

**CARIBBEAN TOURISM ORGANISATION**  
**Featured Address**  
**Delivered by Glenda E. Medford**

***Making excellence a habit: Service, Loyalty and Profitability in the Caribbean***

**Introduction**

**SLIDE 1**

Mr. Hugh Riley, Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer of the Caribbean Tourism Organization, Caribbean tourism leaders and practitioners, visiting presenters, thank you for inviting me to share a few thoughts on 'excellence' – how to make excellence a habit.

As you just heard from my Bio, I have had an interesting journey in my professional life, one which has given me the opportunity to see and experience first hand, the good, the bad and the down right ugly. I have seen persons you might least expect, deliver outstanding work, driven by an internal hunger, passion and drive to do an excellent job and succeed against all odds.

I have seen others who flattered to deceive, falling short of an ideal I had envisaged, considering their profile and experience. I also discovered that what is 'excellence' in many ways depends on who is doing the measurement and the circumstances. The achievement in putting a man on the moon is not the same as smashing every record to

become the fastest man in the world– but there is no doubt that they are both excellent achievements.

**'Excellence' is defined as..." the quality of being outstanding or extremely good."**

'To excel' means *"to surpass others or to be superior in some respect or area; to do extremely well"*.

Excellence is however not perfection, and as Vince Lombardi remarked: ***" Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence"***.

Excellence is about aiming high, and in the words of Professor P.K Menon, one of my university lecturers :

**"If you reach for the stars you might reach the tallest tree.'**

Excellence is about setting a high standard for yourself and focusing on being as EXCELLENT as YOU can possibly be. In such a case it is inward focused. It is your current ability vs. YOUR maximum potential.

## **SLIDE 2**

However, some people settle for mediocrity in many aspects of their lives on a daily basis. They may accept shoddy work from an employee, continue to engage and socialize with 'friends' that constantly let them

down, and continue using a service provider whose service is totally unacceptable. Instead of demanding better, they may shrug their shoulders and accept the MEDIOCRITY being dished out to them. They tolerate it, they become numb, and very soon their own image of excellence is altered and replaced with a lesser standard – an inferior view.

### SLIDE 3

**In the words of President Barack Obama: *'Not many folks spend a lot of time trying to be excellent.'***

### SLIDE 4

In this region there is already some evidence of chronic MEDIOCRITY at all levels and silent acceptance by the public, the people being served. The sad reality is that with every passing day, the less than excellent behaviour is becoming the norm - the accepted behaviour, I shudder to say – is the new EXCELLENCE'.

The Caribbean is not isolated from the rest of the world - it is part of the global village and we are exposed daily, to higher standards of behaviour demanded by the global players to achieve 'excellence'. What is the standard of excellence in the Caribbean?

At the end of this session you can decide if you want to be on the road to excellence or the road to indifference or mediocrity.

## SLIDE 5

As John Wooden said, *“If you do not have time to do it right when will you have time to do it over.”*

## SLIDE 6

### The industry

Ladies and gentlemen, let me put this conversation within a context.

You are leaders in one of the most important and fastest growing sectors in the world. The **Travel and Tourism World Economic Impact Report** for 2015 reveals that Travel & Tourism generated US\$7.6 trillion (10% of global GDP) and 277 million jobs for the global economy in 2014. (*cf Preface page v*)

In addition, international tourist arrivals reached a record 1.14 billion in 2014, (51 million more than in 2013), with forecasts suggesting that in 2030, tourism international arrivals are likely to reach 1.8 billion. (*cf United Nations World Tourism Organization Report*). (*chapter 1.1 page 3*)]

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There is no doubt that Tourism is a vital sector for the Caribbean region and a major player in our socio-economic development. Indeed, the Secretary General Mr. Hugh Riley told us today that the Caribbean is the most tourism-dependent region in the world.

The region is a popular destination, and the Caribbean Tourism Organisation reported that 2015 was the second year in a row that the region performed better than the rest of the world, and the sixth consecutive year of growth.

At its core, **Tourism is about people and places creating memorable experiences for people - our visitors.** If our visitors are satisfied or even overjoyed by their experiences, they can become loyal repeat visitors who become live 'walking and talking billboards' for our Caribbean destinations – free brand ambassadors.

Our people play an important role in creating memorable and remarkable tourism experiences for our visitors. It is the interaction between your staff and guests that is often what people remember most about a trip –that interaction is also what they are first to complain about when things go wrong. Excellent service can be an important source of differentiation as well as a competitive advantage. The moment of truth for your brand is when your staff interact with your guests. What is your brand promise?

