



Feature Address by:

**THE HON. CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN**  
Minister of Public Administration  
Member of Parliament for San Fernando West

**THE WAY FORWARD:  
The Caribbean  
Leadership Centre  
for Excellence**

**THIRD REGIONAL LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM  
OF THE CARIBBEAN LEADERSHIP PROJECT**  
Hyatt Regency, Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.  
Friday 05 December, 2014 | 8.00 a.m.

## SALUTATIONS [ALL PROTOCOLS OBSERVED]

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen...

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*“Nearly everything you do is of no importance, but it is important that you do it...”*

That quote comes from Mahatma Gandhi, the pre-eminent leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India; a man whose stance on non-violent civil disobedience led India to independence, and inspired movements for civil rights and freedoms across the world.

Like many of us, Gandhi had a problem with procrastination. He learnt to discipline himself to take the first step in faith and perform the task anyway. He was aware that not all the actions he

would take in his lifetime would seem important, but he knew they would have important results later on.

Like Gandhi, what we are doing with the **CARIBBEAN LEADERSHIP PROJECT** and the **CARIBBEAN CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE**, is taking a major step into transforming our public service entities across the region, by creating a new paradigm of leadership and a new brand of leader to helm the public service of the 21<sup>st</sup> century...

If someone asked me what I think of Caribbean Leadership, I would argue that at critical times in our respective histories, we have raised up leaders in all spheres of activity who played their part in advancing our societies. There is no question as to the soundness of Caribbean scholarship and the intelligentsia behind it. Throughout the last century, time and again, men and women of integrity,

intelligence and commitment stepped up to the leadership plate and led our march towards progress. Whether in academia, politics, sports, the arts or the public service – these notable Caribbean personalities seized the day and acted; and their very lives changed the world at that time.

We have entered a new era of Caribbean Leadership, a time when the focus no longer is on the leader's charismatic personality – although a little charisma still goes a long way. **The leader of today is a Facilitator:** someone who creates an enabling environment for the knowledgeable, experienced and talented people – even geniuses – in his or her team, allowing them to innovate in ways that redound to the benefit of an entire organization, or even an entire country. We continue to invest in our people's education and ensure they are well certified and matriculated. More of these people are

entering the public service, with their skills and experience, their higher level training and qualifications, as well as their access to and savviness with cutting edge technologies like ICTs. These new types of professionals need a different type of leader, one who can facilitate the synergies inherent in such a potent mix.

**I believe we must create and develop a new Caribbean Leadership Paradigm and Model** that takes us out of the old practice of centralization and stultification; away from insularity and exclusivity, and the old boys' network. We need – we absolutely must work together – to innovate and design a model which is a macro version of the paperless office and boundary-free building. It is an edifice that spans all the frontiers, from real time to virtual reality, and while bringing our people together, does

not intrude on their private space. It is one that is inclusive and open; transparent and participatory.

On that note, as I welcome all the delegates I now see before me to today's deliberations and discussions, it would be remiss of me if I failed to acknowledge **those delegates who are joining us online**, today. A warm welcome to you! Your virtual presence with us today is a clear indication that our commitment to this new paradigm is sure and strong. I look forward with interest, Delegates, as to what your combined inputs and contributions will be, and more importantly what will emerge at the end of this truly collaborative process.

In Georg Hegel's **THE PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT**, an idealized vision of the role and importance of the public servant is presented; but perhaps it is an ideal towards which we can strive, even today. He argues that public servants must be

educated in such a way that they see their jobs as **genuine service to the public**; they must keep in mind the interests of the whole society. Indeed, public servants are seen as “the glue” that bonds together a divided society, as well as being the gatekeepers of the national treasury or public purse. Who else but the public servant balances the interests of disparate classes and differing ethnicities with the universal services they dispense to citizens at large? Both the rich and poor citizen alike is served by you. It is within the public service that needs from all quarters of society coalesce and are met. I know that I am preaching to the choir when I say, that any positive change in the way you public service leaders and senior administrators conduct yourselves and dispense your professional services, can have more than a ripple effect across your organisations, and indeed, the whole society. This is

how we public service leaders are the true keepers of democracy. We are the most powerful force for change in this, and any society.

