

## **Antigua and Barbuda Institute for Continuing Education (ABICE)**

### **2009 Graduation**

#### **Speech delivered by:**

**Hon. Dr. Jacqui Quinn Leandro**

**Minister of Education, Sports, Youth & Gender Affairs**

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Today, I speak words of particular pride and encouragement because the graduands of this institution are special people. I want to honour you for clearing the hurdles that you have and making the determination that your life is of worth. Your graduation today pays tribute to your belief in self and your belief in getting up, dusting off and moving on. It states loudly that you are just too good and too smart to stop when you have just barely begun. Today is evidence of a bright future for you because you have demonstrated that there is a strong sense of responsibility that you possess and a spirit that cannot be killed.

Whenever I am invited to events like this I am always moved to share that I am a champion of education. Being the product of teachers I am unsure whether I am naturally that way or I am as a result of indoctrination. However, I know how availing myself to learning opportunities has enhanced my life and has prepared me to step through any open door. Success is not a science; it is simply hard work and focus, and once you have prepared yourself then you are dressed to meet the opportunity.

ABICE offers an opportunity that many have not taken advantage of, but you graduands caught the dream and settled into the driver's seat of your

own destiny; this is why I am so proud of you. This is not secondary school where you go because your parents have sent you; this is a choice you have made as young adults to continue what got interrupted along the way. Life is a personal journey that you should ride to success; and success is a personal determination. You have the power to make your dreams come true and today part of your dream is coming true.

To me, graduations are a time when you are reflective. It is that bridge on which you pause and look back from whence you came and ahead to where you want to go. In essence, it is the ending of a chapter which signals the beginning of another. Graduation is clothed in excitement over your recent milestone and trepidation about what lies ahead. But I daresay that's a good thing. Not having the comfort of the familiar means that you are on the move.

Achieving in the face of adversity has its merit at every stage of life because life is not an easy journey. It is no walk through the park. I am moved to tell you this not only because it is true but because you must be prepared to fight and persist to get ahead. Along the way you will encounter people who will test you; circumstances that will try you and make you second-guess yourself; perhaps feel like abandoning this journey. The world is big and competitive and the path isn't always clear but I ask that when you are feeling defeated that you remember all the hope you are feeling right now, right here at this very moment.

Dig deep and remember that you have cleared obstacles before and possess the ability to clear them again. For all of the people who threw daggers of negatives at you throughout your lives, like; you will amount to nothing; or you are not smart enough; today is your day to tell them "just take a look at me now."

Nothing bad comes out of an education. Knowledge is power and it simply equips you for the realities of life. Nothing in an education is ever wasted. It is always there ready and waiting to be tapped into; to be executed. Education is personal enhancement which can be used for professional advancement. When we are equipped, we are able to make informed decisions. We are able to decipher for ourselves the myriad challenges that life throws us and to direct our paths picking our way carefully. There is less chance of the wool being pulled over your eyes. Being educated polishes you with a confidence and assuredness that is unmatched.

I know by now you have heard of the government's plans for the University of Antigua and Barbuda. As Minister of Education and as an Antiguan, it is a development that I am overly excited and happy about. The time has come in our history and social development to upgrade our educational landscape; to paint it in tertiary colours. The greatest gift a government can give its people is the wings of knowledge. When graduates walk through the doors of ABIIT, ABICE, Antigua State College the School of Nursing or the Hospitality Institute, it must be through the open doors of our own University. The chance to earn a degree will be had right here in our own twin island state.

My hope for you is that you do not stop here. The world is your oyster if only you would persevere a little longer. I never miss an appropriate opportunity to tell students that yours truly was not the brightest student in my class. What came naturally to some of my classmates I had to work twice as hard to achieve. I was fortunate that my realization came early. I realized that if I wanted to reap the benefits of a good education then I had to do my part. I would never tell anyone it was an easy task because it wasn't. But I would tell everyone that it was worth it. Every sleepless night of study; every single class; all of the sacrifices pursuing

higher learning require. It is not going to fall into your lap. You cannot reap the benefits of success without putting in the time, energy and effort.

ABICE now has a new board that is eager, perhaps salivating even, to make better what is good and realize new ideas, headed by renowned educator, Mr. Lesroy Merchant. As Minister of Education, Sports, Youth and Gender Affairs, I am committed to taking education in Antigua and Barbuda to a new place, to making a difference in education. As time moves, things change and so if we are to be competitive in this global village we cannot afford to be a stagnant society. Executing these plans to move this entire educational system forward will, with certainty have mammoth challenges. I have never been one to back away from a challenge and when I look at your faces here this afternoon I find even more inspiration. We are going to do this because we have an obligation to you, the nationals of this fair land.

Be proud of yourselves, I am proud of you. The Ministry is proud of you. Your teachers are proud of you. Mr. Gilbert is beaming with pride for you. There are some people somewhere, family members, friends, a neighbour or acquaintances who are looking at you now and telling themselves that if you can do it, then so can they. Someone that you may be unaware of is finding inspiration in you.

Graduands,

The Caricom Single Market, CSM a vexing reality though it may be to some, is here. Our turf has become everybody's turf and each prospective job fair game. How do you win? How do you get ahead? How do you make yourselves more marketable? Simple: You make yourself the best person for the job. Had you not chosen to continue your education you may have been somewhere at this very moment involved

in something negative or perhaps working in a job for wages that can barely support you. But education is empowerment. Education places in your hands the bargaining power necessary to get ahead in life. You can demand your worth and receive equal pay for the skills you bring to the table. In addition, you help to build this nation by contributing to society. The youth must carry the torch of leadership in Antigua and Barbuda. Why not you?

I have to leave here immediately to attend another graduation; the Antigua State College to deliver another keynote speech. But I had to accept this invitation because it was important for me to tell you just how immensely proud I am of you for staying the course. In time to come you will understand better how important your decision to attend ABICE was.

Hold your heads high and go forth being good citizens leading productive lives. Believe that you can attain anything because it is true. Nothing is beyond you as long as you believe you can. Make your teachers and instructors proud by making good use of the tools given you at your time here at ABICE.

I leave you with the words of Milton Berle: If opportunity doesn't knock, then build a door.

On behalf of the Ministry of Education, Sports , Youth & Gender Affairs, heartiest Congratulations!!!

May God bless you all.