This region should have two goals:

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- a) to create a customer who creates customers

## SLIDE 9

- b) To have customer service that is not just the best, but legendary  
(Sam Walton)

## SLIDE 10

### Loyalty

The combination of the destination's physical and human assets with the emotional experiences visitors are looking for, should produce customer satisfaction AND, a loyal customer - that is, a customer who would come back again and again, make business referrals, and directly or even indirectly provide strong word-of-mouth references and publicity about the destination. [cf John T. Bowen & Stowe Shoemaker, (1998)]

Customers who are loyal cannot be easily influenced or swayed by enticement from competitors. [cf Baldinger & Rubinson (1996)]

Loyalty results from customer satisfaction which is largely influenced by the value the customer places on the services received and their experiences.

So how can we embed excellence at every level of the ecosystem of our industry? How can this region ensure that it is the destination of choice for the millions of persons who travel worldwide annually? How do we increase our global market share?

## **SLIDE 11**

### **Excellence**

Let us have a closer look at whether 'excellence' can be used by this region, as the solution, the silver bullet for keeping ahead of the competition, retaining current visitors, acquiring new ones, growing market share, and ultimately increasing the tourism dollars.

Striving for excellence is not new for the Caribbean in fact our history has shown the determination, strength of will and character of our people to overcome adversity and to achieve excellence.

Within our small Caribbean Community, many have achieved excellence in different spheres of activity measured by both local and international standards.

We can point to the success of Sir William Arthur Lewis who won the Nobel Memorial prize in Economics in 1979 and Derek Walcott who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992; Bob Marley who lives on through his music which is known and loved in every corner of the globe (and today marks the 35 anniversary of his death); and Usain Bolt, the fastest man in the world, to name a few.

While there is understandably more visibility through the media, of excellence exhibited by persons in their professions, in sports and entertainment, there are, I am sure there are many other examples of people in other spheres of activity who are also models of excellence.

Unfortunately we can also point to too many examples where service delivered in the region was less than excellent.

Excellence is a place where people who refuse to settle for mediocrity live; it is a place where one reaps all the hard work sown. It is a journey of continuous progression toward the goals in your life.

Excellence, the highest human achievement is NOT beyond anyone's capacity. It is also not a fixed goal – it is an ever-changing dynamic. The quality of your craft and abilities today should not be the same as last year. Continuous improvement should be seen. Excellence is an ever-moving target.

#### **SLIDE 12**

***'Excellence is not a destination; it's a journey that never ends.'*** (Brian Tracy)

#### **SLIDE 13**

In 1982, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman published the management book, "In Search of Excellence" where they identified eight characteristics of excellent companies:

1. A bias for action –( ie - getting things done)
2. Stay close to the customer

3. Autonomy and entrepreneurship- (ie – be flexible and supportive of the creative process, of innovation)
4. Productivity through people – (ie – engage employees and treat employees with dignity and respect)
5. clear and compelling organizational values - (ie the right values will define the company)
6. focusing on what you do best
7. operating with a lean staff – (ie a flatter organization)
8. finding a balance between having enough structure without getting stuck in it – (ie – being flexible – the co-existence of a firm’s direction and an individual’s autonomy)

Aren't these characteristics still relevant today?

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In reflecting on these principles articulated 34 years ago, Holly Green wrote in Forbes magazine, “**Redefining Excellence for Today's World**”:

*“These principles remain good guides to this day. However, the business world has changed almost beyond recognition over the last 30 years, and the time has come to redefine what excellence means. In today’s world, excellence is more than a set of principles. It’s a set of beliefs, ways of thinking, a matter of discipline, and ways of focusing.”*

*Excellence starts with getting very clear on the end state you wish to achieve (winning) and relentlessly driving towards it every day. Excellence requires knowing when to push on (even when you don't have all the information or the perfect solution), but doing it well and constantly refining as you forge ahead. Excellence means accepting only the best, and understanding that when it is not given that you, as the leader, are at least partly responsible."*

### **Transformation – change management**

Working to achieve excellence requires leaders to critically looking at their business model and processes, the recruitment process, people development approaches, their systems, product development and marketing - and then making changes which are deemed necessary.

Technology is playing a tremendous role in transforming sectors today. Technology is driving disruption in our most traditional sectors with tourism being no different. Cloud and mobile functionality are fundamentally changing the way that visitors can access information. Visitors are now far more knowledgeable about where what they want, can be found. Visitors are now innately digital. Software, apps and customer indulgent portals will be at the center of how you differentiate from competing destinations and engage with your customers.

In order to improve an organization you have to be prepared to change how the work is done.

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**In the words attributed to Mark Twain: *'If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.'***

I can tell you first hand that managing change is difficult, but the aim is to find a way to be always relevant, and to remain a big player in the game.

