

SPEECH DELIVERED BY OTUMFUO OSEI TUTU II, ASANTEHENE

TO GRADUANDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

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ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERMENT OF AN HONORARY  
DOCTORATE DEGREE

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Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Please allow me to express my sincere thanks and that of my delegation to the government and people of Barbados for the warm reception and hospitality extended to us since our arrival in your beautiful country.

In the same vein, may I express my profound gratitude to the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus for the honour done me today by conferring an Honorary Doctorate Degree on me. As the Chancellor of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, I know such accolades are not bestowed lightly. I feel the more honored from the knowledge that the award is coming from the premiere University of the West Indies that has Science and Technology as its major objective just as my university in Kumasi Ghana.

Fortunately, I have come here with the Chairman of Council, the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar which goes to affirm our desire to have greater collaboration with this University.

We believe that through this visit will emerge fruitful and mutual cooperation that can bring our two universities and for that matter our two countries and peoples together. We thank you for this opportunity.

Now to the graduands and students of this university, I shall like to share some thoughts on leadership with you as you graduate from this university and are on your way to the outside world to start your new lives.

Few leadership skills can be as rewarding, personally and professionally. Indeed my experience has been that mentoring relationships can support and nurture four characteristics of effective leadership:

Adaptability;  
Shared vision;  
Integrity; and  
Youthfulness

Today, the world is in the grip of an extreme financial crisis the extent and severity of which has never been seen before. This crisis has thrown up a number of issues that are at the core of the leadership debate. Simply put, the crisis has been the result of a dismal failure of leadership at all levels.

Unethical behavior, greed, distrust, lack of compassion, selfishness, short-termism, and integrity, all these words are prominent in any informed discussion of the current financial crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen, to extricate our world as we know it out of this terrible but self-imposed morass, there is now more than ever the need for a direct, large and sustained injection of leadership in all aspects of human endeavour.

There is no doubt that everybody aspires to be a leader. We revere our leaders, we admire the glamour, the benefits and the opportunities that leaders are provided in society. Naturally, we do not always see the challenges and responsibilities that come with leadership. Perhaps even worse, we rarely appreciate the moral, personal and professional tribulations leaders have to surmount to attain such positions of influence.

Rev. Martin Luther King jr., a black civil rights leader in America who more than 30 years after his premature death has and continues to inspire leaders. Leaders like Barack Obama, the first African American to

win the nomination of a major party to stand for the highest office in the land. King's words continue to challenge men and women to rise and squarely meet their destiny.

Dr. King wrote:

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no formula for success. However, like others, I do know the formula for failure and that is trying to please everybody.

**One of the first lessons I learnt on my leadership journey is this:**

Do not be all things to all men. Be yourself. Don't try to be what you are not and hold dear to the things that you believe in.

**My second lesson is:**

You cannot achieve anything in life if you don't have a vision of what you want to do, who you want to be and just as importantly, how you want to get there.

One of my favorite American sayings is:

“If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there”.

The Bible says:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish”.

A vision without an execution or implementation plan will remain a dream. In life, being at the right place, at the right time helps.

Your education will provide you with opportunities for networking, contacts will be made, friendships formed, opportunities will come beckoning, so in that sense, all of you are at the right place and at the right time. Those who will make a success of their opportunities are those who have a vision.

However there will be many of you who will have a vision, but success will only go to those who will execute on their vision. Luck is often cited as an important factor in success. What is luck? For me luck is the coincidence of preparedness and opportunity. Indeed, Louis Pasteur, a French philosopher wrote:

“Luck favors the prepared mind.”

Have confidence in yourself.

Rudyard Kipling was poet laureate, of England. In Ghana, we had the likes of Ckyeame Akoto to speak simple, clear and ancient words of wisdom to our leaders and to us. In England, Kipling wrote vividly in his poem “If” as follows: “if you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too.”

