

Address Delivered by James Husbands at the 2012 Convocation of the University of the West Indies' Cave Hill Campus, at the Sir Garfield Sobers Gymnasium, Barbados, October 20, 2012, 5.00 p.m.

Salutations.

Standing with you in the light of this moment, I feel privileged to bask in the brilliance of some of the Caribbean's (and indeed, the world's) most illustrious minds.

I am humbled that this distinguished University would find me worthy to inhabit these ceremonial robes as a recipient of your Honorary Doctorate; and I am deeply honoured, and distinctly grateful for the opportunity to stand at this podium where oratory greats and intellectual luminaries have graced the Keynotes of UWI with the most eloquent, edified addresses. Thank you!

But may I warn you, Sir George and Sir Hilary, that by no means would I make the grade as an orator or intellectual luminary in this esteemed company.

For the entrée afforded me to the corridors of this noble institution, I can only surmise that it is through the divine favour of God, and the conspiracy of human faith, that I stand here to share this moment with all of you.

...And ladies and gentlemen, my address today will probably not strike the accustomed chord of Keynotes at UWI. Because, you see, my degrees were earned at ULE - the University of Life Experience. The School of Hard Knocks is the faculty that has, and continues to sanction my credentials; and my distinctions are in the areas of tenacity and audacity, as a student of the politics of business in the socio-cultural context of Barbados, and the Caribbean.

I speak today, not from the learned tongue of the traditionally educated, but from the heart of a business SOLDIER - a soldier who has learnt some of life's greatest lessons in the trenches of business. I suppose in some way, one may consider this presentation to be my dissertation. In which case, students of the Science of Management may argue, and convincingly so, that it is not the product of careful research, supported by scientific data. Ladies and Gentlemen, mine is a **living** thesis; and I thank you for inviting me to be here standing in **this** moment.

...And in this moment, I take pause. I take pause to refresh my spirit. I take pause to remind myself, and you, dear graduands, that anything **is** possible.

For when I measure the ordinary beginnings of a country boy, with a St. Martin's Boys School, Princess Margaret, and Christ Church High School education, against the extraordinary voices that have echoed across campuses of this celebrated institution over the last sixty-four (64) years, I am reminded of the promise made to all of us that: "If we believe, all things will be made possible".

..And I do believe.

Back in 1972 when I started Husbands Marketing, later renamed Buildec; and in 1973 when I joined the fledgling Solar Dynamics, at the invitation of the now retired Archbishop His Grace Drexel Gomez, and Canon Andrew Hatch, very few would have believed that Solar Dynamics would become a household name. Back then we stood on the shoulders of the early pioneers, Arthur Coppin, Anthony Hoad, and Professor Tom Lawand. Andrew Hatch would rekindle the then dormant idea of a solar water heater, and build the “Low Cost solar water heater”, designed by Tom Lawand.

With the help of a great team, especially Ivan Franklyn, whose unmatched technical competence and dedication knew no bounds over the last 39 years; we seized the opportunity to extend the comfort and convenience of hot water to our people, our nation and to our region.

Given the culture of Barbadian business in 1973, I would have been considered a most unlikely candidate to lead this new endeavour. Indeed when I turned down an invitation to sell imported Australian Solahart heaters, the Barbadian importer at the time wrote me the following day labelling me “a belligerent young man.” With the dice cast against me, I entered the “Barbados” game of business anyway.

I entered because I *believed*.

I believed that it was possible to turn an idea into an industry. We turned that industry into an ideology. An ideology that now energizes our region, and engages the world.

We lived by one of Albert Einstein’s greatest sayings,

“*There’s a way to do it better, find it!*” and in times of threat we were re-inforced by Martin Luther King’s assertion that “COURAGE faces fear and thereby conquers it”.

I wish to thank the thousands of customers, well wishers and suppliers, who have believed in us, and trusted us.

Others have followed Solar Dynamics into the industry and have added to our efforts. Today, according to the Climate Institute, Barbados is the 5th leading nation in the world, in the penetration of solar water heaters per 1000 population. Consumers have saved Bds\$1 Billion in energy costs; up from the 260 million\$, which USAID identified at the end of 2002.

Barbados, and indeed the wider Caribbean, now has the opportunity to build on the work which we have started and sustained; to be leading developers and users of a wide array of renewable energy technologies.

But we need to accelerate our efforts. To do that, we need the active engagement of all of you graduands, and the University of the West Indies.

