



**ADDRESS**

**BY**

**HON. DAVID THOMPSON, Q.C., M.P  
PRIME MINISTER OF BARBADOS**

**AT THE**

**12<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL HRMAB CONFERENCE**

**ON**

**OCTOBER 21<sup>ST</sup> 2009**

**AT**

**THE LLOYD  
ERSKINE SANDIFORD CENTRE**

**"ORGANIZATIONAL RENEWAL, MANAGING PEOPLE,  
MANAGING CHANGE"**

Congratulations to HRMAB Inc. on getting to the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary milestone of your founding in 1996!

Twelve years may be a short time in the life of an institution but it is a significant achievement in an era of organizational renewal or demise, for a modernizing organization dedicated to making Barbados Better in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Thank you for your service to Barbados in focussing on our most valuable resource and helping to professionalize Human Resource Management during this period of rapid change.

It is no co-incidence that your organization was founded in the very year when the post-Independence generation, those people who were born after 1966 were reaching maturity.

It is a natural social response to the great expectations of that generation, a brave attempt to meet the needs of a generation that was expected to fulfil the hopes and dreams of their parents, their grandparents and their more distant ancestors.

As you may remember the 1990's were trying times when the workers of Barbados flexed their muscles with serious political consequences.

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially its closing years are even more testing.

Since the second half of 2008 we have been confronted by the worst economic recession we have experienced since the 1930's and once again the workers of Barbados are becoming restless.

Your intervention with a Conference entitled "*Organizational Renewal, Managing People, Managing Change*" could not be more relevant.

I don't have to remind you of the cumulative technological revolution and advances in trade liberalization which are creating a global, highly competitive village market-place.

As we speak the scramble for scarce resources and the competition for markets are creating serious tensions throughout the world. People and their natural habitats are paying the price for this modern predatory thrust and unfair carve-up of the globe.

Nearly every single problem we have experienced in recent years, including military conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, grinding poverty in Africa, global warming and freak weather calamities in the Far East, can be attributed to this.

In particular, the global recession can be ascribed to the unregulated release of greed and piracy in major metropolitan centres.

Needless for me to say, small open economies and fragile eco-systems like ours in the Caribbean are extremely vulnerable to these external forces.

You do not have to be Nostradamus to accurately predict that at the end of the current recession, a larger number of super-powers, no doubt drawn from the G20 Club, will have emerged.

These countries will have the capacity to produce the standard goods and services in demand in the global market place. These new workshops and boardrooms of the world will be able to mass-produce and deliver consumer goods and services at prices, quantities, qualities and in a timeframes that are highly competitive.

To put it bluntly we run the risk of a “jobless recovery”. We who live in developing countries may very soon read and hear of “world economic recovery” while large numbers of our workers remain idle.

World Wars have been caused by less dramatic changes in the lives people who felt wronged.

To prevent social and political disasters following these developments we have to think outside the box.

To begin with, we have to safeguard the inalienable rights and freedoms of our people.

We have to guarantee their right to housing, their right to education, their right to work, and their right to a decent standard of living.

It is for this reason that your government has been pre-occupied with strengthening the **SOCIAL SAFETY NET**, to prevent Barbadians from suffering unnecessarily during this recession, the worst aspects of which may yet to come.

We have been accused of spending money on “certain DLP priorities” during this period of austerity. These accusations accurately reveal our philosophy of **PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST**.

Yes, the way out of a recession is to invest heavily in our human resources, because we believe and we know that it is the people of a country who contribute most to recovery and if given a chance, will guarantee the sustainable development of their nation.

I therefore wholeheartedly endorse your commitment to education and training. Indeed I want to go further by stressing that that education and training should be meaningful. Based on your aims and objectives, you are naturally a part of Team Barbados.

I believe that the time has come for us revisit the relationship between the employer and the employee.

Can we afford the luxury of perceiving that relationship as a war between two implacable foes?

Can we afford to be pulling in different directions in times of crisis?

Obviously this is a topic that has engaged the minds of our best philosophers and economists. But I insist that we all have to take a hard look at the received wisdom and find workable solutions to this perennial problem.

I believe that we also have to revisit our perception the role of the worker in both the private and public sectors. I don't have to remind you of the challenges we are experiencing in changing the mindset of some public workers who hold certain out-dated or politically motivated beliefs.