Once upon a time, it was necessary to build multiple levels of bureaucracy to ensure proper checks and balances and accountability; not so today. Our mission — not impossible! — is to erase the painful memory of public service that has failed to deliver in so many ways, because it has been weighted down, straight jacketed and tightly cocooned in the bureaucratic red tape it has continued to generate since the days of colonial rule. We have taken the first step by embracing this new paradigm being created at the Caribbean Centre for Leadership Excellence, which actively makes use of the new ICTs that work 24/7, thereby allowing you to defy geographical, historical and traditional barriers to progress.



Our very presence here today – virtually and in the flesh – is creating that **enabling environment** required for our national governments and regional institutions to exercise and develop leadership through the strengthening and improving of policies, procedures and governance systems in the Caribbean public sector.

In the midst of my optimism, I am aware of counter-arguments that will come from the cynics among us. Regional projects have a certain history of promising much and delivering little. Our groupings with their fancy acronyms remain little more than talk-shops; they fail to act and implement. I say, not anymore! That all changes with the Caribbean Centre for Leadership Excellence!

Why? Because we understand that you don't need to build a physical building in a specific country location to house its varied elements. As I indicated

earlier, and as we demonstrate today, it is a concept that links public service leaders and would-be or potential leaders in real time and virtual reality simultaneously. In this Caribbean Leadership Project, we have connected and are connecting various essential functions in different spaces, some of which exist in cyberspace and are within reach only through the information superhighway. We must continue to push beyond the limits of the tools currently at our disposal, which make this a reality.

There is a bit of the chicken-and-egg conundrum in the make-up of our societies. On the one hand, we can ask: to what extent do existing institutions and frameworks support public sector leadership and leadership development? On the other hand, we must try to determine to what extent public sector leaders and institutions support existing institutions and frameworks.

Whether the vehicle used is the Caribbean Centre for Leadership Excellence or CARICOM, we must start from the same place. This Caribbean Centre for Leadership we are creating must build upon the positive foundations laid by other Caribbean institutions of the past. **We cannot run away from certain realities:** we are small and vulnerable countries with scarce resources. In our desire to ensure the sustainable development of our respective societies, we have engaged in the duplication of organisations and structures, rather than coming together and exploring the power that resides in a team approach. Indeed, **there is no need for us to reinvent the wheel.** We should be tapping into the existing institutions which can help us achieve our goal even as we develop new ones to cement it.

There are many leadership training institutions to help along the way. For instance, the Jamaican experience comes to mind. These types of institutions help us develop the synergy required to cross the divide between the public and private sectors. We may not wish to admit it, but public sector transformation won't happen without some form of partnership with the private sector. Both of these distinct entities must come together, creating "centres of excellence" and moving in the same direction, to achieve the goal of national development; and in the Caribbean context, sustainable development of our region. Indeed, in my own Ministry, we have adopted this approach in our public sector transformation initiatives, most notably **the Independent Advisory Panel for our Diamond Standard Certification Programme.**

I now place before you, **the First of Four Challenges** we must tackle in earnest today... **How do we engage and partner with the private sector for public sector transformation?** We must define roles for private sector leaders and organisations to play in the Caribbean Centre for Leadership Excellence. It is the only way to develop the synergistic relationships required to evolve the new brand of Caribbean Leader. In fact, this is the way to develop Caribbean leadership overall, whether it resides in the public or private sector.

We in the public sector must be cognisant at all times that we cannot afford to remain aloof and apart from our clients and customers – the stakeholders and citizens of our respective territories. This is where **Challenge #2** comes in. We must **consider using the considerable technological tools at our disposal to engender**

**greater transparency in our operations**, creating an effective two-way dialogue with our stakeholders and citizens. We are beginning to demand that the public officers in the lower ranks of the Service adopt a citizen-centric, open and transparent approach to dealing with the citizenry. As permanent secretaries, CEOs and senior administrators, should we not lead by example and mirror that kind of behavior ourselves? What clearer demonstration of our commitment to these ideals, by spearheading efforts to create a space that facilitates the crucial dialogue required on what should be best practices in the Service moving forward. Let us innovate by opening up an electronic forum in which citizens from all over the region can participate, thereby allowing us to obtain critical feedback on the work of the Centre.

In this respect, Trinidad and Tobago has embraced the challenge, and now is among several

countries from this hemisphere that have joined the Open Government Forum. Only recently we created a two-year National Open Government Action Plan.