Like you Sir Hilary, I dream of the University of the West Indies utilizing renewable energy for most of its energy needs on a daily basis.

I dream also of the day when the hospitality industry, which sells solar energy as an integral part of its package, becomes the leading region in the hospitality world with the lowest energy footprint.

And I dream of an agriculture industry made sustainable; through the reduction- in-miles; our food has to travel to reach the plates in our homes and hotels.

I long for the day when the taste of Barbados black belly lamb” (with the highest reproductive rate in the world) is at least 50% as popular as the cell phones in your hands;

I long for the day when Barbados grows processes and sells Bajan Cherry the most potent Vitamin C source, to pharmacies across the globe.

I long for the day when we process, package and sell breadfruit, and sweet potato in many forms to capitalize on their renowned health benefits; and

when “Barbados Sea Island Cotton”, with the softest feel and the strongest yarn, is established internationally as the preferred fabric for those who aspire to have. These are world class opportunities sitting on our doorstep.

Graduands, we are made of the stuff that make these things happen! These are the heights which we *can* achieve! And why?

The fact that we have achieved sustainability in the solar water heating industry means that we can achieve lofty goals in other industries.

The value of the Solar Dynamics story must be to inspire us to believe that we can achieve.

It can all be achieved through the widespread harnessing and leveraging of our many and varied talents.

Scientists, architects, researchers, accountants, lawyers, chemical mechanical and electrical engineers, leaders and managers, from among the UWI’s graduating class of 2012, together with those who preceded you, and those who will come after you; are the capital investment of trained human resources the Caribbean needs to catapult our region into more world class leadership. **Leadership** and implementation!

My vision for Barbados is to have the most widely held and most efficient renewable energy company, with every household becoming a shareholder in such an enterprise. That, with an investment of \$500.00 to \$5,000.00 per household, per year, over a 5 year period, that “Caribbean Renewable” would be energised to develop and commission an array of bold, and innovative technologies to satisfy our growing energy demand and needs. The Graduands of 2012 can help make this happen, while making the long held notion that we, as a people, cannot work together “a myth”. ***Anything is possible!***

Some of the lessons that I have learnt which I wish to share with you are:

1. the most valuable skill of a leader is the ability to do the three-step;
2. the strongest currency we trade in the world is not money, but ideas; and
3. the most important asset we bring to any opportunity is our mental model- our mindset.

Lesson 1: the most valuable skill of a leader is the ability to do the three-step.

One: Step forward ...to fight for, and work for what you believe.

Two: Step aside ...from positions that leave you compromised.

Three: Step back ...from relationships that don't serve you well.

LESSON 2: The second lesson I've learnt is that **the strongest currency we trade** in the world is not money, but **ideas**.

In every international gathering where I've been invited to speak on the Barbados experience in developing the solar water heating industry; our value has been heightened by the hard currency we trade: **ideas**. Not money, not the political sway of having a large market. Ideas!

In the darkest moments of business, an investment of original thinking and fresh ideas are what keeps us in the game. Challenge after challenge has been overcome by our teams with the infusion of fresh ideas. And when we find our measure on the world stage, it's the economics of ideas that rule.

I wish to give an example:

In responding to a client who was dissatisfied with the temperature on an early Solar Dynamics water heater; I conceived of the most effective consumer benefit; the Solar Dynamics temperature guarantee. That "fresh idea" instilled the confidence, which grew the market.

All of you will, in one way or the other, face unexpected challenges (and opportunities) as you grow into your future. Whether they arise from your personal lives, from being business owners or from being leaders in other fields, remember that it is original thinking that trumps all else.

There is so much more I'd like to share on this topic, but I think Albert Einstein advances the message more succinctly. Einstein reminded us that "*we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.*"

Therefore, the original and creative thinkers among us, who are best able to put ideas into practice; will be the ones left standing on the world stage of success.

Are you still listening...for the third lesson?

LESSON 3: The third lesson is that: **the most important asset we bring to any opportunity is our mental model - our mindset.**

Not our academic credentials; not our upstanding references; not our flawless resume of experience. It is our mental model - our mindset.

Your mental model is your internal operating system that guides how you function in any endeavour. People with mental models which enable focus, planning, and consistent practice of high standards that serve their potential; are the best performers. This holds true regardless of the natural inborn talent they bring to the table. Without the right mental model and the deliberate practice of what works, all the natural smarts and talent in the world really don't count. The real-world value of this lesson to those of you who are on a trajectory to being high-performance leaders is that: **you cannot be a leader without, until you have mastered the leader within.**

It comes from a conscious, self-driven habit of deliberate practice.

