

WBS GRADUATION CEREMONY

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Congratulations one and all on your achievements. It must be one of the most satisfying ways of ending a year. Recently I spoke at a Graduation Ceremony where those who qualified were going to be involved with the health of society; I urged them not to abandon South Africa, but to respond to its unfolding challenge and excitement. My theme was that a doctor, doing what he or she is trained to do, broadens the scope of choice of the average individual in society; that this was absolutely essential for South Africa if we are to unlock our creative potential in order to meet the enormous challenges that face us.

Those of you who graduate today, have more to do with the wealth of society than its health. In a very real sense wealth creation has to do with exploiting opportunities available, consolidating gains and creating more opportunities. By wealth creation, I do not simply mean the accumulation of capital in the old fashioned vulgar sense of the word, although this is often a necessary consequence of wealth creation. In its broadest sense, wealth creation has to do with the management of creative potential in such a manner that resources are innovatively combined to create employment, produce commodities to satisfy human needs and

improve the quality of life of those involved. But perhaps more important, is the multiplier effect of wealth creation. Genuine wealth creation in society is only durable if its benefits spread wider than those originally responsible for it. Simple acquisitive consumption on an individual basis is a perverse form of wealth creation. It creates the illusion of wealth, whilst disguising general impoverishment. Just like a face lift in medicine creates the illusion of health whilst disguising metabolic decay. In the long run, both become self-defeating ending in the same inevitability, namely death.

Genuine wealth, like health, leaves a society better off for everybody. It strengthens the base on which future generations can build. Wealth, like health, has to broaden the scope of choice of the average person. In its purest form, growth in the economy is nothing else but the expanding rate of choice for the individual to explore the satisfaction of material needs. There have been fierce debates about the benefits of growth for society. Some argue that economic growth in South Africa went hand in hand with the strengthening of Apartheid. Others, that growth was actually responsible for the erosion of Apartheid. I think there is a basic misunderstanding here. Recent research shows quite convincingly that whereas there is no definite relationship between growth and economic inequality, there is a very clear relationship between growth and poverty. In other words, societies can grow with inequality increasing, remaining the same or decreasing. But societies cannot grow and maintain the same level of absolute poverty. There has to be growth to

fight poverty. To conquer poverty is to increase the scope of choice of people who are its victims. To combat inequality is finally a political problem, i.e. how a society distributes the benefits of growth. But without growth, there is nothing to distribute except growing disillusionment and confusion.

As people with qualifications in Advanced Management, you are in the growth business pure and proper. You do not all work for your own concern or necessarily for a private company. But, all of you have presumably come here to improve your management skills in order to assist with the growth of the enterprises in which you work. The hope is that both from the point of view of the enterprise and individually, your innovative abilities would have been sharpened and honed, so that you would recognise opportunities and respond to challenges more effectively. If this were not one of the major informing principles sustaining the WBS in teaching you, then you have every right to sue us for fraud, deception and tampering with sensitive psyches.

But the one thing you cannot expect us from the WBS to do for you, is to make up your mind for you out there in the larger environment. We all have to cope with that environment in our own individual ways. It has been my special privilege to try and make that larger socio-political environment more intelligible to some of you who have come through WBS. There is a very simple reason why I find this to be important : If those of you in the growth business are paralysed by the dynamics of transition and sit on your hands in a changing environment, the environment

itself changes that much more from being an opportunity that has to be seized to a threat that has to be avoided. There never has been, nor will there ever be, a static relationship between the human being and his environment. If there was, there would be no growth of knowledge, science, literature, art or economics. Life simply has no choice other than, as Darwin and not P W Botha discovered, to "adapt or die". To adapt is to explore the possibilities of choice in a changing environment. The boring thing about a Bullfrog immobilized and fascinated by a python is that both have accepted the inevitability of their environment and abdicated the responsibility of exploring alternatives. The result is death. And as Talcott Parsons, long ago, pointed out : Death is a final disintegration of boundaries between an organism and its environment. The dead organism becomes part of a new environment that continuing life will have to respond to.

You are part of life in a fascinating, changing environment in South Africa. Not only that. You are specifically in the business of expanding choice in relationship to that environment. You are part of growth. I think it is worthwhile reflecting on the following points when you respond to that environment :

1. You are vastly better able to respond to challenges and opportunities than the majority of people in our country. This presents you with clear advantages, but also responsibilities. How you make use of your advantages is your business, but society - nowhere, whether South Africa or elsewhere - is going to allow you to avoid your

responsibilities. As far as I am concerned, I would rather take up my responsibilities here than elsewhere. I hope you feel the same, because we certainly need your expertise.

2. Learn to live with uncertainty. If you do, you will find that you can create facts rather than just respond to them. In a period of dynamic transition, the opportunity to create new facts are almost without limits. If you think about it, man has created ritual to respond to the final certainties of life. Death, old age, sex, birth. It is the uncertainties in between that demands innovation and ingenuity. If the response to daily uncertainty is ritual and inflexibility, death, decay and disintegration is the result. One of the reasons why Eastern Europe collapsed is that they had been dogmatically and ideologically programmed not to respond to a changing environment.

3. Never tire of exploring your environment in all its variety : physically, socially, politically, economically. And your environment is Africa : beautiful, tragic, dramatic, exciting, challenging, changing. From what I have said so far, it should be obvious to you, that I see history as an open ended, unwritten future. And, in Africa/South Africa, it is so open ended as to be almost breathtaking. In such a situation there is no greater arrogance than to live as if the final word has been written. There is no greater sin than to curse the wonderful uncertainty of life with the ritual of dogmatic intolerance. Do not allow politicians,

pulpit bashers and pavement demagogues to meddle with your ability to choose, to live with uncertainty and to explore your environment. The way in which particularly you in the growth business do so, creates a whole new adventure of opportunity and choice for others. In other words, if you do your job properly you can help to shape a new environment for South Africa which can help others to respond even more effectively to choice and opportunity.

In saying these things to you, I am not trying to exude an air of false optimism, or help you whistle as we prepare to walk past the cemetery of our future. It is precisely because, for the first time, South Africa is on the threshold of escaping the deadly legacy of its past; the structured inequality; the ritualised racism; the rampant economic exploitation and political expediency, that we cannot respond in a manner which will simply dress up old customers in new costumes. And by now we should know these customers : intolerance, fear, ignorance, prejudice, poverty, disease. These were the customers that shaped our past. We cannot allow them to have a hand in our future. If we do, we will surely help to immortalise Santyana's dictum : "Those who refuse to learn from the mistakes of history, are condemned to repeat them." My whole address to you is to argue precisely that we are not condemned to repeat anything, except death and there is a great deal of choice to be exercised before then. Rather take courage from Karl Popper : "For evil to reign, it is sufficient that good people do nothing". You are good people, you have lived in and through evil. Do not allow

it to play a role as we hover on the threshold of a new future.

Get cracking - and good luck.