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2010.12 .14

# Corporate Responsibility of the Graduate Prof. Willie Mendis 

The Convocation is an occasion to reward those who have earned to graduate after years of hard studies. It is a memorable day to each and every Graduand, who with their parents, family, friends and loved ones have graced this solemn event. As the ceremony ends, each Graduate will be embarking on the unchartered roadmap in the "world of work". It's milestones may initially be unclear, and the conditions of the pathway may need to be tested. On the other hand, your batch represents the expectations of our beloved Sri Lanka that is free from the grave uncertainties of a separatist conflict. Some of you have braved the shock and trauma of violence in your home areas. Others have experienced the fear of entering an economy that held little hope for a lifetime career. However, May 2009 has changed it all, with the advent of a vision to make Sri Lanka the "Wonder of Asia". It cannot be realized unless we all contribute towards our country's transformation. Sri Lanka needs gamechangers, and your batch in particular, are likely front liners in facing it's challenges.

The convocation is an opportunity to reflect upon the larger responsibility of the Graduate. He or she cannot be disconnected from the expectations of the country for advancing the growth of it's economy. It is also the Graduate's task to be sensitive to the importance of attaining economic growth with equity, which is central to spread the benefits of development across the country, from its south to north and from west to east The current disproportionate housing of nearly half the nation's wealth generation in favour of the Western Province has to be remedied at all cost. It is in this context that the occasion of the convocation represents an alarm bell or wake-up call to the new Graduates as they begin to experience the ground realities on leaving their happy years of university life.

The convocation is the occasion on which a University Student transforms from a Graduand to a Graduate. It is a day on which expectations of a variety of types emerge to give the Graduate hope for a better life as a good citizen. It's outcome has less to do with the expectations of a prospective employer or of the society at large. The convergence of these two expectations will nonetheless be a happy coincidence. On the other hand, it's clash can be worrisome for the Graduate whose career and livelihood may then fall behind to cause despair. My focus is not to address you on the negativity of your future on this happy day of the convocation. You all have matured sufficiently to be conscious of the "world of work" to which you have embarked. Nonetheless, it augurs well for you to engage in a discourse which further livens your intellect that has been fired up by the academic environment which you have enjoyed to date. Your Lecturers have moulded your minds to stand-up to any eventuality in the days, months, and years to come. However, they would have also counseled you on the many unknowns about which no textbook exist, or even found in a case study that you may have brilliantly analyzed in a research dissertation. I trust therefore that my address will give you that extra "little bit" which may influence your mindset, although I am conscious of the tired state you must be on this day.

Let me firstly imply that you have already found or will soon find a placement in the "world of work", whether in the Private Sector or in the State Sector. It's immediate impact is for you to recognize that you are one of a Team in the organisation. The challenge you face is to position yourself in its structure. The underlying feature is therefore to assemble the processes of governance in the organisation which would offer space for your contribution to its better performance. It's model of Corporate Governance becomes the first lesson in your new classroom. The team spirit which may have been nurtured in the University, favours you to innovate your space in the corporate body. It includes the learning curve in it's different aspects of human resources, client service or customer base, production, marketing and distribution, financial viability, ethics and corporate social responsibility. The challenges in mastering the learning curve are what favours a Graduate in making the appropriate choice and the right decision.

Corporate Governance is fundamental in any organisation. It not only reflects the key players in its decision making structure, but also the flow of the system for fashioning choices in its output. The Graduate is equipped to be a part of Corporate Governance. This however involves the acquisition of new knowledge of the products or services specific to the organisation. Further, it obligates the gathering of the processes which facilitates the output to the customer or client. In same, an essential ingredient is the human resources without which the corporate body becomes an empty shell. Their social attributes may therefore need to be assessed in recruitment to reinforce the spirit of teamwork. Hence human resources management which the Graduate may have learnt in the University becomes a critical tool. A key part of it will be to integrate technology with management skills. This implies a crucial part of the new knowledge that the Graduate will acquire to broaden his or her already cultivated mind. It is in this phase of the learning curve that the Graduate matures to be connected in making the paradigam shift to change Sri Lanka for the better.

The overarching responsibility of the Graduate is no longer regarding his work or place of work as a time serving exercise. Sri Lanka is now on a path from which it cannot revert to instability. It has therefore raised the barometer of expectation from a Graduate to a higher peak than ever before. It's challenges from equity considerations which I mentioned previously, must necessarily be a part of it. This is therefore a lifetime experience for those graduating today. I would love to see you in two decades from now to thank you for changing Sri Lanka for the better. My address today is to inspire you to prepare yourself with a report card which you can share with your own children in the future to show them the part you played in your work, that in turn made Sri Lanka the "Wonder of Asia"

Creating change for the better also lie in being satisfied with your job and of the work you do. The path to job satisfaction in a career is like one which has a cobbled stone surface. It tests your resilience, and not the other way round where you expect it to wear out. Underlying the latter is your commitment to whatever you have been tasked to perform. This is cushioned by what is called "hard work". Over time, it nurtures the right attitude towards your work, whether in your own domain, or towards your colleagues in the workplace. The combination of commitment, hard work and attitude comprise the essential ingredients for you to enjoy the blessings of your career. It cultivates the basics of work ethics that is pivotal for your expectations to succeed. In turn, it helps your workplace to prosper and to
contribute to nation building. In its absence, lethargy sets in where you expect everything and gives very little in return. No nation can forge ahead if its human capital, especially of the Graduates, are not driven by the force of work ethics.

The contrast in a corporate body that engages the Graduates, with others, must be easily measurable. It must get reflected in the balance sheet, and in the rise of the customer base. In the State Sector, the public must feel the service delivery, in good times and during want due to disasters. It's measurement must become ingrained in your hearts and minds. The basics of this cannot be expected from cramming textbooks. It should emerge from the principles of work ethics which I mentioned previously. A Graduate has to lead in this change in the Public Service and also in the mercantile image of the Business Sector. This is pivotal to recreate Sri Lanka's pre-conflict branding as the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean". The fundamental in this behavior is what a famous President of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy, exhorted to his people. He said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country".

My dear Graduates, Sri Lanka at this juncture of its history, needs you to be reminded of what President Kennedy said. I have no doubt that each one of you will rise to the occasion and pave the path for Sri Lanka to truly be the "Wonder of Asia".

The time for such reflection is now. You are the brand new batch of Graduates to drive the economy of this country. As its pioneers in the emergent era of huge expectation after the end of a three decade long conflict which nearly decimated our beloved nation, you occupy a special niche. It should be your pride to lift this country to the pedestal being visualized for it to occupy. The knowledge you gained as a Graduate places an additional burden on your shoulders. It is a premium that the society at large has placed on your asset value, from which it expects a gilt-edged return. Accordingly, from the time you leave this hall, you cannot forget that you have been endowed with the label used by a Stock Exchange for its best, the "blue chip". It's value can only enhance, and not drop. You have thus the strength to ensure that Sri Lanka will never return to the poor 3.5\% growth rate of its GDP. The choice is also yours to quadruple this rate of growth in your lifetime career. My bet is that you will make that choice. I wish to conclude by congratulating each one of you who have graduated today and wish you the very best in your future.
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