

**Speaking notes to the Bahamas Human Resources  
Development Association**

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**On Wednesday, August 11, 2010**

**At the J. Whitney Pinder Building**

**Topic: Is Foreign Labor Better?**

"Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind."

Reggae Star Bob Marley.

Salutations....

There are two central themes that I would like to touch on today:

1. **Have we really emancipated our consciousness sufficiently to demonstrate that we have confidence in ourselves and our abilities?** I submit that we have not.
2. **Is the concept of Bahamianization still relevant in the 21st Century Bahamas?** I submit that it most certainly is.

### **Theme #1 - Emancipating of our consciousness**

Have we really emancipated our consciousness sufficiently to demonstrate that we have confidence in ourselves and our abilities? Consider the following:

Bahamians seem to have this love affair with foreigners. We often pay unwarranted deference and sometimes homage to anyone coming across the bar, frequently at the expense of minimizing and even denigrating our own skills, talent and aptitude.

This "not invented here" perspective appears to be deeply ingrained in our national consciousness and has had the debilitating result of disabling us from achieving our

personal best, our true potential.

This view that we possess of foreigners speaks in a very definite manner to a lack of confidence that we have in ourselves and our ability to do things as well, if not better than foreigners and until and unless we overcome this perception, we will never truly be emancipated, no matter how much we talk about being an independent country.

The fact is that there is no real basis for this national paralysis that we seem to portray in the presence of foreigners.

**Theme #2 Is the concept of Bahamianization still relevant in the 21st Century Bahamas?**

### **The Public Sector**

We have Bahamanized two of the three branches of Government, namely the Executive and the Legislative branches. The third branch has escaped such good fortune.

We still have too many foreigners in top positions in the Judiciary whether it is the Attorney General's Office or the Courts. We are all aware of the recent hullabaloo over the recently-appointed Director of Public Prosecutions. To me, as a proud Bahamian, it is abhorrent and disrespectful to Bahamians to have to look beyond our borders to fill this position.

I have said before that this appointment is confirmation that The Bahamas Government has failed miserably in its succession planning efforts because the appointment of any foreign person in that position clearly reinforces the view that the system could not find **one single Bahamian out of more than 1,000 Bahamian lawyers** to fill that position.

I also find it very interesting that very few persons have come to the defence of the sole Bahamian who was earmarked for the DPP's position. In some ways, we have become a nation of cowards, looking out only for ourselves and ignoring the plight of others who have been unjustly treated.

In a few months when Dames Justice Joan Sawyer demits office as President of the Court of Appeal, unless one is appointed to replace her, there will not be a single Bahamian judge sitting on the Court of Appeal. All of the other judges now sitting on the Court of Appeal are non-Bahamians. This is a travesty which could not happen in any other major independent Caribbean country. It would not be fathomed in Jamaica, Barbados or Trinidad and Tobago. This is the sort of thing is characteristic and prevalent in **the non-independent British territories** such as **the Cayman Islands, the Turks & Caicos and Bermuda**. What a shame! We have been independent for more than 37 years and still cannot staff our major institutions with Bahamians.

A foreigner now occupies the office of Director of Public Works. Why is this when his Bahamian predecessor filled that position? Again, it would appear that there is little if any succession planning here.

We now have countless foreign consultants advising the Government on so many areas that affect our lives, including EMERA who is advising the Government on the privatization of BEC.

And the most pernicious thing about these consultants is that they interview Bahamians about the latter's views on matters for which they have been engaged and then often turn around and advise the Government with the same recommendations that were offered by Bahamians.

### **The Private Sector**

The tourism sector is replete with foreign managers as are some of our banks, trust companies, insurance companies, and other fields. Foreign accountants still fly into The Bahamas to perform work for companies that could be performed by Bahamian accountants.

We have allowed foreigners to purchase two major Cable Beach hotel properties at bargain basement prices.

We have given a foreign company a 15 year monopoly over our Cable TV industry.

We have offered thousands of acres of land to foreigners to develop, and have done so **with** generous concessions and **without** adequate limitations or penalties for non-performance that will cause our children and their children to hang their heads in shame at the massive and obscene land give-aways by their forebears --all in the name of progress and prosperity. But I ask: progress for whom and prosperity for whom? Certainly not for Bahamians.

**Why have we tolerated this?** I can only believe that deeply rooted within our Bahamian DNA are genes of insecurity, appeasement and a lack of confidence to assert ourselves in a manner that would put the fear of God in our leaders who allow such nonsense to persist. We are a docile, submissive, obsequious people who would rather go along to get along. We have become and often act like lambs being led to the slaughter.

Furthermore, some of our leaders are intellectually bankrupt, lazy, and lack the vision that is required to develop a Bahamas that should be first and foremost for Bahamians.

Lest I be accused of being xenophobic, let's be honest. At the other end of the spectrum, as many of you who are engaged in Human Resources can attest, we still have great difficulty in sourcing suitably qualified Bahamians for many positions. Too often we hear complaints that Bahamians are not prepared to work hard, to consistently apply themselves to their employment activities. They are accused, and sometimes justifiably so, of lacking discipline, sometimes not only not showing up to work, but also at performing at a substandard level. In some ways, we are our own worst enemies and sometime make it difficult for persons engaged in Human Resources to persist in ferreting out suitably qualified Bahamians to fill vacancies.

## **Proposed solutions**

There are several specific steps we can take to reverse this trend:

1. As a country we must develop a consensus of a national vision of what and where we want The Bahamas to be in the next 10, 20, 30 years and formulate an intermediate- and long-term national strategy for implementing that vision to take us there;



2. That vision will, of necessity, require a **national manpower needs assessment** for the types, levels and scope of employment that will be needed in order to achieve that vision. In short, **national manpower needs assessment** will inform us of what skills are required to achieve that vision
  
3. We have to re-engineer our educational system to develop the Bahamian who will be able to fill the roles that we define as indicated by such a manpower needs assessment for a 21st Century Bahamas.
  
4. We must place much greater national emphasis on vocational and technical training in order to bridge the tremendous "*qualification gap*" that now exists in our country. This will require a dramatic overhaul of the present educational system, supported by a more focused, targeted curriculum and greater national budget allocation to dramatically augment and enhance the offerings that are presently provided by BTVI. I would go further and submit that **we must establish many more Vocational and Polytechnic Institutions of higher education** in order to satisfy the demand for the integration of all our citizens in the 21st Century Bahamas.
  
5. We need effective, workable, and practicable succession planning at all levels

of the public and private sectors. **We must urgently, deliberately and methodically re-institute the Manpower Projection Survey that must be filed with the Department of Immigration** in order to clearly demonstrate what plans each company has for training and replacing foreigners holding positions in all cases where companies have foreign worker employed in those companies;

6. Government must lead by example in hiring and procuring Bahamians to fill positions that are currently held by foreigners and foreign consultants in all Government Ministries, Agencies, and Departments;
7. The Department of Labour must aggressively implement its mandate and not issue Certificates of Vacancy for companies that hire foreigners by making bona fide efforts to find Bahamians who could fill positions that are presently held by foreigners;
8. Bahamians must become whistle blowers and inform on those foreigners who presently hold positions that can be filled by Bahamians;
9. Joint venturing opportunities of foreigners with Bahamians must be encouraged by the Government for investors who wish to invest here.

10. Any political party that does not take aggressive steps to implement these steps should not be given the mandate by the people of The Bahamas, because if they do not take definitive steps as outlined above, they should be considered unsuitable to hold public office.