My dear friends, it is a tough world out there and the choices that you make will have far-reaching consequences for your future. They may be choices to do with your career, choice of partner and many more. Several and varied factors will influence your choice. Your families, your friends, your peer group, even your detractors’ will all have a bearing on what you do. As important as these influences are, remember at the end of the day the decision is always yours to make and your will have to live with the consequences. Along the way there will be many moments of reflection, anxiety, consultation and even self-doubt. But remember, you are in a very lonely position when you make that crucial choice – hence self-coincidence is a must have.

My forth lesson therefore is:

Begin with your strengths and leverage on them.

I will tell you an apocryphal story of a rabbit. The rabbit was enrolled in rabbit school. Like all rabbits, it could hop very well but could not swim. At the end of the year, the rabbit got high marks in hopping but failed in swimming. The rabbit’s parents were concerned. They said “forget about hopping. You are good at it anyway. Concentrate on swimming.” They

sent the rabbit for tuition in swimming. And guess what happened? The rabbit forgot how to hop! As for swimming, have you ever seen a rabbit swim? In essence, we must also focus on our strengths and hone them even more! It is only our strengths that can give us the energy to correct or weakness.

My fifth lesson is:

Do not compromise on values.

In colonial India, a slight, spoken bespectacled man called Mahatma Gandhi preached a powerful message of non-violence that eventually brought the sun down on the mighty British Empire. Gandhi often said: “You must open the windows of your mind, but you must not be swept off your feet by the breeze.”

I asked you today – Define what your core values are. What do you stand for? These values are not so difficult to define. Values like honesty, integrity, integrity, consideration for others and humility has survived for generations and is needed in ever greater measure in our world today. Values are not embodied in the words used to describe them but are rather manifested in our actions. At the end of the day, your values will define you.

Let me share with you a compelling example of values at work.

There was once a newspaper vendor who had a rude customer. Every morning, the customer would walk by, refuse to return the greeting, grab the paper off the shelf and throw the money at the vendor. The vendor would pick up the money, smile politely and say, “Thank you, Sir.” One day, the vendor’s assistant asked him “Why are you always so polite to him when he is so rude to you? Why don’t you throw the newspaper at him when he comes back tomorrow?” The vendor smiled and replied, “He can’t help being rude and I can’t help being polite. Why should I let his rude behavior dictate my politeness? The newspaper vendor stood for his values no matter what was thrown in his path.

Always remember that it is your attitude and not your aptitude that determines your altitude in life. It is easy and cheap to be arrogant and a snob. It requires strength of character to be charitable even to your detractors and to embrace the less privileged.

Personal integrity is about the values you do not compromise. It is about your believability, because if people do not believe in you, they will never believe anything you say, and you will fail as a leader. Integrity is about where you stand in times of challenge not comfort. In difficult time, will you be compromised or not?

Integrity is also about your good name. William Shakespeare, at this point, I urge you to read and re read any of his plays for the wisdom they contain. Shakespeare once said that, 'he who steals my wallet steals my trash. But he who steals my good name, has stolen everything.' Shakespeare was right: your good name is about your integrity. It is about whether you can be trusted, whether you mean what you say and say what you mean. It is about whether you are competent in what you say you can do.

My friends, integrity is about more than earning respect. Indeed, there is a definition of I will re quote "Integrity is all about how we meet challenge of doing the right thing when that act will cost more than we want to pay."

My sixth lesson is:

Success is most satisfying when it is earned.

A friend was sharing with me the story of his eight year old niece. She would always complain about breakfast. The cook tried everything possible, but the child remained unhappy. Finally, my friend took the child to the supermarket and bought one of those ready-to-cook packets.

The child had to cut the packet and pour water in the dish. After that, it took two minutes in the microwave and breakfast was ready. The child found the food to be absolutely delicious! The difference was that she has cooked it!

In my own life, I have found that nothing gives me as much satisfaction as earning my rewards. In fact, what we get for free or inherit follows the old rule of “easy come; easy go”.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are no short cuts in life. So, do not be tempted by them. The short cut can make you loose your way and end up becoming the longest way to the destination, that is to say if you reach it at all. Whatever your choice of career, apprenticeship is a must.

