

ADDRESS BY BRIGADIER-GENERAL MARK PHILLIPS AT THE
GOVERNMENT TECHNICAL INSTITUTE 2014 ANNUAL
GRADUATION & PRIZE GIVING CEREMONY.

(Opening greetings/protocols-Chairman Major General Retired Norman Mc Lean, Board of Governors, Chief Education Officer Mr Olato Sam, Assistant Chief Education Officer(Technical) Mr Chinedu, Principal Mr Carl Benn, Deputy Principal Ms Renita Crandon Duncan, Students Guild President Mr Lincoln Robinson, Chairperson Mr Rosco Green, Lecturers, Instructors, Graduands, Students, Parents, Spouses, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a distinct honor to deliver the feature address to the 63rd Graduation Exercise of the Government Technical Institute. When the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Government Technical Institute/Government Industrial and Training Centre, Major General Retired Norman G Mclean requested that I deliver today's address, it was for me a privilege.

Let me commence my address by admitting that this is the first time I have entered the GTI compound, and that I was never fortunate like you to have any form of technical or vocational education.

I note from your website that the vision statement of this institution is “To produce all-round and skilled graduates, who will ensure that Guyana takes her rightful place in the “Global Village.”

I also noted your institution’s aim: “the GTI is committed to offer education and training to young people and adults in technical, commercial and scientific fields relevant to the needs of the national economy.”

It does not matter whether today you are graduating from the department of building, computer Science and data operations, business, science, competency based education, land & surveying, mechanical, or electrical. Across the industrialized and developing world, economic growth is increasingly linked to skill training necessary to raise labour productivity and average living standards.

The twin forces of global integration and technological change have increased the focus on, and importance of education and training in the competitive process. The role of education and the training system in this process is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, in Guyana we too are now faced with the dilemma of whether to concentrate investment in general education or in vocational education.

We are all experiencing a lack of skilled workers to satisfy the growing needs of our industry and other economic activities. These challenges need to be addressed and Technical Vocational Education and Training must not be viewed as an end in itself, but as an essential prerequisite for socially balanced economic growth.

My readings for this address have led me to conclude that Vocational training is better delivered in adequate quality and relevance when we:

Establish more services offering opportunities for work- study and apprenticeships -to ease young people's transition from school to work.

As the labour market becomes more specialized and economies demand higher levels of skills, our government and business enterprises must be seen as increasingly investing in the future of vocational education through publicly funded training institutions and subsidized apprenticeships or traineeship initiatives for businesses.

The transformation of Guyana's economy and its market based development must be fuelled by expansions in our specialized and tertiary level training infrastructure and institutions. Additionally, modern values need to be implanted in our young people and they must be trained for specific jobs in a technically complex division of labour. In today's training environment, the ambitious must be given their chance to achieve and not be restricted because of their sex, age or social status.

I recognize that a lot of work has started in this regard through the implementation of the technical education strategy of the Ministry of Education- with the increased number of Technical Vocational Education and Training centres now available throughout Guyana, the establishment of Secondary Competency Certificate Programmes in our Secondary

Schools, the Competency Based Education and Training offered in all Technical Vocational Education and Training centres, and other training opportunities including those under the auspices of the Board of Industrial Training.

So then the question on many of your minds may very well be how relevant is a feature address by the Chief of Staff of the Guyana Defence Force on your graduation day.

Well, the GDF is in the business of Defence and Security therefore we have to invest in young able-bodied men and women, and your newly attained technical, commercial and scientific knowledge are all relevant to the work of the GDF. On an annual basis the GDF spends more on training, per capita and as a percentage of budgetary allocations, than many private and public sector organizations in Guyana.

We always have vacancies for employees with technical qualifications, and we also provide many opportunities for upward mobility in rank while you are still young. With qualifications similar to yours, two GTI

graduates of 2012 with no prior military exposure are now sergeants after completing our military leadership course in 2013. With the accompanying CXC subjects, and on successful completion of our officer cadet course, graduates of GTI are commissioned as second lieutenants of the Guyana Defence Force.

Since its establishment in 1965, the GDF has been sending officers and ranks to study at GTI, and we have provided annual work-study attachments for many of the students here to experience the work environment prior to their graduation.

