

**Acceptance Speech by Douglas Orane CD,  
Chairman & CEO, GraceKennedy Limited, on behalf of the honorees  
and words of exhortation to the graduating class at The University of  
the West Indies, November 8, 2008.**

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Chancellor  
Vice Chancellor & our other hosts of the University Administration and  
Faculty  
Chief Justice  
Your Excellencies and other members of the Diplomatic Corps  
Other distinguished special invitees  
Dame Karlene Davis  
Members of the Graduating Class, Friends all...

I take this opportunity, on behalf of my fellow honoree Dame Karlene Davis, to thank the Council and Senate of the University for conferring this honour on us. While we did not attend this university it is an institution which we hold in very high regard and we feel very privileged to be recognized in this way. No one can argue that the UWI is the single institution that has contributed most to the pace of regional development and integration since opening its doors to the first group of medical students in 1948.

On a more personal level I have very fond memories of the Mona campus. In the 1970s, after graduating from Glasgow University in Scotland, I returned to Jamaica where I spent many happy hours here on campus with my UWI friends, including my then girlfriend who lived on Taylor Hall. In fact I spent so much time here that for many years afterwards many people just assumed that I was a UWI graduate.

It is therefore a tremendous feeling for me to be able to participate in this ceremony and to address this gathering today.

Let me pause to express my deep gratitude to my wife Michéle, the rest of my family, all the people at GraceKennedy with whom I have had the privilege to work both currently and in the past, and my longstanding friends for their constant and consistent support which has buttressed me as I have charted my course through life.

I would now like to direct my remarks mainly to the graduating class, firstly to congratulate you on reaching this milestone in your career; and also to share briefly some of my own experiences which you might find useful as you chart your own career path.

As I reflect on what must be going through your minds this morning at this momentous watershed in your lives, I realise that your sense of accomplishment must be tempered by very real concerns about the future. Our society is beset by many challenges, among them ... rampant crime, which continues to create increasing fears and anxieties and which to date we have been unable to address with any degree of measurable success. Perhaps even of greater importance to those of you who are graduating is the developing global financial crisis and its implications for your ability to find a job, pay off your students loan, and enjoy a reasonable standard of living. My message to you today is that you are right to be concerned about these things but you must be careful not to buy into conventional thinking that says, "This is the way things are and there is nothing I can do about it."

If I were to reflect, not only on my own achievements, but that of Dame Karlene and all the other honorary graduands I would say the common

theme is that each of us has taken personal responsibility for the outcome of our lives. We have refused to cast ourselves in the role of victim and we have decided that, by our own positive thoughts, words and actions, we will seek to take control over our own future regardless of the environment in which we find ourselves. A dramatic example of the potency of this type of thinking is the rise of Senator Barack Obama to become the first African-American President of the United States. This way of thinking is the one common characteristic of all successful people, wherever they live in the world. The President Elect expressed this mindset in words which became the inspirational mantra of his campaign – “Yes, we can.” As graduates, you might well consider this as one of the themes to underpin your approach to life as you embark on your careers.

In that regard, each of us has to consider what are our objectives in life and how we will achieve them. In my own case I knew I wanted to be involved in business in some way and to be in an environment where I interacted very frequently with people. Then I patterned my career path around these objectives.

I frequently meet young people who are concerned about whether they will find employment because of the tens of thousands of others in the job market. I tell them, “Do not be perturbed. All you need is to find one job – the one for you.”

The way to approach it is to differentiate yourself so that anyone who is meeting you will say, “Wow, this is the kind of person with whom I’d like to

work.” In fact you can differentiate yourself from 95% of your competition by displaying an important set of attributes, namely:

- 1) Punctuality
- 2) A sense of civility displayed as courtesy and humility
- 3) Respect for other people
- 4) Willingness to be able to make yourself available to go the extra mile when situations require
- 5) Insatiable curiosity about the world around you.
- 6) A positive attitude no matter what adversities there may be.

Interestingly, these are not only the traits that make one successful in the job market, they are also the traits of the successful entrepreneur.

In addition to developing and nurturing these attributes, I would like to suggest two other habits that will serve you well throughout your career. These are networking, and giving back to your community.

In my late teens I made the discovery that one of the best ways for me to move ahead in life was to identify people whom I myself considered successful and who had the qualities I admired and then to pattern myself after them. This included getting to know them if at all possible and asking them how they managed to overcome specific obstacles along the way. In fact, many of them have become not only my mentors but also my personal friends. These areas of mentorship ranged from industry and commerce through to public speaking and martial arts to name just a few.

