

**FINAL FOR CIRCULATION**

**SPEECH FOR NATIONAL ALUMNI DAY 2021**

**BY DOUGLAS ORANE**

**AT 6PM ON WEDNESDAY 13 OCTOBER 2021**

**Paying it Forward: Partners in Improving Education in Jamaica.**

It is a pleasure and an honour to be your guest speaker today. Carla Myrie, president of the Jamaica Alumni Association of High Schools contacted me to bring you this speech. I was thrilled to know I would be interacting with my fellow Jamaicans of like mind, who are committed to the education of our young people. In my retirement, people often comment: “Doug, how come you’re so busy? I thought you were retired!” My reply is a simple one: “I’ve dedicated my life to helping the younger generation. Why? Because so many did the same for me decades ago when I was a youngster, and now it’s my turn to give forward”.

We Jamaicans have developed a culture of support for our schools which in many ways is unique. In my travels, I haven’t come across another country which has such a vibrant, energetic network of school alumni associations giving wholehearted support to the country’s schools at every level. In particular, it’s amazing the level of emotional commitment to our country by the diaspora. So the time is now right to formalize the vibrancy of this network through the proclamation of National Alumni Day and its associated activities.

In doing my research for this speech, I was struck by the motto for the Union of Jamaican Alumni Associations USA, UJAA, in the tri-state area. “Education is empowerment: only the educated are free.” I add a quote from Marcus Garvey “Liberate the minds of men and women and ultimately you will liberate the bodies of men and women”. I can assure you there is hardly anything more satisfying in my life today than the joy and pleasure I have in helping and guiding young people to become productive adult citizens. In my interactions with my fellow Jamaicans as I encourage them to become involved, I ask them this question “What percentage of your net worth is because of your school and the Jamaican education that you received? Is it 5%, 10%, 20%, 50%? Surely not 0%!” Whatever it is, it is time to give forward by repaying with gratitude the dividends on that investment in us, to the institutions that have made us what we are.

There is a special urgency for us to act now in a much more concerted way. There are two major factors at play. Firstly, the digitalization of our society, and our way of life, is increasing exponentially. Secondly, the Covid 19 pandemic is dramatically accelerating the rate of change. We need to help our young people prepare for a world where it is predicted that in ten years time, many if not most of the jobs in different industries, will not exist in their present form, because newly developed fields of endeavor are being created as we speak. Data analytics, coding, genome sequencing, artificial intelligence, green energy, robotics, the ability to immerse oneself in lifelong learning, all of these are trends that are here right now. The risk that we face is that we act too slowly. Then our next generation of Jamaicans will be left behind, ill-equipped to fit in a world that is being created with new skill sets for which they have not been prepared.

How will we do this together? The answer is simple; through effective organisation, building our emotional ties with each other as alumni, bonding more closely to the educational institutions which we support, and most importantly committing ourselves to the wellbeing of the children and educators in those institutions. Going forward the task of our adult generation is effective fundraising, mentoring, counselling, career guidance, social support and all that is needed to make our educational institutions truly successful in a twenty-first century environment. I am inspired by the words of my friend and Jamaican-Canadian, the late G. Raymond Chang, one of the most generous entrepreneurs and philanthropists I have ever met. Ray said: “At the end of the day, a good life is not measured by the amount of wealth you have accumulated. It is evaluated according to the contributions you have made to society – of yourself first and of your resources next.” I am inspired by Ray’s example as I travel through this stage of my life.

In this context, let me share with you seven of my learnings over the years in finding ways for successful fundraising for our Jamaican schools.

1. Friendraising first, fundraising after. This is the most important rule in fundraising. Build the emotional commitment between your alumni and your schools first, and the money will flow after.
2. Be self-confident! Many people are secretly paranoid about asking others for money. The way to overcome this is by practice. Keep doing it repeatedly and it becomes enjoyable.
3. Do not treat rejection as failure. Raising donations for a school is very similar to selling life insurance – the individuals who pay out the money do not see an immediate benefit

to their own personal lives, but others will in due time. Do not get despondent when people say no, they are just not ready to give yet.