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***"If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less."***

**General Eric Shinseki**

## **Making Excellence a Habit**

So how can we make excellence a habit?

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As Aristotle said...

***"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."***

How does one develop a habit?

Have any of you tried to break a habit such as smoking, or start a new one like getting fit?

Did you lapse from time to time? Yes, we all do, but when you get going you wonder why you did not start months earlier.

Whether you are a member of the front line staff, middle management or senior executive, the journey to excellence starts with YOU. There must be a personal commitment to take the first step.

## **SLIDE 18**

'Jack D. Hodge said:

***'Habits are important. Up to 90% of our everyday behaviour is based on habit. Nearly all of what we do each day, every day, is simply habit.'***

## **Slide 19**

***'First we make our habits then our habits make us.'* Charles C. Noble**

## **Tips for developing a habit of excellence**

I am now going to share 8 tips you can use towards achieving personal or business excellence.

**1. Make a list of priorities every day. Practice small. Practice daily**

Developing a habit requires daily personal commitment and repetition.

Be disciplined. You must commit to make the effort every day.

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**2. Be consistent**

Striving for excellence involves discipline and tenacity of purpose.

*'The hallmark of excellence the test of greatness is consistency.'* Jim

*Tressel*

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**3. You need to be hungry for success – have a deep and burning desire to excel**

If you have the will to succeed on your journey to excellence, you will develop the strength to prepare and persevere.

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*'Excellence is not a skill it is an attitude.'* Ralph Marston

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### 4. Understand your customers and potential customers. Study them well

A clear understanding of your customers, and their expectations as it relates to a service, will contribute to a more effective positioning, promotion and communication strategies.

For example, Millennials, also known as 'Gen Y' are driving change in the travel industry.

They are a young, yet influential demographic group of travellers born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s, who according to Millennial Traveller Report, represent '20% of international travellers and by 2020, 320 million international trips are expected to be made by them each year, a staggering 47% increase from 217 million in 2013.'

Millennials are:

- Tech savvy
- Like authenticity (they prefer to experience how the locals live, visit heritage sites and hike trails and explore the island on bicycle or segway)
- Spontaneous
- Rely on word of mouth - (the recommendation of a friend is as good as gold)

Milleniels are a digital generation who are changing the rules of the game. Millennial travelers demand instant gratification, accuracy in booking and one-stop shopping, all from their handheld device.

Milleniels are also quick to share their experiences – good or bad – online, and depending on the experience, this could help or hurt your e-reputation.

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### **5. Be a yardstick of quality - always**

Implement a business plan with clear objectives and goals, responsibilities, accountabilities and standards of performance with measurements; engage the team and ensure everyone understands their role and deliverables; leaders - walk the talk; engage your team with performance assessment and staff engagement tools, and share the information/feedback. Engage the customer – their feedback is vital; have customer surveys and share the feedback with your team. Create a service culture with staff embracing the brand values as well as having the knowledge and communication skills and are empowered to deal with interactions and situations.

## SLIDE 25

### 6. Exercise Emotional Intelligence - daily

Leaders should exercise Emotional intelligence – E.I. - if they are to achieve extraordinary results. Knowing, understanding, and responding to emotions, overcoming stress in the moment, and being aware of how your words and actions affect others is more and more being recognized as an important tool in management.

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### 7. Push yourself – the human spirit can win again great odds

Challenge yourself. Be relentless.

If you do not set high standards for yourself, who will? There is no escalator to excellence, but rather a stairway which needs to be climbed step by step. Excellent people do not settle for the status quo - they want to experience the best and *be* the best. That means giving their best each time; every day. They go the extra mile so that in everything they do, in everything they say and think, they are striving for excellence. They make excellence a habit.

Every job is a self-portrait of the person who does it. ***"Anything worth doing, is worth doing right."*** (Hunter S. Thompson). Autograph your work with excellence.

## **In closing**

These are a few suggestions to get you started on the road to excellence.

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***'Let excellence be your brand. When you are excellent you become unforgettable...'* Oprah**

If each one of us makes a commitment to commence a journey to excellence, amazing things will happen and the Caribbean will be unstoppable as an excellent, responsive, customer-centric tourist destination. Get YOUR people fired up and the rest will fall in place.

Most important of all - put God first. Say your daily prayers and thank God every day for grace, mercy, humility, your talents, understanding, prosperity and wisdom – in advance.

## **SLIDE 28**

***"The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential, these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence"* Eddie Robinson**

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The pursuit of excellence starts with your acknowledgement that you can do better and a hunger to do better.

***"Do not be afraid. You can do it."* Steve Jobs**

**SLIDE 30**

**The sky is the limit.**