To achieve success in your careers you must put in every effort to master the required skill set. There is only one instance that I can think of in this world where the word “success” comes before “work” and that is in the English dictionary.

I compare a successful career to a tall ladder. You can only climb to the top by placing your feet firmly on every step of the ladder. With success comes another important lesson in leadership, humility.

If I was to ask you to describe someone who is not humble, I bet the description would include the following:

- “too full of himself”
- “super-size egos”
- They walk, talk and present themselves as if to say ‘we have arrived”

The Americans call this “ego-tripping”. And trust me, foolish and empty pride comes before a fall. In life, you would find that the more powerful you are, the more humble you should be.

As Abraham Lincoln, a man who tried, tried, and succeeded because he did not give up said:

“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”

Humility is the corner stone of successful leadership.

My seventh lesson is:

Persevere! Even when failure is staring you in the face.

I can give you a number of examples for men and women who gave up the fight at the first sight of failure. I do not know of any successful person who has not had his or her fair share of setbacks and failures. Sometimes we all would like to rewrite the script to suggest that it has all been smooth sailing! When I have had setbacks or failures giving up have never been part of my DNA. In all cases, I have persevered, regardless of the odds.

I must admit that sometimes the odds appear most overwhelming. But never throw in the towel. See any setback as a challenge to be overcome. Samuel Johnson, the early American college president once said:  
“Few things are impossible to diligence. Great works are performed not by strength; but perseverance.”

What I can tell you from my experience is that there is nothing that is impossible, I am not saying that achieving the possible is easy. Overnight, nothing is possible but overtime, the impossible becomes possible. So strive today therefore to persevere in all that you do. When you are faced with adversity, resolve to wrestle victory from the jaws of defeat.

My friends, you do not drown by falling into water, you drown by staying there. Leadership is about perseverance and as Benjamin Disraeli, a former British prime minister once said, “nothing can withstand the power of the human will if it is willing to stake its very existence to the extent of its purpose.”

Perseverance is the answer.

Now let me share with you a compelling example of sheer perseverance:  
Abraham Lincoln.

- 1832 – Lost his job
- 1832 – Defeated for state legislature
- 1833 – Failed in business
- 1834 – Elected to state legislature
- 1835 – Sweetheart died
- 1836 – Had nervous breakdown
- 1838 – Defeated for Speaker
- 1843 – Defeated for nomination for Congress
- 1846 – Elected to Congress
- 1848 – Lost re-nomination to Congress
- 1849 – Rejected for Land Officer
- 1854 – Defeated for U.S. Senate
- 1856 – Defeated for nomination for Vice President
- 1858 – Again defeated for U.S. Senate

## 1860 – Elected President

Life has many challenges. You win some and lose some. Enjoy winning! But do not let it go to your head. The moment it does, you are already on your way to failure.

And if you do encounter failure along the way, you will, we all do, treat it as an equally natural phenomenon. Don't beat yourself up for it or anyone else! Accept it, look at how and what you contributed to the problem, learn from it and move on. The important thing is, when you lose, you do not lose the lesson.

My eighth lesson is:

Learn to respond instead of reacting.

Arguably, the animal instinct is to react but reasoned human beings respond. When one reacts, one ends up doing what the other person wants you to do irrespective of the outcome. To respond is to evaluate with a calm mind and do whatever is most appropriate. We are, and should be in control of our actions.

Sometimes our challenges appear overwhelming and it is easy to feel helpless, hopeless, frustrated and frankly to want to give up. You must never give up! Indeed, we must persevere with tenacity and commitment!

My ninth lesson is:

Success is a different result of team effort, and it takes all sorts to make a team. I always liken a leader's role to that of a conductor of an orchestra. His primary responsibility is to ensure that the team plays in

total harmony. His challenge is to get the best out of every body. Egos would have to be managed, conflicts resolved and hurt feelings smoothed. A leader must have the heart to rise above personal feeling, forgive mistakes and pull the team together. Contrary to what most people believe, it is not a weakness to have a big and forgiving heart. A good leader must be conciliator and in this regard, we can learn from the example of Nelson Mandela.

