



ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY VERNON LORDEN SHAW, S.A.H.

President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

OPENING OF THE FIRST MEETING

OF THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE SIXTH PARLIAMENT

ON MONDAY, 23rd JUNE, 2003

Madam Speaker

I thank you for the invitation extended to Her Excellency to attend the formal opening of Parliament (First Meeting of the Fourth Session of the Sixth Parliament under the Commonwealth of Dominica Constitution Order 1978) and to me to address the House.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

It is clear to all who are willing to look, that in every form of activity in a free society, there must be leadership that is creatively conceived and voluntarily accepted by those it leads. New and enhanced powers of insight and capability for action are needed.

Every aspect of life demands guiding hands: government business, the professions. The need for leadership in all walks of life is greater today than ever before.

"The world needs credible and sustained leadership" states the Report of the Commission on Global Governance 1997. "It needs leadership that is proactive, not simply reactive, that is inspired, not simply functional, that looks to the longer term and future generations for whom the present is held in trust. It needs leaders made strong by vision, sustained by ethics, and revealed by political courage that looks beyond the next election."

"To a very particular degree today, the need for leadership is widely felt, and the sense of being bereft of it is the cause of uncertainty and instability. It contributes to a sense of drift and powerlessness. It is at the heart of the tendency everywhere to turn inwards. That is why we have attached so much importance to values, to the substance of leadership and the compulsions of an ethical basis for global governance. A neighbourhood without leadership is a neighbourhood endangered."

"Enlightened leadership calls for a clear vision of solidarity in the true interest of national well being."

Leadership means initiative – getting an operation off the ground, carrying it through in spite of discouragement, and wrapping it up. This demands a constellation of personality, qualification and motivation.

A leader must have vision. He acts well because he has a clear idea of the part he is going to play and the results he seeks. What marks a leader is individual craftsmanship, sensibility and insight; initiative and energy.

One cannot be a leader unless he bears up well under heavy responsibility. There are timid souls who will not take any commission except with others who might bear part of the blame for failure. At the other end of the scale are persons like Admiral Lord Nelson, who wrote to the Admiralty;

"I have consulted no man, therefore the whole blame of ignorance in forming my judgement must rest with me."

Dependability is another quality of a leader. Being dependable means accepting responsibility. The leader will take counsel from his people and his advisers but he will act on what his mind tells him is right.

To live in that responsible way requires a good stock of self-confidence. It demands that the leader shall have trained himself out of the fear of making mistakes. He must feel sufficiently secure to devote his thought to the well-being of his subordinates and the perfection of his job instead of constantly looking up the line to make sure that he is being approved.

There can be no substitute for integrity in a person seeking to be a leader. The words associated with integrity are: moral soundness, honesty, freedom from corrupting influence or practice. This involves more than simple abstention from crime. It includes adherence to ethical principles and soundness of moral character. Fairness and impartiality are especially needed in the character of a leader. He must speak the truth to those he leads and keep his promises to everyone regardless of status. He is never swayed by prejudice but in honour and honesty he is fair to all persons. One great leader who in his childhood was taught that he who ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord, prayed for godliness and integrity as his bodyguards.

"Humility" ... said President Museveni of Uganda.. "is one of the most important attributes necessary to become a good leader. When you observe leaders of all levels of society, throughout Africa and I suppose throughout the world, you find them overcome by power, greed and self-interest. Somehow, after they have attained the prominence and positions of trust, they forget the people, their poverty and need. They forget that they could become a great instrument to help their country, and instead they begin to live like little kings and dictators."

"Only with a humble spirit, one which recognizes that we who have been given opportunities greater [than most, that we] are in fact servants of God and the people rather than masters, will we be able to help our countries move from Third World status and lead the people to a new day... Please pray that God will give me the strength, wisdom and sense to be a humble servant."

The good leader is tolerant of other people's ideas and is not dogmatic about his own. He keeps in mind the necessity of yielding to everyone his rights.

Intolerance of other people's opinion is a mental ailment. Political, social and economic fanatics are to be found everywhere, pursuing their pet theories with extreme and uncritical zeal. They become a danger to society when they are accepted as leaders rather than as buffoons.

The man who would be a leader must pay the disciplinary cost involved. This does not mean that he must withdraw from the world but it does entail restraint, control and moderation wherever these are necessary to achieve the ends he seeks.

