

## Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

### Convocation Speech- 29/12/2015

Venerable Chancellor,

Vice- Chancellor, Deans and Heads of the Faculties, Members of the Senate and the Council, Members of the Academic and Non-academic Staff, Distinguished Guests, Parents and Graduates.

First of all I take this opportunity to thank the Vice Chancellor, Dean, Heads and Members of the Board of the Faculty of Management Studies, and members of the Convocation Committee of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka for inviting me to deliver the 2015 Convocation address and to participate as the Chief Guest for the Evening Session in this memorable and prestigious event. I consider it a great honour bestowed upon me and it is a privilege for me to share some thoughts with you, on this vital occasion in your lives, wherein you are assembled, after several years of strenuous studies, to secure your degree. Let me congratulate all the graduates! To secure a Degree from a state university is a great achievement in one's life.

I was requested to deliver the address based on my own life experiences. I reflected on certain experiences of my life which may be useful for you and wish to present them in terms of lessons.

#### **Lesson Number 1- Don't Get Frustrated and Afraid of a Destitute and Underprivileged Environment.**

Lack of resources in the environment will force you to work more and cause you to suffer. However, consider the suffering positively and it is a prerequisite to reach a great success. Without complaining, explore opportunities and you will find certain sources of assistance enabling you to strive for your expected success. To achieve a good level of success in an underprivileged setting is better (or more praiseworthy) than achieving an excellent level of success in a privileged setting. I received my primary education in Thiththawelgolla Junior School which had only two small buildings one of which had a roof made of woven coconut fronds under which I started my formal learning. When I was reading for my G.C.E. (A/L) examination at Dambulla Maha Viduhala in Matale District there were numerous hardships. One such hardship was a dearth of graduate teachers to teach two essential subjects i.e. *Commerce & Finance* and *Accountancy*. This compelled me to search relevant books and learning material. Indeed I engaged in extensive and rigorous self studying without attending any form of private tuition, though then private A/L tuition education was getting popular in the country. Lack of continuous transport facility was another hardship which compelled me to walk more than three miles to the school from one telephone post to the next and then running from the next telephone post to the other and so on. Indeed this improved my health. Lack of proper formal guidance caused me to engage in my own dreaming toward my future. As there was no examination centre in my school I had to travel by bus for 28 miles to Matale Mandandawella School where my A/L examination was held. Finally it was possible for me to

get the best results in the Commerce Stream from the GCE A/L examination in the Matale district in 1980 and enter the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ) in 1981 to read for B.Sc. Business Administration (Special) Degree as the first student of Dambulla Maha Viduhala who could enter the university in Commerce Stream and as the only student who could enter a university in that year.

### **Lesson Number 2- Never Give Up Your Endeavour to Achieve Your Desired Employment Goal though You Receive Failures.**

Failures are inevitable in life. They give lessons to you to learn. Careful examinations of your failures enable you to ascertain reasons for failures: they may be your weaknesses, blunders, and of course improper systems and practices being followed by others who are not ethical persons. I had a goal of becoming a university academic. I had to face an interview for the post of Assistant Lecturer in Business Administration at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 1986 and I was rejected. Two candidates from my batch (there were 5 top candidates including myself) were selected and it was surprised to note that both had not done the independent research and had not been competent in English Language. By that time, teaching had been not only in Sinhala but also in English. Not selecting gave a heavy frustration to me. I was able to understand that I had not obtained any political back up (internal) to be selected. In the batch I was the only person who had done the independent study in English and had secured an 'A' grade for it from Mr. R.A.A. Perera (who was an excellent academic who later became an Associate Professor in Business). However I did not give up my efforts to the achievement of that goal. Again I faced an interview for the post of Assistant Lecturer in Business Administration at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 1987. Out of about 12 candidates, two individuals including myself were selected. However, I was not fully satisfied as it had been a temporary appointment. By that time, the Faculty had a new policy of hiring on temporary basis. For the third time I had to face another interview conducted by the university for the post of Assistant Lecturer in Business Administration in January 1989. When I came to the interview I had been a Class III Officer in the Educational Administrative Service to which I had been selected through a very competitive selection process on 01.09.1988, and I was selected as a permanent Assistant Lecturer with effect from 03.04.1989.

### **Lesson Number 3- When there are Options to Choose, Evaluate Each Option as per Your Values and Interests, not Others'.**

Don't decide owing to the mere reason that majority of people have decided. Remember that many attitudes our people have in respect of jobs, fields of education etc are inappropriate. Choose to work at something you prefer, something which gives a real pleasure to you, something you really love to do. It may not be the best one, one of the best ones or a better one in terms of popularity or economic value. It does not matter. What matters is proper matching with your values and interests. I turned down several career opportunities including Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service and Sri Lanka Administrative Service to pursue a career in university teaching because it had the highest matching with my personal values and interests. As far as my university teaching career is concerned, I could have specialized in

Accounting, Finance or Marketing. Instead I decided to specialize in HRM even though it was then not a popular field of Business Management and also it was the field of Management most neglected in industry in Sri Lanka.