The point here is that, human nature is such that once we start settling for less in some areas of our lives; it makes it easier to settle for less in other areas as well. The impact on our standards, expectations and performance becomes negative after a while of our practicing the habit of "less is OK".

I know that because I've been there!

We need to rally the spirit to rise; because we know, "we have better in us".

Many of you will have influence over important human resource decisions.

In making those decisions, keep in mind that you first hire "a mindset" and "a mental model for excellence", *then* you hire for other qualifications.

The lessons I've learnt in recruiting have taken me to places in the human psyche that I'd prefer not to recall. But in staying the course, while protecting myself and my businesses, my slogan has forcibly become:

"Don't be blinded by "bright" objects in your line of sight. Check on the mental model".

Friends, I thank you for honouring me by inviting me to share some of my story with you. I just wish to incite you to keep learning and thinking critically beyond the knowledge you have already accumulated.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have lingered a little longer on this third lesson. Perhaps because it is more important than the other two lessons:

- a) There are opportunities for University graduates with the **right mental models** to be part of the business teams of companies in the Caribbean. People with mental models who would fulfill the goals of organizations around the region.

- b) Second, and more importantly, I shared this lesson because over the years I have seen, far too often, brilliant minds with outstanding University credentials stagnate in the stillness of achievement: where, after having achieved the great victory of academic qualification; they forfeit the *most* precious asset of their higher education: the ability to creatively use it. At the root of every such situation, there was “a mental model” at work, which perpetuated performance well below their potential. Let me warn you that an ill contrived “mental model” is oft employed to your own disadvantage.

I believe that it is in our interest to delve further into the many aspects of this topic in the future. Suffice it to say that we have shared consciousness on the matter.

These lessons for life in leadership are my top three: learn the three-step; trade ideas as your hard currency; and make your mental model a capital asset.

I’m told that it is best for speakers to stop talking while the audience is still listening. So I shall conclude:

What I hope you have heard is that there is tremendous opportunity for you, the graduands to utilize the resources garnered through The University of the West Indies; to take bold initiatives; and to mobilise capital to move what have been “projects” into implementation. You must raise the level of thought leadership, and continue the drive to accelerate the advancement of our Caribbean. The structures; the research capability; your alumni; and your abundant access to mind-power, ideally position you to make a “world-class contribution” in many fields. Renewable energy is but one of them. But do not stop there.

“Possibility thinking” is needed in every area.

Some of the best examples of “Possibility thinking” are the expansion of knowledge through this very institution. Who would have imagined 20 years ago that The Cave Hill Campus would be the magnificent educational and leadership centre that it is today.

Who would have imagined that a city in a town called “Limegrove” could be built. Its possibility thinking! Possibility thinking is vital to our regional and hemispheric development.

What I also hope others have heard is that, as a business community, we must step up and continue to deepen our engagement with education: education with direction.

It is imperative that the business community institute a widespread internship program for our students. This kind of collaboration puts the energy of thought into motion. And where thought and knowledge meet the practice of business, the dynamic energy they create is transformational. Indeed, we can all use some business transformation! The resistance to new ideas may well be standing in our way to success; but we are reminded by the incomparable Nelson Mandela that, “*it always seems impossible, until it is done*”.

Ladies and gentlemen, my remarks are at their end. Permit me to direct these last few words to the stars of this day. Graduands, I entreat you to make the story of my journey to this moment an example of “what’s possible”. While my story is not yours personally, it’s **ours** collectively.

Your own story from this moment on will become **ours**.

It is **our** collective stories that will define our fortune as a country; forge our future as a region; and frame our footprint as global citizens.

The value of the education you have gained in this fine institution resides not in the scroll with letters that you have so deservedly earned, it lives in your continued drive to evolve and leverage the most precious asset of this education – a mind filled with possibility. I ask that when you disrobe from this glorious day of celebration, you take pause. Take pause to reflect on the victory of the moment, yes. But take pause, also, to envision a bright future - a future of innovative possibilities. Today, you celebrate a victory you have worked hard to achieve. Now we ask you to use it effectively; not just for self, but in the interest of all of us in this world.

My parting prayer is that you will take all that the University of the West Indies has given you and distinguish yourselves as “exceptional”. ...And when you stand in the future, to give your own living thesis, let it be said, in honour of this University’s motto, that: “In 2012, many lights rose from the west.”

Congratulations and I thank you!