Besides doing well, what he has to do, the leader has initiative which is the ability to think and do new things. He is shooting at a moving target.

A leader must keep his imagination vividly alive so as to originate and start new trends. He must be an innovator; but he needs to do more. He must push plans through to successful execution, coping with the unexpected and the unpredictable, through originality and ingenuity applied with courage.

The difference between a good leader and a poor one may be merely that the poor leader does a thing at the wrong time, sometimes too early but more often too late. Where the leadership is poor, there is an absence of hope, which if prolonged will cause the organisation to become non-functioning.

The capable leader does not flounder around in confusion when he meets a problem, because he has learnt certain general procedures which enable him to face a crisis without panic.

Simplicity marks this process as it does all effective work in any field. Grasp the problem, whip it into organized shape at once; seek the information that is necessary to its solution; do what is necessary, according to the size and complexity of the problem, analyse its elements and then proceed to shape and test in your mind the various answers and plans.

To tackle problems in a masterly way the leader must see things whole as well as in separate parts. Unwise accent on some section is one of the most ruinous practices in Government or business leadership.

A leader in any activity will find it an advantage beyond price to have clear-cut policies written down. They keep his mind in consistent paths. When he has his policies well shaped, then he may move on with sureness to proper means and methods.

Policies and plans are more or less useless unless they are known to all who may be concerned with them. Let every one know where he stands and what is expected of him.

The leader has to have courage and fortitude to keep a clear eye on the competitive picture, and a steady hand on the organisational wheel, when the going is rugged and success is doubtful. Being licked is part of the game, if it is counted as useful training. A philosopher put it neatly when he said the most important thing in life is not to capitalize on our gains. Any fool can do that. The really important thing is to profit from our losses.

Being a leader has many compensations, but it is a hard job and often a lonely job. It is incorrect to think that a leader can always make the right decision if he is surrounded by a sufficient number of expert advisers. He must be able to distinguish and define the possible lines of action, among which he has responsibility of making a choice, realizing that he is in a position where action or abstention from action affects many people.

While strong leadership is beneficial when times are good, it is critical when times are bad.

Here are the comments of some prominent leaders as they define good leadership in troubled times.

"In my opinion, there are three key elements that are critical to leadership:

- 1. Setting a clear direction for your organization*
- 2. Aligning people to that direction*
- 3. Motivating people to take specific actions towards that direction.*

These three elements of leadership are critical regardless of the economic situation. However, during severely troubled times it is even more crucial that you positively motivate your organization. This can be accomplished by clearly communicating the direction that has been set and reiterating that this direction will remain a correct course of action despite difficult times. It is essential that all individuals understand, trust, and support the goals and direction of your organization.

Likewise, during troubled times a leader must acknowledge difficulties both inside and outside his organization.

While employees need to understand and be aligned to the direction of the company, they must also understand and embrace the difficulties the organization is facing. This will allow them to take the appropriate actions to confront and then overcome these difficulties.

Finally, it is essential to recognize the successes of individuals and the organization as a whole. Highlighting successes during difficult times can continue to motivate and convey to people that they work for a winning organization."

Terrance R. Orzan, Group Managing Director,

Americas, Cap Gemini

Ernst & Young

Cleveland

"Difficult times separate the great leaders from the merely good.

The rising tide of economic prosperity floats all ships, but only those who are quick and have chartered a proper course remain afloat and ready for action when the tide recedes. It is the leader's responsibility to chart that course and ensure that the corporation under his charge turns adversity to advantage and emerges from the troubled times stronger than ever.

To succeed, a leader must have vision and must know when and how to allocate resources for the long term.

A leader is only as good as the team he leads. A leader creates the conditions for success by bringing together a group of talented individuals, each with his or her own individual strengths, and channelling those strengths productively.

And above all, a leader must foster and safeguard public trust in the corporation under his guidance by holding his team to the highest standards of integrity and promoting transparency throughout the organization."

Dr. David K. P. Li, Chairman CEO

The Bank of East Asia Ltd

Hong Kong

"A leader is someone people want to follow, not someone they follow because they have to. That requires trust. Employees must trust that their leader is honest about the business and its future, and the leader must trust that employees are honest about their opinions of the organization.