Our support for work-study is based on our belief that while students generally expect to get a job right after leaving the school system they do not become fully qualified until after they have entered and experienced the work place.

The GDF accommodates around 160 work-study students annually with 16 students from GTI in 2014, while we have about 20 students attending classes here at any time. Therefore, the modernization of the Guyana

Defence Force and the enhancement of its capabilities depend on how well we embrace Technical Vocational Education and Training.

There is now agreement that we must focus on the development of sufficient human capital necessary for our country to have a stable well-functioning economy. Building this human capital for the Guyana Defence Force remains critical to our role in the defence of and maintenance of order in Guyana.

We own and operate aircraft, vehicles, lighting plants, IT equipment and therefore need technically trained persons to maintain and operate these equipment. Our IT and Signals departments are staffed with GTI trained technicians. Our buildings are constructed by building supervisors trained at GTI. For example, in 2014 the GDF acquired from the USA, three 29-foot Metal Shark Defiant aluminum boats, communication devices and maintenance equipment. These riverine and coastal patrol boats have the capacity to enhance significantly the Guyana Defence Force Coast Guard's

ability to patrol our vast river network and to interdict criminal organizations attempting to use our country's rivers for illicit trafficking.

In an effort to ensure that the full potential of this investment is realized, the GDF must employ technically qualified young people with advanced training opportunities in the successful use and maintenance of these vessels. Additionally, we have provided training opportunities in a variety of other technical and professional development fields throughout the Guyana Defence Force.

Guyana's economy has moved from stabilization to sustainable growth, we are on the brink of an economic take-off to modernization; our industrial base and infrastructure are expanding. Over the years we have move from being a basket case to now a lower middle income developing country.

More young people will be needed to fill vacancies in technical areas. Surveys have already established that as a country we are experiencing skills shortages in the fields of Construction and Engineering,

Manufacturing, Hotel & Hospitality, and Commerce. With the current Foreign Direct Investments in our Mining, Agricultural and Forestry Sectors, this shortage will most likely drive the cost of labour upwards.

I urge you to stay and seek employment in Guyana, stay and start your own small business ventures in Guyana. Stay and contribute to the development of our beautiful country.

With your qualifications you will more than likely be employed in a leadership role. Leadership means responsibility-for when things are going good, and for when things are going bad with your team. As a leader you are responsible for achieving the task given to your team, you are responsible for developing your subordinates, the individuals that make up your team, and you are responsible for building and maintaining your team.

If you chose to be employed in the public or private sector or chose to be self-employed, always set high standards for yourself and for your work.

Your superiors, your peers and your subordinates will quickly recognize and respect you for this.

Today, when you would have graduated, you will now be better educated in your chosen field of study than you were two years ago. To be better educated is important for all of us. Education is universally recognized as the best way to catalyze change to improve individual circumstances, to uplift families, to transform communities, to develop countries, to change the human condition for the better.

The greatest man of our time, Nelson Mandela said, “Education more than anything else, improves our chances of building better lives.” Now that you are better educated you have to, as advised by the poet Horace – to “Carpe Diem- to seize the day (or the moment) by not trusting the future but doing what you can with the time that you possess instead of dwelling on future fates.”

Everyone has their own definition of success. However, you must keep steadily before you the fact that all true success depends at last upon you.

Do not miss your opportunities. Remember, everything comes to you in the right moment.

By seizing the day, I want you to stay and serve Guyana, contribute in your own way to Guyana's development. And while you are working continue learning, remember education is a continuous activity – you never stop learning.

Develop an inquiring mind, replace fear of the unknown with curiosity, “Remember, millions of people saw the apple fall, Isaac Newton was the only one who asked **why**.”

You need to quickly understand the value of service. Power and public recognition must not be your priority. Service with humility is now more necessary than ever. Also, recognize and hold close to your heart the need for self- sacrifice.

As you embark on your new career after today's graduation, heed the advice of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, "These are seven things that will destroy us:

1. Wealth without work
2. Pleasure without conscience
3. Knowledge without character
4. Religion without sacrifice
5. Politics without principle
6. Science without humanity
7. Business without ethics."

I congratulate you Class number 63. The future of Guyana is in your grasp. Reach for it and seize the moment! I wish you all success in your future

endeavours. I take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous 2015. Thank you all.

Brigadier-General Mark Phillips, Thu 2014-11-27