

A Bermuda Technical High School

16th November 2008

To most of us Barack Obama was a wild card, an unknown, and came from nowhere, well the truth is he has been preparing for this presidential race for many years, he is a great orator, he is charismatic and he knew the secret to winning an election, it was to unite the people. How many of us thought he had a chance against Hillary Clinton? Now he is President elect of the United States.

We always promise our children that they can be anything they want to be, and yet our schools are not producing results that will allow them to fulfill their desire. We were all hopeful that the present government would bring that change, I am not hopeful anymore. The change we all hoped would come has not happened.

Whilst gaining qualifications could be a passport to high paying jobs. Some people choose to serve in lower paying jobs because they have a higher purpose, Barack Obama said ***“you read about some injustice and you say someone should fix that and you soon realize that nobody else will fix it if you don’t”*** and that touches a personal nerve for it was fourteen years ago that I saw the students graduating from high school that were not up to the standards that were expected. It was then that I started researching, started to try and make difference, it was not that easy, politics entered the equation. There were setbacks, but setbacks make one stronger, more focused, to fix the lack of Technical Education on our Island.

Now I have proved that it can be done, but there will always be skeptics. All my students passed their first year City and Guilds and they were not high achievers from high school, they came to the college unprepared but were soon reaching the higher standards expected, but were then prevented continuing to advance in the City and Guilds programme for a lesser programme was introduced which is not as Internationally recognised. (Incidentally they all passed that new two year course in ONE year!!!)

In Cedarbridge Academy and Berkeley Institute my students came in on a Saturday morning because they were hungry for the knowledge, and learning made interesting.

Historian Arnold J. Toynbee once said ***“Apathy can be overcome by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm can be aroused by two things: first, an idea which takes the imagination by storm and second; a definite, intelligible plan for carrying out that idea into action.”***

Today I am going to introduce to you an idea, and a plan for putting it into action.

It was thirty six years ago that the Bermuda Technical Institute closed for good. That was a technical high school which not only changed students' lives but changed the standards and economy of Bermuda and the influence of this school and its students have lasted a very long time.

Our present public education system is in shambles. We read and hear about the continuing saga each and every day. We have been promised change but we must all understand that ***“Change does not happen from the top down it happens from the bottom up”*** and that means without the inclusion of the teachers, head teachers and all stakeholders change will not happen. These are facts we cannot ignore. So throwing consultants and money at the problem does not mean that the solutions being unwound will be beneficial to our youth and their education. ***Change happens from the bottom up***

It is because of this understanding of change and of education in particular that I have finally moved away from the idea that public education will see the change required.

During the past several years I have produced a proposal for a private technical high school, to include all of our students, to include the prospects for our children to become not only useful citizens but managers and CEO's of their own companies.

I am well aware of the economic situation the world now finds itself in, I am well aware that jobs will be lost in the not so distant future, but this is our time to prepare for the future, but it can only happen with the inclusion of everyone on this Island, we must all want success for our youth, and we can all make it happen because ***change happens from the bottom up.***

The time for short changing our youth must end. It is my experience that the majority of our high school graduates are unable to read a rule, read a blueprint, or understand how their home water system works and WE can change this because ***change happens from the bottom up.***

I do not stand before you today on a whim, this has been the result of fourteen years of researching and writing because I am passionate that the economic success of any community is the result of having a sound education system and in particular a technical education system, our technicians and engineers must ensure that the infrastructure of our community is safe and sound and will be as attractive to the exempted company employees being recruited as it is to the poorest families on this Island. We should have an educated community to reduce the numbers of guest workers required to make our companies “World Class” although we will always need some guest workers if we are to remain successful as the World Class Centre of the Insurance business

Eliza Cook said; ***“It is better to build the schoolhouses for the boy than to build the cell for the man”*** that does not mean throwing money at the school house, it means putting effort and hard work into the education of our youth to improve standards and bring back the interest for the students. My plan involves a practical component to enable our youth to make decisions about their future by experiencing for themselves, what happens in those workplaces, what one requires to become well paid and have an interesting job and they would have a set syllabus of things they need to learn.

I have spoken to the top managers of many of the larger Technical companies who have committed their support if “we” the people, get this school going, get this idea into action, because ***change happens from the bottom up.***

The school would be for 14-18 year olds, where in the first year they would spend two afternoons per week in industry, and the remainder of afternoons would be spent on soft skills and projects and team building, after five weeks they would move to the next company.

A technical education entails teaching mechanical, electrical and electronic engineering principles, it is not to specialise our students, it is not an apprenticeship, it is a technical education enabling our students to make educated first hand choices about their career after high school.

Apart from the technical education there would be career advisory classes where careers advice and knowledge can be gained and researched to enhance their own experiences. It was Yogi Bera that said: ***‘If you don’t know where you are going you might not get there’*** we intend that our students will know where they are going and how to get there by the time they graduate.

The school year would be five, eight week, terms, and two weeks between each term, static Christmas and four weeks in the summer. Why? we are committed to excellence and enjoyable education.

An academic programme to raise standards during the first two years in preparation of an international programme in the second two years so that every student will graduate with international qualification, an career path and either a job or the education to continue to college.

The school day would be longer than normal high school, and the school fees would be comparable with other private schools, but we would solicit scholarships, and bursaries linked to academic progress, we would also encourage the government to introduce a voucher system for deserving students.

Our intention to use industry members as our selection committee, and industry management as our Board of Governors, because it is industry that understands what they require of school graduates. In addition Parents, Industry, Students and Teachers would be fully involved on all fronts for this to be a success.

How do we expect to get the building and get this idea into action?

Today is the introduction, the beginning, we now appeal to the public, the parents and industry for their support to make this happen and without the full support of them all it will not happen and ***change happens from the bottom up.***

We would like to raise the funds to put a school building in trust for technical education for Bermuda for future generations I believe this is so important to the future of Bermuda that it should have a permanent home, I believe our youth is our future and should no longer be short changed by being limited in their careers and where they can go in life. The international qualification started in their second two years can be continued to the next level in the evenings once they graduate from high school and this will continue so that a student can reach managerial positions, as have the previous technical high school students from thirty six years ago.

Destiny should not be written for us but by us, we need to make this change happen for our future, teachers should not teach to a test, they should be teaching for our youth to become useful citizens with careers that they have chosen. This change will not happen by itself, it will only happen if we are all willing to work for it and it will only ***happen from the bottom up.***

We will be looking for financial support our youth do not have the means to make this change, it is our legacy we can leave for our children and grand children.

We are looking for sponsors and we know the road may be rough but as long as it is supported by the people of Bermuda in the words of Barack Obama "YES WE CAN"

This is the beginning of our journey to re-introduce the technical high school education, putting our graduates into better jobs, shaping the leaders for the future of this great little Island. We do not have to accept more of the same, spending thousands of taxpayers dollars on "experts from afar" we need to train our own experts, and ***if it is necessary to hire from afar, ONLY the best of the best should be hired.*** I look forward to the day when the majority of guest workers are hired ONLY for the bottom of the food chain not the technicians, managers and CEO's of our technical companies. We can do this if we work together. There is a lot more to this proposal than I have time to share with you, but the full details are available on the website details can be obtained from the cards on your table,

I will make myself available to individuals and groups to explore the proposal further should they so desire.

I would like to thank the Rotary for allowing me to introduce this proposal and now I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

Colin Palmer