

Reforming the Workforce

Traditionally in the English Speaking Caribbean, persons who pursued careers in the medical, legal, teaching, nursing and banking sectors were the toast of the society. It was this group of persons that was deemed as the educated elite. Entry into any one of these professions was seen as the gate way to social mobility. The idea that members of this group has a claim to be designated as the educated elite, and are a special group within the social structure may have since become a notion of the past. With the advent of free secondary education, the snobbery that existed where only a chosen few attended so called prestigious schools has now become a thing of the past.

As fate would have it, the medical, legal, teaching, nursing and even banking sectors have been over saturated and to some extent, are seemingly losing their appeal as the first choice careers by students pursuing studies at the university level. The reality is that technology revolution has taken over the world and some of those so called less academically inclined, are seizing the opportunity to rise to the top of the revenue earning ladder. Although it may be hard to accept, it nonetheless would seem that many of those who are employed within the informal sector are moving at a fast pace up the social ladder.

This has all come about because of change. Change has always been said to be inevitable. History will recall that our forefathers who were brought from the African continent were forced to work on the plantation fields as slaves. They struggled to change that to the point of becoming peasant farmers. Ever since the social revolution of the 1930's in the Caribbean, the struggle has been directed at empowerment of the people. Through education there is now an educated workforce. Members of this educated workforce have been encouraged to be enterprising, and hence the push by the political directorate to promote entrepreneurship. This encouragement clearly is directed at promoting a business culture. This inevitably means that the average man and woman will have access to capital.

Gone are the days where traditional professions will continue to dominate. However, it is an established fact that their importance cannot be overlooked. It would seem that there are imminent threats which loom around them. Can these professions continue to be attractive to the brightest and best? Are they the lucrative professions they once were? Will the cost of a university education be a determining factor in ruining the aspirations, hopes, dreams and ambitions of those, who hoped to benefit from state funding education?

In an oversaturated labour market, these are concerns which in the short term may not appear to be relevant. As time goes by and the passing out parade begins to take its toll, the need to replenish these professions will become obvious. It therefore requires some careful planning with respect to the country's manpower needs, in order to ensure that the situation does not go from one extreme to another, as is currently the case.

The quest for social mobility shouldn't rest simply on the attainment of a blue or white collar job, but on availing of oneself with an education that allows the individual to make best use of their skills, talents and capabilities towards achieving sustainable and rewarding employment. Whilst there remains some real fears about the declining attractiveness of the traditional professions based on the remuneration and benefits they offer, what remains certain, is that these vocations are here to stay.