As a young undergraduate I learnt how very satisfying it is to give back to your community when I volunteered to do social work by working with a youth club in the Gorbals in Glasgow. At the time the Gorbals were the worst inner city slums in Europe. The experience was a seminal change for me because it awakened within me the love and joy of giving back to whatever community I live and work in, and experiencing the pleasure of guiding people to maximize their potential.

These are some of the lessons I learned early on. I have also found it is important to do what we truly love and what gives us a sense of joy rather than only for the sake of making money. Therefore I encourage each of you to look within yourself and identify what you truly enjoy doing and make it the centrepiece of your career.

I have discovered that there is such a thing as 'joyous work'. When you find your joyous work you don't notice time passing because you are so immersed in what you are doing that you lose yourself in it. I can only imagine that it is the same feeling a painter gets in producing a work of art, a carpenter from building a chair, or an accountant from balancing a set of books. In my case, I get that feeling from seeing a business develop and blossom in front of my eyes to the delight of its customers, whose needs have been met.

When you get into the job market you may find that opportunities present themselves in areas that may be quite different from what you have studied. Do not be dismayed. I studied Mechanical Engineering, but what I now do in life is very different. In that regard I remember one of my tutors

at university saying to me 'Douglas, the real reason you are here is not primarily to become an engineer but to learn how to think.' The more I reflect on that statement and the more I interact with university graduates the more I am convinced that the true and enduring benefit of a university education is that it equips us to think originally and independently.

What I remember so vividly returning to Jamaica as a young professional in 1970, was the tremendous sense of optimism of my generation. This was true, not just for my friends at UWI, but also those who had returned from studying in the United States and Canada. We were absolutely convinced that in twenty years, by 1990, Jamaica would be transformed into being a first world country. Obviously we have still not realized that goal, but as I speak to you today I remain convinced it is eminently achievable. My generation did not succeed but I believe that, in this new age of possibilities, your generation can succeed where we failed.

The future is in your hands and what an exciting time it is within which to live. The opportunities in this age are limited only by what we as individuals choose to accept as our limitations. Technology, and especially the internet, have opened up possibilities for collaboration that, as a young man, I could never have imagined. Within seconds, events in any small corner of the world can be viewed by millions without requiring facilitation from traditional media, or even the sanction of national governments. In the business arena companies can explore opportunities literally in all parts of the world, and the idea of networking has taken on a whole new meaning. I'm sure Dame Karlene will also attest to the significant

developments in her field made possible by technology, as has been the case in other areas of medical science.

Your generation has an advantage. Yours is the first to be born into the digital era, whereas the members of my generation are immigrants scrambling to learn a new language, a new way of communicating, very often from people like you in this graduating class. That's one of the reasons I joined Facebook online earlier this year!

And so your generation has a unique set of opportunities for creating your own jobs as well as laying the foundation of your own wealth creation by eventually starting your own businesses.

I believe that the tools are available to us in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean to raise our economic fortunes, but we need to believe as a nation and a region that we can do it. Our experiences in sports and entertainment prove that it is possible for us to unite around a vision of world class competitiveness. What we need is to find ways of extending this confidence and intensity to other areas of national development, such as industry, agriculture, tourism, education and our justice system, to name a few. This is the challenge to your generation.

Our vision must be one where we break down the barriers of mistrust which have grown between us as people and to create a harmonious society rather than one built on suspicion and manifesting consequently in violent behaviour. I have found it not only desirable in my own life but essential for me to be involved in my community to feel that I am a whole human being.

And I would posit that in order for you to create the ideal social space you want to live in, you must find a way to participate in the wider society whether through volunteering, outreach, caring for the very young or very old, and being involved in our social institutions ....including our political parties.

I believe there is a unique opportunity for Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean to turn over a new page... as we say 'wheel and come again', to recognize that we can do what we set our minds to. But first we must start by taking responsibility for ourselves, by individually becoming the change we would like to see.

I recognize that this is your big day, and the last thing you want is someone sounding like your parents giving you a lecture and I agree. At any rate, I have found from personal experience it is more effective to talk less and do more. Then the demonstration effect kicks in, where others will say, "If he did it, I can do it too."

Again, congratulations on your achievements. I know our region will be a better place because of your contribution. And in the months and years to come remember that anything that is worth having is worth fighting for. This is true for your career, your family, and your country. And yes...you can do it.

Thank you.