use but safeguard our respective springboards in the realisation of our potential-this may just be the key to our success.

Whether the springboard is used by a swimmer or a gymnast in their respective arena they hone perfect their art or skill of their metaphysical springboard with virtues which are equally applicable to us:

- **Discipline:** To come to work every working day and give a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay;
- **Toughness:** to work through the injuries of ego; to get up when you fall short; analyse the cause of your deficiency and move on or in the words of **Denzel Washington in the Commencement Speech at University of Pennsylvania** that when **you fall, you fall forward.**
- **Balance-** so we have work life balance and rewrite the lyrics of work hard play harder with work hard play hard;
- **Determination-** to solve problems, to rise above the office politics, continuous training and upskilling-to adept and embrace new technologies, to set and achieve goals that are in tandem with the organisation’s goals;
- **Consistency-** giving of our best each and every day;
- **Respect-** for our superiors, our peers, our office/organisational culture and for oneself;
- **Dedication-**to our professional development and spiritual development- whether through prayer or meditation. Oh yes sometimes we need prayer, mediation, deep breathing to get us over some of the scenarios that we have to deal with and of course

the practice of introspection- to honestly evaluate our past actions with the aim of taking ownership of what we could have done better or differently;

- **Teamwork-** realising that we are part of a team, support your team in the achievement of its goals; And
- **Leadership:** Demonstrate quality leadership and be a mentor at whatever level you are in your organisation.

In my view those are the component parts of our individual springboards and if we stand back and view where those component parts reside, they reside within each of us-**they are our possessions and are under our exclusive control**. So if your springboard is missing, lost or misplaced then you have to look within, and not outside at who stole it, but rather ask oneself, where, when and how did I misplace it?

And in closing, I remind us all of two of the four keys to Success identified by the author of the book **Springboard: Launching Your Personal Search for Success (2013)**, that *“Defining success for yourself often involves trial and error”* and *“Success is not a destination but more so a journey with its own or personalised metrics.”*

So I conclude that in Unlocking your Potential, no one stole your springboard. If you are not on it you have just left it in the locker room, Go RETRIEVE IT!

HAPPY ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS WEEK!