In explaining to me why Black South Africans had been so forgiving after apartheid, a young Johannesburg based barber told me and I quote: “if whilst walking, you continuously look over your shoulder, you run the real danger of tripping over your own feet.”

Leaders, real leaders, look at the big picture; indeed, we must use the lessons of the past to guide our future actions.

We live in interesting times. The world is changing at an incredible pace. What appears to be modern technology today becomes obsolete in an instant. To make a success of these challenging times, I urge you to always think outside the box.

A leader should always confront change, question the status quo and never take “no” for an answer, especially when confronted with what appears to be, at least initially, a problem that cannot be resolved.

Rudyard Kipling, I have quoted him previously, in another of his poems  
“Six Honest Men” said it brilliantly:

“I keep six honest serving men  
They taught me all I knew;

Their names we What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.

I send them over land and sea  
I send them East and West;

But after they have worked for me  
I give them all a rest.”

I often tell my people that one of these six men always has a solution to most of our problems – it is just a case of asking the right questions in the right order. In essence, a leader must be inquisitive, capable of asking probing questions and must dare to be different.

A good leader is one who leads the crowd and not one that follows it. A good leader has the optical powers of an eagle. When it flies high, an eagle has a good view of the landscape below, yet it can spot a prey from several hundred meters above the ground and fly down to catch it with precision. Whatever you end up doing, my advice to you is that you must always look at the big picture, whilst maintaining a sharp focus on those relevant issues of detail. As I said previously, ‘Play the long game.’

During these challenging times, and there will be more than one of them in your lives, your character and convictions will be tested but always remember the most important quality you should never have to compromise is honest. The old adage has it that “honesty is the best policy.”

The great twentieth century explorer and leader Ernest Shackleton once said about honesty and honor thus:

“Life to me is the greatest of all games.  
The danger lies in treating it as a survival game,  
A game to be taken lightly,  
And a game in which the rules don't matter much  
The rules matter a great deal.  
The game has to be played fairly or it is no game at all.  
And even to win the game is not the chief end.  
The chief end is to win honorably and splendidly.”

Indeed honesty is about what you will do when no one is looking.

Herbert Macaulay, the nineteenth-century British historian, professed that: “the measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he would never be found out.”

We all know that cheating and lying are dishonest and eventually lead to failure and disgrace. My friends, we have all heard the saying that “winners never cheat and cheaters never win,” yet, there are many in our society today who believe that the best way to get ahead is to cheat. How wrong they are. So strive today to be honest and when you become leaders in this society or internationally, commit yourself to stay honest. You will be rewarded abundantly in name, measure and in deed.

My tenth and final lesson is:

Always strive for excellence.

One way of achieving excellence is by looking at those better than ourselves. Keep learning what they do differently. Emulate it. Seek advice from outstanding people.

But excellence cannot be imposed from the outside. We must also feel the need from within. It must become an obsession and a passion. It must involve not only our mind but also our heart and soul Excellence is not an act but a habit.

Your reach must always exceed your grasp. That is heaven on earth. Ultimately, your only competition is yourself.

Here I will paraphrase the words of the French philosopher Voltaire, his summary of the wisdom of life is well known but little applied.

Simply put, each player must accept the cards life gives him or her. But once they are in hand, he or she alone must decide how to play the cards in order to win the game.

What is important in life is not what you have, but what you do with what you have. Successful people and countries do not ask why they get the kind of cards they have, but simply concentrate on “How can I play with to win?”

In closing, I will urge you to begin today to instill some of these leadership lessons in you. Lessons that have been learnt from life in Ghana which have been reinforced by the philosophies I have studied abroad. Don't wait until tomorrow because when tomorrow finally comes it is called today and today will be too late because you lost yesterday which was tomorrow.

In parting I say thank you in a deep sense of gratitude to this University for inviting me for this honor and the opportunity to share some thoughts and experiences with you graduands and students.

May you have warm words on a cold evening, a full moon on a dark night, and the road downhill all the way to your door.

Thank You.