We say we want to be citizen-centric, open governments and public service bodies in the region, why not create that electronic, collaborative forum for this Caribbean Centre for Leadership Excellence that would allow citizens to give us that type of feedback? And not only citizens, but all types of stakeholders... This way, the Centre for Leadership would be open to the public and open for feedback and as we move forward with our programmes.

Recently, one of the fastest growing specialist fields in HR has been the management of professionals. They are different from typists or messengers and must be treated differently. In the entire region we hear stories of leaders who have no time or respect for the next generation.

*“They treat we like servants, you know...”*

(in true public service style!) is what I have been told by some young people about their bosses.

*“They don’t listen...”*

is like an echo that resounds along the corridors of the public service. We talk succession planning as an abstract, without really thinking seriously about our successors. Right now, the other stakeholders, including young professionals whom we are supposed to be grooming for leadership, don’t have access to and don’t get their share of time and training. Is there space in this Caribbean Centre for Leadership Excellence for young people to participate?

Therefore, **my Third Challenge to you today is once more, to lead by example.** At MPA, we have defined who the new public officer is:



*A qualified individual who is technology-savvy; quite empowered and not afraid to take the initiative and innovate in order to deliver quality services to citizens in a timely fashion; and most importantly, someone who embodies the very highest values of integrity, honesty and professionalism.*

In fact, our competency based framework will focus more on how we assess these values in these individuals, and how they develop from one level to the other as they move up the public service, where these value systems are concerned. All our citizens want to know is that we have **public officers who are value-driven and principle-centred.**

As the people leading this new force for change, should we not embody the same? We too, must be conversant, even fluent, in the latest ICTs, improving our flexibility, creativity and innovativeness in

decision-making. As we empower our junior officers to embrace the new paradigm, should we not also ensure we are empowered as well? No longer can we be risk averse.

Those of you who served in the last cohort would remember how passionate I was about the “risk averse” issue. I know that is not typical of public officers in our system. You are afraid that if you take a risk, and allow your juniors to take that risk, you might hear your name calling in Parliament, right? Yes! We know that!

But how can we as leaders show that we have the attributes of the new public officer that we are demanding of our officers in the lower ranks? Just think how encouraging it would be to the young people entering the Service to see their leaders working towards getting the new skills required to take the Service through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Indeed, we speak of flexi time, more professional employees, working from home... But how do you manage employees who live and work in cyberspace? How to deal with young professionals, looking to us for guidance, whom you cannot see, touch or deal with face-to-face? This requires much thought about which future mechanisms could help reach across space and time. I wonder if there is some way in the operational workings of this Caribbean Leadership Centre for us to exhibit these values and these new types of behaviours, and these new modes of operation.

Just remember, **these young professionals are potential leaders of the future.** To underscore my point, allow me to share with you what I have heard from my own leaders in the public service. In fact, how many of you leaders right here have shared with us what you remember your leaders did

when you were juniors? How many of you realise that you are influencing your juniors with your leadership? There is a legacy that is passing down. Do you realise in all of this that an impression was made on you by those leaders? Can you imagine that as a result of what you are doing today, the young leaders in waiting are going to mirror you in the future? Do you realise that today you are molding those future leaders? This is why I say I am looking for a different approach for this Centre of Excellence, where we could actually think about the future – twenty and thirty years ahead! That by what we do today we are making history and are making that impression on those young minds through this Centre...

Someone once observed that the Caribbean has never lacked leaders; instead, what we seemed to lack was leadership. We have had Governors and

Governments, but not enough Governance. We've had institutions without institutional memories, needing those unbroken connections that lead inexorably to common ways of doing things across the region.

Therefore, let's move on to **Challenge #4 and the issue of Principle-Centred Leadership**. We in the public service have always been called and held to a higher standard. This is even more evident today as our economies struggle to find their place in this world; tiny sardines swimming in a tank full of sharks. We are calling on our junior officers to espouse and uphold certain values such as **Integrity, Transparency and Professionalism**, as they dispatch their duties. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, we wish to be rid of all the red tape, and checks and balances. How, therefore, are we going to protect the national purse, without all

those checks and balances? We can do it only if we ensure that the value system is intact; that there is **Honesty, Integrity, Fairness and Transparency.**

It is imperative that we do the same with this public sector. Every action we take in our positions must meet the deepest scrutiny. This means the development of new types of behaviours for us all and our junior officers; our leading with new value systems. How do we make this happen; engender these new types of behaviors? Do we create new systems and mechanisms that leave us no other pathway?