Building and nurturing that trust demands visibility, meeting with employees face-to-face to share your ideas and hear their questions. It demands consistency, keeping your messages clear and ensuring that what you do doesn't contradict what you say. It demands honesty, giving the news to them straight, whether good or bad. It demands respect, listening to perspectives from all geographies, from all levels of the organization, and responding empathetically to what you hear. It does not mean necessarily agreeing.

A leader provides the vision and sets the course. But only when employees trust the leadership will they take action to make the vision a reality. And when employees take action, a good leader keeps an open mind, recognizing that some of the best ideas emanate from the field and giving employees the opportunity to test their suggestions."

Lawrence A. Weinbach

Chairman, President & Chief Executive Officer

Unisys Corporation

Blue Bell, Pennsylvania

"Effective Leadership requires the same characteristics in good times and bad. Along with trusting one's instincts, delegating wisely, staying focused, listening well and communicating clearly, being face to face with clients and colleagues sends a powerful signal and enables a leader to stay connected."

James S. Turkey

Chairman & Chief Executive Officer

Ernst & Young

New York

Leaders need to be sensitive to what is significant and what is trivial, and to be prepared to rise above sectional and selfish interests. They need to have minds attuned to coping with events and crises. They should cultivate the capacity of uniting people and lifting them above what divides them. Leaders must persuade their followers to pursue not that which seems most pleasant, easy or profitable at the moment, but to prefer that which is just and honourable in the long run.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

William James in his work on Principles of Psychology wrote, "There is no more miserable human-being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision."

None of us goes through a day without making decisions. Always there are many things to be considered, evaluated and decided upon.

Decision making has never been easy, even for the highly trained man, but history is made up of the stories of men and women who were good at it. Government is complex, not only within its own walls but because of outside influences and pressures. A decision must be adequate to the solution of the problem.

Decisions on important matters are not within the reach of men and women whose knowledge of facts and the forces acting upon them is small. There must be on hand a large store of memories of previous experiences and things learned which can be linked with the current problem. The man who makes important decisions may not be sweet tempered. He is under pressure; he takes risks; he wrestles with the task of getting his ideas carried out; he has little patience with incompetence.

No reasoning can be done by our minds unless we have units of comparison gathered through experience and study. When we have many objects in our minds, our imagination ranges over them, assesses them, relates them significantly, and produces a decision.

The man who has to swim hard in muddy waters to get his head out where he can make an important decision may be plagued with doubting folly. This is a state of mind in which a man cannot remember whether he did this or decided that or whether he did it in the best way.

One needs to give patience, time and thought to decision making when he is on unfamiliar ground or dealing with a strange subject.

The power of deciding involves the danger of going astray- that is the essence of deciding; and going astray involves some kind of penalty – that is the essence of error. The consequences of a decision are part of the total problem and should be considered as factors in it. We must balance risk against gain and be neither deterred by the one nor be dazzled by the other.

It is wiser to make decisions promptly and crisply after giving the matter adequate thought than to linger over them and lose momentum and drive. Holding up a decision while awaiting facts that are necessary to wise thought is different from indecision due to reluctance to decide. In a competitive society it may be staying much too late to wait till precisely the proper time.

To make a sound decision it is not necessary to have all the facts but it is necessary to know what facts are missing so that we may make allowance for the gap and decide the degree of rigidity to give our orders.

The person who wishes to make decisions with confidence needs to keep in mind the fact that knowledge is the bedrock upon which judgment must rest. Skills in deciding are developed through practice and through relating things newly learnt to one's acquaintanceship with facts and principles.

We must be objective in our thinking, but if we sit on the fence never committing ourselves, and never giving a decision we live an unrewarding sort of life. Doing nothing has consequences just as surely as doing something has.

Wisdom in making a decision is narrowed by ignorance, habit, obsession or prejudice. It is broadened by knowledge and open mindedness and meditation. To attain these, one must step a little aside, out of the noisy, pushing crowd and take a prospect of all that is relevant to the matter that demands decision.

Decision is of little account unless it is followed by action and there is no recipe for getting things done so good as the one to start doing them. Hesitation is the fatal flaw in the make-up of many men and women. Doing nothing is negative action, but it has positive consequences: discouragement, irritation, disappointment, and even ill health and mental upset.

Decision making is a commitment of one's self. Before he reaches it, he must have tested facts rigorously and weighed possible results. One cannot always go by the plotted course. The realities may contradict charts and statistics.

