

Choosing your Career- 4th Formers

Delivered 25th May 2005
to Bregada Flax Educational Centre

Good Evening Principal, parents, guardians, teachers, staff and students. It is with double delight that I accepted this invitation to speak to you about this most important process in the lives of you and your children.

As simple and painless as this exercise tonight appears to be, it is going to set the foundation of the most important set of decisions in the life of your children. But let me just suggest to you that the outcome of this process has been taking shape long before. What it will be doing is shaping the possibilities and the options.

Parents and children you are now beginning to put a more definite focus and direction to your future, particularly your career as a professional, an independent producer, business person or an employee. In helping to place your child on a more clearly determined career path, it is your responsibility to have the best possible information and the widest possible information from the sources that you trust. With this type and volume of information you are more likely to make a better choice, if not the right choice. So it is not only information, but good judgement and decision-making.

Although this is not a final decision about your future it is important that you understand the world of work and the realities that you understand the world of work and the realities of the jobs market and the business environment of the British Virgin Islands. But, by no means do you limit yourself to the borders of the British Virgin Islands. You must remember that you are competing world-wide for jobs because skills move around. Prepare yourself to work anywhere in the world. Those of you that have British Passports will be able to work

anywhere in the European Union and its territories. And those that may end up working for international enterprises or organizations, especially in tourism and financial services.

Current trends and past experience suggests that the BVI cannot grow forever. There will soon come a time when this country will not be able to employ all its citizens and residents. Your aim therefore it to give yourself the edge that will prevail in competition with students, employees and persons the world over. Not have a competitive edge in your skills set will guarantee failure behind your name.

In carrying out this exercise today you must have an idea of the world that will exist 5 to 10 years from now when most of you will have hit the job market. The jobs market is going to be very competitive and the minimum skill set required to function is expanding. When I was growing up, one could generally get a job without a high school diploma. Today, the good paying starts with a 2-year college degree - and I am talking about in Government.

Employers and business persons in the world of work will have to be knowledge workers. Knowledge workers will have to be knowledgeable across a broad range of subjects. This means more than having information, but be able to process it in an intelligent way adding value to you or your organization. Next decade workforce persons must be able to communicate across the world in several languages - not just slang English and ghetto Spanish because more than half the world population probably could not understand you.

Next decade workforce persons must be able to use information technology in a most productive way to expand knowledge, to bridge communication gaps, to

understand culture around the world, to understand the significance of history and possibility or application of science in life.

Next decade workforce persons must be able to work across fields that are related because career changes and job changes are going to become a part of life as globalization impacts more and more on local economies.

In addition to being versatile, having the ability to multi-task and having core competences, the next decade persons must have advance life coping skills. Why, because you will most likely leave the BVI to further your education, acquire professional skills and broaden your horizons. For living, visiting and shopping abroad, please do not underestimate the importance of subjects such as Home Management and Food and Nutrition. Right now there are BVI Islanders working in Hong Kong and they must be able to live in a culture that is completely foreign. Foods are definitely not like BVI, the Caribbean or the western world.

Making a choice of subjects is not about locking in, but locking you on to the possibility of a particular field. This exercise opens up a field and affords you the options of choosing within or across fields in the eventuality that becomes necessary. And based on the work environment in which you will find yourself in the next decade, it is going to be necessary to be versatile and flexible enough that you could work in several fields. Industries and jobs will disappear and new ones will appear. Therefore you must be ready and equipped to make that change or you will not survive.

Planning the financing of your career is just as critical as planning your area of profession. Parents and guardians, the saying that goes, "Those who do not

plan, plan to fail" is very true. Please take it from a person who has been in planning for the last quarter of a century.

The areas and value of financial assistance, including scholarships, loans and grants being offered by which organization are important pieces of information you students and parents need to make the best choice about the future. You must find out what are government priorities for scholarship for students and permanent employees. It is also important that you start thinking about your budget for higher education because three years is a very short time and if you have not begun saving already, it is probably too late unless you get really lucky somewhere, somehow. As I recall it you need to get this information from the Department of Education and form the Deputy Governor's Office if you are going to be a permanent civil servant.

Closer to home, now let us talk about the area of growth in the job market and business opportunity in the British Virgin Islands. Everyone knows that our job market is broken down broadly into tourism and related, 20.6%, financial services and related, 8.7%, government, 32.2%, construction, 8.2%, distribution of goods, 9.2% and other areas, 21.1%.

The above data suggests that anyone of you will most likely work in tourism, financial services or government. You will mostly need to possess the core skills and competencies needed to work outside the BVI. When we say government, it means working across health, education, welfare, courts, police, border control, administration and management.

Based on a number of factors we used to predict the future, it is my conclusion that job growth in the BVI will be in maritime and marine activities, health care, financial services, legal services, tourism and construction/engineering services.

In choosing the broad subjects for your career path, you must ask yourself how marketable will the skills you have chosen to develop when you enter the job market or temporarily during your tenure at HLSCC and after you have obtained your first degree. Your best source of temporary employment is with the Government. As well, it is also the most secure and one of the best paying areas of employment in the country.

Choosing a career that requires a field of study or a particular set of competencies that no one in the country will finance or could finance, including your family, is a pointless act. My point here is that you need to know who or which organizations are giving scholarships and for what. At this point you should not only be planning your career, but also how are you going to get your college education financed.

If it is only a few things you take away tonight, they should be that knowledge, versatility and flexible are going to give you the competitive edge. You must prepare to live, work and compete outside the BVI.