In today's world, the modern, principle-centred leader must develop leadership throughout the organization. Indeed, he or she is leading in an environment full of professionals working in teams and discovering the synergies inherent in diverse viewpoints and experiences. We know now that this

is the best way to generate and encourage innovation.

At this juncture, I must pose a few questions. What can we do in this particular Centre to demonstrate leadership? As you develop leadership for this Leadership Centre, will you develop leadership throughout the organisation? Will you be able to demonstrate principle-centred leadership yourselves, as Stephen Covey has always challenged us to do? I am asking you today, from this concept and as you develop this model, to ensure that it is steeped in this value system, and that you **focus on those competencies that would generate those behaviours.**

Allow me to emphasize this point even more. I knew nothing about human resource management before becoming Minister of Public Administration. When I assumed the post, I told my PS and DPS:

“Look, I am an engineer. I have served in the energy sector all my life. I mean, I was the Minister of Energy before coming into this area. I know I have a lot to learn...”

But one thing which really has impacted on me is **how many professionals we do have, and how many of them are willing to change the Service.** Do not think that your people are not willing. Do not think that your officers are not ready for this change; they are! They are very ready, and this is why we have to deliver. What I have noted, however, even from our citizens and stakeholders, is that what they wanted is not somebody who is this great professional with all these technical skills. The citizen only wanted to know that they were dealing with a public officer who was being **honest and fair** with them. They wanted to know that at the end of the day, **they could trust their public officers,** and



that those officers were committed to giving the citizens the very best service.

So, leaders of today, what are you going to do with this Centre so we can demonstrate this? You know, one of the things we always must do is lead by example, and I think this Centre of Excellence must lead by example.

**As I close, I want to deal with the perception that regional projects get stuck in pathways that run in circles, with little or no results.**

Every bit of sand and rock is a sovereign state that jealously clings to its independence in a world where no man — or no island for that matter — is, or can afford to be, an island in the strictest sense of the word; one that is entire and apart. Today is the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, 2014. It is even more relevant as we go into 2015!

Is there a time in the future when we can reverse that old formula highlighted by the late Dr. Eric Williams (the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago), used to describe the breakup of the Federation? When Jamaica held a referendum and decided to “part company” with the other countries of the region, Dr. Williams said:

*“One from ten leaves naught...”*

I believe we can turn this around. As we explore our synergies, we can say instead, one multiplied by ten makes twenty, or even thirty! We must believe in ourselves; we must believe we can build something anyway — and that’s why I go back to Gandhi — even if people leave the enterprise. In addition, the formula *“One from ten leaves naught...”* will be a self-fulfilling prophecy if we fail to seize the moment and **reverse old trends and deliver**, as we

come together for the sake of all our benefits and vested interests.

Therefore, I make a special appeal to each of you; you who are making history today. **Ensure that this Centre for Caribbean Leadership Excellence does not become the traditional type of regional project in which the perception is that all it would be is another talk-shop.** I am of the firm conviction that if we are able to step into this new paradigm for Caribbean leadership, we will change this perception... That **this Project** could change that perception... Through this Centre, and all that it implies, we would be working better and with the right type of leadership, exploring and fully exploiting all synergies among our countries.

Can this much vaunted Caribbean Centre For Leadership Excellence be **the centre** for regional synergy? Could this Caribbean Centre change the

perception of how regional projects operate, by the way it is operating, and the way it will — and I say it will — deliver results? In addition, can the 21<sup>st</sup> century Caribbean leader produced by this Centre help establish these new synergies and symbiotic relationships that are so critical to breaking us out of this mold of the old, traditional model of regional projects? To generate the results so urgently needed by the citizens of the region?

I am asking the question: **is it that the perception we have of some of these regional projects is because they did not have the right type of Caribbean leadership?** And, therefore, could your Caribbean Leadership Centre produce the new type of leader required to change that perception? And not only change the perception, but change the modus operandi of these regional

projects, so that they will deliver results to our citizens...

I believe the answer is a resounding **“YES!”** because of the new type of leaders we would be grooming and developing through this new vehicle. **I believe we would see success across the region, and the paradigm shift will occur.**

I am convinced.

I am confident we can do it!

I ask you: Are you?

I THANK YOU, Ladies and Gentlemen...

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