When one comes to make a responsibility-accepting decision, it is a great comfort to know that he has the respect and support of those around him. If everyone is pulling in the right direction, with esteem for him as a person, as well as in his role of top man his mind is free of jarring thoughts.

Every decision carries with it the element of risk. One must venture to run the hazard of his own judgment.

"Yes and no" wrote Charles Maurice De Talleyrand Prince of Benevento, a French Statesman and Diplomat, "are the two shortest words but they require more thought than any other before being uttered". There is a natural urge to say yes to other people's plans so as not to hurt their feelings or give offence but no is always the preferable answer even when the best course remains in question. Remember that anything is easier to get into than to get out of. Saying no enables you to revise your decision later because a no is more easily changed to a yes than a yes to a no.

Many crucial decisions are made under pressure from another person or persons. An iron rule of decision making is to determine that what you decide is what you want to do not what somebody else wants you to do. In self defense you should keep a keen eye out for the wiles of self-serving persuasion, hidden agenda and outright lies. While there is individual pressure to do what you don't really want to do there can also be social pressure. It is a solid principle never to make a decision because everybody is doing it.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

"Procrastination is the thief of time" wrote Edward Young an English Author. In fact procrastination is much more. It is the thief of our self-respect. It deprives us of the fullest realization of our ambitions and hopes. It does not solve any problem when we toss it into a tray marked pending.

Very little that is good can be said about procrastinating: - the habit of needlessly putting off things to which we should attend. Persistently long delays in the making of a decision can paralyze an organization. They cause waste of time among personnel, loss of team work and forfeiture of faith in management.

To put off a decision while gathering or awaiting pertinent information is not procrastination but be sure that what is awaited is pertinent and necessary. All great leaders have deliberated with caution but acted with decision and promptness.

This Country, Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, has no time for procrastinators or ditherers - nor should it have if they avoid difficult decisions or are chronically unable to make up their minds; but irresolution should not be confused with due deliberation. It is not dithering or procrastinating to take time to examine the map to make sure you are on the right road, or to change your mind when it is clear that the decision you have made is not leading to where you want to.

The man who hesitates is lost. He seeks quite rightly to bring to bear on his decisions the mature judgment that is the outcome of thought directed toward solving a problem, but there is a deadline beyond which he must not prolong his deliberation. He must make decisions and not postpone them or his opportunity to take advantage of a good situation will be lost.

Excuses for postponing decisions are not hard to find. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, Hamlet's hesitancy is clearly illustrated. One moment he pretended that he was too cowardly to perform the deed; at another he questioned the truthfulness of the ghost, at another he thought the time was unsuitable, that it would be better to wait until the King was at some evil act and then to kill him and so on. Every reason had a certain plausibility but it would not stand serious consideration.

By debating every problem, awaiting the divine spark that will shine on the right decision, one shows himself to be timid and distrustful of his own judgments. The Hamlets among us must learn that it is better to make a wrong decision than none at all. At least, an error teaches a lesson that needs never be repeated. To stand indecisively midway between our duty and our task is calamitous.

There are of course, times for postponement, when a resolute determination to take no action until more facts are available is a constructive contribution to wise decision. The warning is against unwise or frivolous putting off. We must keep in mind that to make no decision is itself a decision and must be justified.

The truth is we are most inclined to postpone doing things that seem at the time to be unpleasant, distasteful or difficult. When we have something like that to do we putter around with little things, trying to keep busy so that we have an excuse that will ease our consciences. Dreading and postponing a task may be more tiring than doing it and apprehension over delayed unpleasantness may so preoccupy us that other things cannot be done effectively.

It would do us well if we adopt this simple imperative as our motto:

If a thing is necessary to be done, do it now; if a tough task impends, do not shirk it; if a difficult decision demands attention, get the facts and be manly enough to make it. The "pending tray" is a treacherous place in which to lay duties and tasks and decisions.

One of the minor prophets, a man who possessed a gift unsurpassed by any other Old Testament author, of clear, vivid and eloquent expression, gave us a phrase to describe waste of time, "The years that the locust hath eaten".

"When the decision is up before you" said Harry Truman, Former President of the United States, "and on my desk I have a motto which says "The buck stops here" – the decision has to be made".

At the end of the day the acid test of a decision is whether one can live with it in the long run. Honesty really does prove to be the best policy when what is essentially at stake is being able to face one's self unflinchingly in the mirror.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

May God Bless this Honourable House.

May God Bless the Commonwealth of Dominica.