#### **Lesson Number 4- Perform the Current Job Excellently.**

Know the Job Description of your current job and understand how job performance is evaluated. Perform the job with high job involvement and high job commitment. Excel in almost all the aspects or dimensions of job performance including quantity of work, quality of work, attendance, punctuality, cooperation, safety and economy. To do your current job excellently is a key to getting confirmed on the probationary appointment and to improving the probability of getting next promotion. In fact there was no properly documented official job description for the job of Assistant Lecturer. Indeed I explored and developed it for the use of myself.

#### **Lesson Number 5- Go beyond Your Job Description and Engage in Organizational Citizenship Behaviour.**

**Organizational citizenship behaviour** is an important type of employee behaviour which is above and beyond the call duty, and it is your willingness to engage in voluntary behaviours that help the organisation achieve its goals. Some of the specific behaviours include performing additional duties such as working overtime, extra duties, and cooperating with fellow workers, helping co-workers with their job problems, raising constructive suggestions or speaking up to prohibit harmful behaviour to the organization, creating a good image about the organization to outsiders, and participating in activities of social responsibility. In simple it means a state where you perform willingly more than what you are supposed to perform (according to the job description) for the success of the organisation. Three such general behaviours of my working are: teaching more than I was supposed to teach, supervising student research more than I was supposed to supervise, and serving as a chairman or a member for numerous committees which were not statutory.

#### **Lesson Number 6- Engage in Pioneering.**

Don't stop thinking and creating a new thing because others have not done or embarked on yet. Believe that you have ability and also a right to create and innovate. Without creativity and innovation there is no competitive advantage; no progress of success. Explore opportunities in which you can be a pioneer. If your thing derived from your new idea is indeed beneficial to others and society significantly, complete it and then present it. There was not a comprehensive textbook on HRM in Sinhala medium. I wrote a comprehensive readable textbook on HRM in 1995. There was no single HRM textbook written in English applicable to Sri Lankan context until 2009. It was possible for me to write a very comprehensive pragmatic book based on a distinct model developed by my perspective of HRM using process perspective and system perspective containing many original theoretical formulations and materials which match Sri Lankan context. The book titled Personal Quality introducing concepts of 3Ps and 3Vs,

and two courses at both undergraduate level and postgraduate level in respect of Personal Quality were pioneering works in Management Education. When there was not HRM specialization among Management degrees being offered by Sri Lankan universities I gave a pioneering contribution to commence such specializations. Sri Lankan Journal of HRM is another example *inter alia*.

### **Lesson Number 7- Be an Internal (a Person With Internal Locus of Control) rather than an External (a Person with External Locus of Control).**

**Locus of control** is the extent to which an individual believes that his or her actions determine his or her outcomes obtained in life (success, job performance, achievement of a qualification, getting promoted etc.). It is possible to classify individuals into two main categories, i.e., internals (individuals with internal locus of control) and externals (individuals with external locus of control). Internal locus of control is possessed by an individual who believes that he or she controls his or her destiny (what happens to him or her in life). External locus of control is possessed by an individual who believes that other factors (other people, situations, luck etc.) determine his or her destiny. If you believe that your behaviour determines everything that happens to you, you are an internal. If you believe that your behaviour has no impact on what happens to you but other people and luck determine your fate, you are an external.

There is empirical research evidence that internals had higher job satisfaction, to be more likely to assume managerial positions, and to prefer participative management styles (Mitchell, Smyser and Weed, 1975). According to research done by Professor Spector (1982) internals had higher work motivation, a strong belief that effort leads to performance (higher instrumentality as per the Expectancy Theory), receiving high salaries, and displaying less anxiety compared with externals.

I was an internal. I believed what I did. I believe what I do and will do. I believe that my presence is the result of what I did in the past. My future will be the result of what I am doing now. With regard to almost all vital events of my life I was a driver not a passenger. You should construct your future and don't let others or luck construct your future.

### **Lesson Number 8- Set a Good Example.**

Before disciplining, instructing and directing others, you should set a good example. What you preach you should practice in reality. Action talks louder. Your exemplary life is effective and instrumental in changing others in the way you want them to change.

In my life, many things I practiced first. Then I gave advice. Before expecting something significant from others I first engaged in that or performed that successfully. Before I expected punctuality from others first I was punctual. Before influencing academics on not cancelling lectures first I did not cancel lectures. Before I expected self-discipline from others first I demonstrated my self-discipline to others. Before teaching about balance between work life and family life first I had that balance. Before teaching others to become a green person first I

became a green person. I played the roles of preservationist, conservationist, non-polluter, and maker of looking-like natural things. Before I started teaching about managing career and time to others first I myself managed my career and time successfully.

### **Lesson Number 9- Avoid Machiavellianism and Be a Person of High Degree of Good Personal Character.**

**Machiavellianism** is a personality characteristic which determines the degree to which a person focuses on obtaining and using power to further his or her own ends, regardless of the impact on others according to Professor Dunham (1984). It is a personality trait that involves willingness to manipulate others for one's own purposes according to Professor Greenberg and Professor Baron (1997). If you are high on Machiavellianism, you behave in any way that will meet your needs without considering your impact on others. You attempt to achieve your goals at the expense of others' wellbeing. You will not become a team player.

