

SPEECH BY DON WEHBY
GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – GRACEKENNEDY LIMITED
UNITED STUDENT MOVEMENT (USM) INAUGURATION CEREMONY
NORTHERN CARIBBEAN UNIVERSITY
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2011 AT 2:00 P.M.

Dr. Daniel Fider, Dr. Beverly Cameron, Ms. Sally Porteous, Members of the Cabinet and the Parliamentary Opposition, Mr. Davy Haughton, current and former Executive members of the United Student Movement, Vice Presidents, Administrators, faculty and staff, specially invited guests from other tertiary campuses, members of the business community, ladies and gentlemen, I am very happy to be here today, truly inspired by the occasion you are celebrating, as I am very passionate about leadership. The inauguration of the United Student Movement of Northern Caribbean University shows me that there are young people who want to keep our country on the right track.

It is also a brave move, as I notice that there are very few young people in Jamaica these days who are willing to step up and be leaders, and champion causes that are worth fighting for. Many young people are leading, but in the wrong areas and in the wrong ways. NCU has proven over the years, that its contribution to leadership will always be a positive one. The formation of the United Student Movement is another move that reinforces this reputation. You are a shining example, and you should be very proud.

Today, we are celebrating the inauguration of the USM under the theme, “Servant Leaders, Conquering challenges...Securing success”. Some people hear the term ‘servant leader’, and think the two words cannot go together. How can someone who leads also be someone who serves? ‘Servant leadership’ is an interesting model developed by Robert Greenleaf. Although he developed it in the 1970s, it has implications for present day Jamaica. Under this model, the leader actually serves the people he or she leads. A servant leader offers inclusive vision; listens carefully to others; persuades through reason; and heals divisions while building community.

It is easy to identify a servant leader. In a room where others are fighting for attention, the servant leader is the one listening to someone others might consider unimportant. If there is a problem, servant leaders look for solutions that benefit everybody. When something goes wrong, servant leaders take the responsibility. When things go well, they **share** the credit. They know that they don't have all the answers, so they seek advice from others, especially those they lead. Servant leaders make employees know that they are woven into the very fabric of the organisation, and nothing can be achieved without them. By doing this, they help employees achieve and improve, becoming healthier and wiser, more autonomous, and more likely - when their time comes- to be servant leaders themselves.

And finally, servant leaders lead by example, working hard, so they can inspire others to do the same.

The model we are looking at also calls for visionary leadership. Often, new ideas and new ways of doing things sound ridiculous, and face serious resistance at first. But the leader who has vision never gives up in conveying his vision and getting staff to buy into that vision. Visionary leaders are 'real change leaders'. And that's what your organisation, the USM, needs to be.

Next year, Jamaica will be celebrating fifty years of Independence. That is a big milestone for us. A milestone is a time to look back, and a time to see how to approach the future. We can take some cues from some of our own people who lived their lives as true examples of leadership.

Marcus Garvey, our first national hero, was a servant leader. His teachings resonate not only here but across the four corners of the globe. Despite constant struggle, persecution and prosecution, Garvey pressed on in his fight for the rights of black people, inspiring the 'Back to Africa' movement, and the formation of the United Negro Improvement Association – the U N I A. He was selfless in his quest to improve the lot of others, in spite of what he was going through. The U N I A stands as a constant reminder of his self sacrifice, of his servant leadership.

Mary Seacole is another such example. Although long gone, she is still celebrated and acknowledged internationally for her bravery and medical skills. She was a woman who succeeded despite the racial prejudice of Victorian society. Imagine, in the 1850s, this Jamaican nurse was told that she couldn't be included in a party of nurses to travel to tend to the sick in the Crimean war. Well you know what happens when you tell a woman she can't do something! It only makes her more determined!

When she was turned down, she borrowed money to make the trip all by herself, and when she got there she worked hard, nursing many sick soldiers back to health. When the war ended, Seacole found herself poor, destitute, broke and stranded. But the service she rendered gained her many loyal helpers, and it was the same people she helped that came together and organised a benefit concert to raise funds to get her back home. Service leadership builds loyalty!

Martin Luther King wasn't born here, but his mission to uplift his race resonates with each and every one of us not only here at home but across the world. He put himself in harm's way, fighting for a cause that he knew could ultimately cause his death. But he continued nonetheless. In the end, he paid for servant leadership with his life.

I'd like to share with you some of the initiatives GraceKennedy is currently involved with in our effort to be good corporate leaders. We will celebrate our 90th Anniversary next year, and we wouldn't have been able to last this long without listening to our employees, and using their input in all we do. If our employees are unhappy, our business suffers. Our customers suffer. We cannot afford that, so at GraceKennedy we have a mantra of "Grace, we care". We help our staff in any way we can, especially with their education and the education of their children. Just a week ago, the GraceKennedy Foundation gave 27 bursaries to children of GraceKennedy employees, going to High School and University to assist parents with back to school expenses.

We wouldn't have been able to celebrate 90 years without contributing to communities. Our Grace and Staff Community Development Programme currently supports 400 children in their schooling, at the High School and Tertiary Levels. Greenleaf says that true leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others. We at GraceKennedy have the vision to know, that by helping others to better their situation through education, our actions benefit not just those individuals, but the nation as a whole.

We recognise the value of education as a nation builder. That's why we spend so much of our time and resources on education. You all need to recognise how privileged you are to be receiving a tertiary education. Use this privilege to become leaders, and do your part in making a positive contribution to the society in which you live.

There will be challenges faced by the United Students Movement as you seek to carry out your duties. The world changes every day as a result of new technological advancements. You will have to stay on top of these innovations and their implications on a micro and macro level. With the frequency of new innovations, this could be a job in itself, but it is one that you have to be willing to take on.

Some people would say that servant leaders are 'soft' and therefore ineffective because of the nurturing spirit he or she *should* have. What we need to realise is that the ability to be 'human' in one's leadership is an asset, not a disadvantage.

The ultimate challenge is how different this model is, and how uncommon, and even unpopular it may be, especially in our context. Servant leadership is a lesson in humility, and this is a lesson many of you will need to learn and adopt.

Leadership will call for tough decisions, but it is all 'par for the course'. No good leader ever made a change by doing things the same way over and over. Sometimes you will be required to step away from the pack, and challenge the status quo.

What kind of group will the USM be? Ask yourselves the question: will you listen carefully, empathise, and ensure that you have the input of those you represent when you put your arguments forward? If you do, then you will be equipped to take on and conquer any challenges, on your way to certain success.

I encourage you also to consider what the values of the USM will be, and live by those values while you serve and lead. At GraceKennedy we live by the values of honesty, integrity and trust. Those principles guide everything we do and every single decision we make. I want you to realise the power that is in your hands, as the voice of the students here. You have the awesome responsibility of accurately conveying the thoughts and feelings of thousands of students. It's not a responsibility you should take lightly.

Think strategically, build great teams, develop people. No man is an island. There is no “I” in TEAM. Together you will achieve so much more than any of you can do alone, so remember the value of teamwork in achieving your goals. Be bold, be un-biased. Be brave. Congratulations to you for stepping out, so as to allow an entire group to step ahead.

Let the words of servant leader, Marcus Garvey be your guide. “Be confident in your approach, and you would have won before you started. God and nature first made us what we are, and then out of our own genius we make ourselves what we want to be”.

Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today, best of luck to the USM and God Bless you all.