4. Always ask for more than you think the individual can give, and make it a specific amount. You may be surprised on occasions that they will actually give the amount you asked for. If you ask for too little you will never know whether you could have received a larger donation.
5. Never beg! You are opening a wonderful door for donors to connect with the institutions that we all love and treasure. Remove that verb “beg” from your vocabulary. Say instead: “It’s an honour and privilege for us to be able to give forward to the younger generation, so please do so now”.
6. Say “I have already given”. But it has to be true! It’s an incredibly powerful opening statement to say I have given. We do indeed have to demonstrate our faith in what we are doing by leading from in front.
7. Say “Thank you”. You cannot say thank you enough. Do so verbally, in writing, by social media, and promptly. Remember that this is an essential part of the reward that donors receive after their participation.

Let’s reflect for a moment on which institutions we will focus our attention. We are fortunate to have dozens of excellent schools in Jamaica at different levels. However, we need to recognize that, if we have a thousand schools in Jamaica, we need to make them a thousand great schools. The most important advantage for our society and our children is to lift the performance of those schools, which have the greatest potential for improvement, up to the level of the best performing schools. This is what equality of opportunity is all about. As an example, our recent Wolmer’s telethon raised funds not only for Wolmer’s, but also for neighbouring schools Alman Town Primary and Central Branch All Age.

I am married to an early childhood teacher and so I have seen, firsthand, the power of early childhood education in creating productive well-rounded individuals. I’m happy to see that organisations within your fold are not only assisting high schools but also basic schools and primary schools. A decade ago, I came across the seminal work of a Nobel prize winner named James Heckman who demonstrated that a one dollar investment in early childhood education results in a return to society of seventeen dollars in later years. When I heard this statement, I said to myself “Wow, I need to find more investments like this!” What Professor Heckman demonstrated is that investment in early childhood education not only creates a better educated young person but has spin off effects in terms of better coping skills, mastery of language, better family dynamics, reducing antisocial behaviour among young people on

reaching adulthood, and a host of other benefits for the society including a more productive work force, greater economic growth, lower crime rates, smaller prison populations and consequently substantial savings for taxpayers. Professor Heckman, ironically, is not an educator – he’s an economist. What he has demonstrated is that the capital value of learning is incredibly high, and produces returns far greater than any of us could get in any stock market or real estate or any other investment. And here is our role – to convince the rest of our society that this is actually true.

One final suggestion for your consideration. At the other end of the spectrum from early childhood education is tertiary education. Our aging generation generously devotes a lot of our time and treasure to assisting our young people to graduate with college degrees, and afterwards to become significant income earners. The question some of us are asking is this: “Is this new generation similarly imbued with a sense of philanthropy to help others less fortunate, once they are more financially settled?” Some may, others may not. Perhaps some of them have not grown up like us in a family environment which has taught the link between productive social values and philanthropy. This is a crucial factor for ensuring our work and our organisations continue long into the future. Let us therefore explicitly encourage these young graduates soon after leaving college to continue the relay of life that we have initiated, by them in turn contributing to an even younger person in need, to complete their tertiary education.

I have a friend who has taken this another step, which you may wish to consider. She is incredibly generous in helping individuals at the tertiary level. She has these beneficiaries sign a written document, a promissory note, committing them to give back a contribution equal to the one they received from her when they were undergraduates. The promissory note states that they will help another young person within three years of their having entered the world of work.

The times are changing in the way values are formed and embedded in our modern culture, and so every creative idea to shape these values is worthy of exploration. The African saying is “It takes a village to raise a child”. We need to find every possible way to instill in the younger generation that they are not only beneficiaries, but also sustainers of that village.

We are on a great adventure to change our country for the better. I close with the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

I thank you.