Prof. Greenberg and Prof. Baron (1997, pp.92-93) write:

*"In 1513, the Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli published a book entitled The prince. In it, he outlined a ruthless strategy for seizing and holding political power. The essence of his approach was expediency: do whatever is required to get ahead of another. Among the guiding principles he recommended were the following:*

- *Never show humility; arrogance is far more effective when dealing with others.*
- *Morality and ethics are for the weak; powerful people feel free to lie, cheat, and deceive whenever it suits their purpose.*
- *It is much better to be feared than loved."*

In our society there are some people who accept the principles of Machiavelli though some do not accept them. Clearly (and fortunately!) the vast majority of people do not adopt the philosophy proposed by Machiavelli but some do seem to embrace many of these principles (Greenberg and Baron, 1997). Machiavellianism personality characteristic can be present to any degree, although moderate levels of Machiavellianism are more common than extreme levels (Dunham, 1984).

Those who are very high on Machiavellianism are more difficult to be influenced by others. They do influencing others to achieve their personal goals by using lying, fake praise, or any other tools available. They have little or no guilt over harming others. They are not remorseful and have no fear and shame to do sins. Indeed these people do not have good personal character. Their presence will create a lot of potentially dangerous political activity.

**Personal Character** is the totality of persistent moral qualities or attributes a person has. It is the degree to which a person has virtues (honesty, patience, gratitude, humility, respect, benevolence, tolerance, self discipline, caring, loyalty, etc.) and vices (jealousy, deception, desire for others' things, greed, selfishness, anger, hostility, reprobation, retaliation, stinginess

etc). **Good character** is morality or civility. **Bad character** is immorality or incivility. Good personal character is what a person must possess not the bad personal character. Here there are two terms to be emphasized, i.e. virtue and vice. A **virtue** is a good habit. It is a good attribute that is useful for you and other persons. Patience is a virtue. Honesty is a virtue. A **vice** is a bad habit. It is a bad attribute that is harmful for you and other persons. Anger is a vice. Jealousy is a vice. Virtues need to be built, enhanced and if possible maximized within you. Vices need to be minimized within you and if possible they need to be eradicated from you. Hence your personal character is the degree to which you have virtues and vices. That is your ability to build and improve virtues and minimize or eradicate vices. **Nature of character that has virtues to the maximum extent and has no existence of vices can be called as the highest level of good character.** That is excellence in morality. You should reach this level of excellence in morality. It is of course a difficult task. However you should come to that level if you want to be a person of excellent personal character. Indeed your religion, your parents, your teachers and general society want you to be a person of excellent personal character.

I hardly compromised my degree of morality in case of life issues and problems. Of course I was successful in the process of maximising virtues and minimizing vices to a significant extent (though I still need to improve). My morality caused me to be a person of ethics.

### **Lesson Number 10- Believe that *Attitude* is a Major Factor that Makes the Difference between Being Successful and Being Unsuccessful.**

**Right attitude** means appropriate beliefs (cognitive), feelings (affective) and intention to behave (behavioural) with regard to the field you have selected or you have been fallen. It does not matter whatever the field of your interest is. What matters is that you should have a right attitude about the field. Right attitude involves **positive thinking** too which refers to perceiving your life positively, perceiving your future optimistically and having favourable self-concept (your evaluation about yourself, linked with self-esteem). Think that you CAN do. Think that you can SUCCEED. You should not have doubts about your life, and the field you have selected or you have to be in. Think that there were people who had been highly successful in the field and therefore it is POSSIBLE for you also. Think optimistically about you, future and the world. As far as I am concerned, my specialized field was HRM, my attitude was identical to the one given in Exhibit -1.

#### **Exhibit -1 An Illustration of My Attitude of My Field**

**Cognitive:** I believe in HRM. It is a very important field of management. It deals with people at work and managing them to achieve organizational goals and their goals. People are the most unique resource. I will be able to lead a very successful life by working in this field.

**Affective:** I feel positively about the field of HRM. I like to working in HRM. I feel very happy when I think and talk about HRM.

**Behavioural:** I intend to be an expert in HRM. I will be in HRM. I hope to live with HRM. I am going to be a serious personality in the field of HRM.

Your attitude about life matters significantly. Life is not a great tragedy. It is a great natural gift and indeed it is the greatest opportunity you got to work and enjoy. If life has many problems, believe that there are solutions for all problems. If life is a mystery, it is possible to discover. If life is a sprit, it is possible to realize it. Of course life is a journey, and you are supposed to complete it. Don't forget that you can get a great deal of happiness by helping others, and by loving others (at least having someone to love). Making others happy makes you happy. Make sure not to be a negaholic, an alcoholic, and a workaholic at the expense of non-work aspects of your life.

Be proud of your legacy as graduates of this university. I wish you success and progress of success in your future endeavours.

Thank you indeed.

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