The point is that we cannot continue in the brave new world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to operate on the assumption that a Government or any other job is a sinecure.

Our workers simply have to become more efficient and more productive..... or we shall stagnate and perish as a nation.

We have to change the mindset of our people.

I often reflect on the old adage that at any time of the day at the workplace, the ordinary worker is thinking of how much he enjoyed himself last weekend, while the Supervisor is worrying about how he could get his workers to stop day-dreaming or chatting or sending email messages to their friends and start producing, while the Manager is trying to secure next month's orders.

The challenge before us is to get the average worker to begin to think like a Supervisor and hopefully like a Manager.

You have to help us to train more and more of our people to identify with Management, to produce more and to plan ahead.

You have to help us to get workers to adopt the iterative process and ask themselves every day how they could improve their efficiency.

They cannot forever assume that someone will turn up on a white charger and create jobs for them. They can no longer assume that they can forever sit down on the job. Those jobs are being outsourced to distant lands; and in some cases are being taken by more industrious migrant workers before our very eyes.

The truth is that it no longer makes economic sense to tolerate idleness on the shop-floor.

Yes, workers have rights and Governments have an obligation to protect these rights. But there is another side to the coin.

In the current context and in the foreseeable future Barbadians will have to become more productive, show greater creativity and pursue excellence in all their endeavours if we are to continue on the trajectory of growth we have experienced since 1961.

We have to do things differently if we are to continue to enjoy the high standards of living to which we have become accustomed.

Ladies and Gentlemen I am challenging this little nation that has traditionally astounded the world by repeatedly punching above its size and overcoming the last and most difficult hurdle on the way to developed country status.

I am reminding this nation that **“to whom much has been given, more is expected”**.

I am stating that we are expecting great returns from the heavy investment in education, training and social services which have been made since 1961.

I am daring Barbadians to join Team Barbados and focus on the economic enfranchisement that has eluded us since the abolition of slavery.

I believe that the current economic recession, even though it poses serious threats to our way of life, even though it is bringing much hardship to our people, offers us the opportunity and indeed the necessity to show what stuff we are made of.

Can we rise to the occasion and find a creative response to the consequences of a deepening recession?

Can we cultivate a culture of enterprise and learn how to create wealth and employment using whatever resources we have at our disposal?

Can we identify niches in the market, in which we have a comparative advantage?

How feasible is it for us to use our better educated workforce to diversify our tourism product, develop our financial services sector, and achieve food security in the short run and food sovereignty in the long run by using modern technology?

How successful can we be in getting more and more school-leavers to consider self employment in growth industries as a serious option?

There is no doubt whatsoever that we have to create employment that is commensurate with the better education which every generation since Independence has enjoyed.

That is the challenge facing contemporary leaders in Barbados. And that is the challenge facing the members of this dynamic organization.

I am convinced that this is the only way we can reduce the growing alienation of our young people from the mainstream of our society. That is the only way to tackle the related anti-social behaviour that is manifesting itself so shamelessly in our streets. That is the way to deal with the other social pathologies that occupy the front pages of our newspapers.

Ladies and gentlemen, the only way we can successfully make the leap to developed country status is to abandon the old world-view of what constitutes a “decent job”.

We cannot operate on the basis that in today’s world, employers and employees can continue to operate and relate to each other as though it is “business as usual”.

Employers have an obligation to value and reward the contributions of their most productive employees. And workers need to acquire a stake in the businesses to which they give the best years of their lives. No doubt a convergence of perspectives is necessary for this to begin to happen.

I believe that HRMAB has a vital role to play not only in improving industrial relations but in motivating ordinary Barbadians to develop and inculcate the culture of enterprise.

I therefore want to thank you for all you are already doing in pursuit of these common objectives. Thank you for reminding your members that in the current recession, when we find ourselves in a hole the first thing we must do is stop digging. Stop doing what comes to mind first.

Thank you for advocating counter-cyclical measures to get us out of this hole.

Thank you for reminding your members and your clients to think and act strategically.

Thank you for helping Barbados to manage the dramatic changes that are taking place around us, to stabilize the current situation and plan for recovery.

I wish you well in all your endeavours at this conference ..... and in the Better Barbados that is just there on the horizon.