
**Feature Address
by
The Honourable
Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP,
Speaker of the House of Representatives**

**at
Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists
Annual Social**

**“Service to others as a Professional”
Sunday July 1, 2018**

La Boucan, Hilton Hotel

“Service to others as a Professional”

Salutations

- Master of ceremonies
- Madam President Dr. Nakhid-Chatoor
- The members of the executive of TTAP
- Other Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon!

Once my calendar permits, it is analogous to an involuntary biological response for me to positively respond to requests such as the one made of me by your president. In this case, on reflection I appreciated that this was a more challenging request than usual – I may even elevate it to the category of daunting!

And why should I have felt so?

After all, you belong to a professional association, which by nature is comprised of persons with degrees, certification and specialised knowledge. I expect that all of your members possess a level of competency flowing from

your respective years of practice and the product of your profession is the provision of a service to your respective clients.

So I am being challenged to address professionals who are already providing service to others. To borrow an expression from our young people.

“D-A-H”

To further explain why my challenge is moving towards the realm of daunting. In my preparation, I started by looking-up what is a psychologist and what does a psychologist do? And then I read the following from one source:

“Psychologists are professionals that study cognitive, emotional, and social behaviours by treating, observing, interpreting, and documenting relationships and environmental factors that may affect an individual. They take into consideration ones’ thoughts, emotions, reactions, or behaviours to try to understand patterns that alter ones’ ability to function. Psychologists specialize in diagnosing and treating but are not able to prescribe medications instead they use talk therapy to help their patients.”

PANIC!!!

So I am going to address professionals whose service lies in having human behaviour under a microscope and who are masters of talk!!! What a conundrum in which I am now placed particularly as the golden rule for speakers of parliaments is that speakers rule, they don't speak! But in Trinbagonian dialect.

"IT TOO LATE TO TURN BACK NOW!"

My professional training has taught me that in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, there exists a presumption of regularity in the conduct of transactions. In drawing upon that and applying it to you, I expect that in your practice, as professionals, in addition to your specialised training and competence you abide by keystones of:

- Reliability;
- Ethical conduct including honesty and integrity;
- Accountability for ones' thoughts words and actions and to some overarching regulatory body;
- Self-regulation in the application of emotional intelligence to your practice; and
- Looking the part of a professional in your appearance and presentation.

Those foundation characteristics of a professional, undeniably, also define you as being professional. But in holding myself under the microscope, before giving you the opportunity to do so, I recognized that in today's culture there are many of whom are described as professionals but who do not fit either the definition or the description of professional which I have initially set out- for example musicians and athletes.

In my continued quest to define the word professional I stumbled upon another source which has defined professional:

"A professional is a member of a profession or any person who earns their living from a specified activity."

The use of the word "or" in that definition I found quizzical as professionals are expected to earn a living from their service or from their practice.

My interest being awakened that article continued:

'The original meaning of professional derived from the middle English profes, an adjective meaning having professed one's vows, which itself derived from late latin professus, past participle of profiteri which meant to profess, confess. The idea was that professionals were those who 'professed' their skill to others, and 'vowed' to perform their profession to the highest standard. In its original meaning, the essence

of being a professional was to have made a public commitment to a high standard of performance, to integrity, and to public service. Although not always stated explicitly, there is an implied contrast between 'high standard of performance' and financial gain."

I then realised the dichotomy in the historical roots of the word and the modern scenario. Additionally, I began to understand why so many may have acquired professional credentials but fail to exhibit professional conduct.

Let's face it in the modern world, becoming a professional is considered an assured route to financial prosperity and it may be reasonable to conclude, that because that ethos is so woven into the fabric of society, then as professionals you may be required to attain prosperity by any means necessary. *E. Friedson in his paper Professionalism the Third Logic, (2001)* - included amongst the characteristic of those who belong to a profession, as being is possession of:

*"An ideology that asserts greater commitment
To doing good work than to economic gain and to the quality rather than
the economic efficiency of work."*

It is this characteristic of being a professional and of being professional, I wish to recommend that you embrace, and instil in your service to your clients.

In the wider context of community, our society needs and requires you to guide. You must see beyond the monetary value of your profession. You must understand the impact of your contribution to nation building, as you can play a vital role in shaping our society and healing social ills.

A glance of the compendium of our communities with the increased violence, will showcase that we need preventative measures, which, your profession- your specialised training and competence- can provide. The daily news stories often cause me to reflect upon *Act 4 scene 1 of Shakespeare's Macbeth with the witches three chanting double, double toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble.*

We may recall the headline:

- ***“Children’s authority boss weeps over abuse” Guardian February 26, 2018. That article highlighted the egregious fact that since the inception of the children’s authority in 2015 there has been more than 55,000 calls for child protection, of which 13,500 required the intervention of the authority”...even more haunting was the***

reference to a post on social media by a 13 year old child stating: *“lord I need help I am being prostituted”* The alleged perpetrator is that child’s mother.

- Add to the boiling cauldron, the data from the crime and problem analysis (CAPA) branch of the Trinidad & Tobago police service (TTPS) which revealed that there were approximately 11,441 reports relating to domestic violence incidents between 2010 and 2015. Approximately 75% of these reports were related to female individuals. During the same period there were 131 domestic violence related deaths of which 56% were female.

I will go no further to highlight any other examples to support my point as I think it is acceptable that for the wellbeing of the collective psyche, we are all entitled to a respite, even if only briefly, which an afternoon like this affords us.

You are professionally empowered to contribute to the design and the tools to fix, reconstruct and repair the malaise with which our society is infected, to become engaged and to present real solutions.

I surmise that “being of service to others as a professional” means more than providing services to clients in exchange for fees. It means lifting your voice,

championing interventions and being agents of change.

I am of the view that his holiness, *Pope Paul VI*, on December 7, 1965 in *The Joy and Hope of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, was correct in stating that:

“it is imperative that no one...indulge in a merely individualistic morality. The best way to fulfill one’s obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one’s means and the needs of others, and also to promote and help public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life”.

As a side bar I hasten to say that my last mentioned quote was not in any way intended to detract from the legitimacy of any other faith in our multi religious nation.

In essence, as professionals you are called to be your brothers’ keeper, to recognise your talents and go beyond the call of duty, to identify your communities as the plot of ground given to you to till and to be enriched and nourished by those of you who have acquired, the unique set of skills with which you are possessed.

To be of **“service to others as a professional”** requires service above self, to

contribute to the common good according to one's means and the needs of others, and also to promote and help public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life.

Of course this is not the sole duty of psychologists but of all professionals who are citizens and residents of Trinidad and Tobago. In my view it is the primary duty of citizenship to use one's specialised skills and training not only for one's own advancement, but, for the promotion of the common good.

In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

"A person is a person through other persons. None of us come into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learnt it from other human beings in order to be human."

From your own web page I have seen that you envision your association as an activist organization. To quote you:

"We are poised to provide expert positions on matters arising within the country that have the potential to disrupt the mental health of one or more citizens. We are also in the unique position to assist in the crafting of much needed legislation to help ensure that citizens have a

strong mental health support system on par with international standards."

Live that vision!

Don't wait to be asked, quite frankly, those who need to ask, very often don't recognize that they need to ask and in instances when they so recognize, they may not know to whom they should direct their inquiry. Nation building is not the sole domain of a certain few and surely is not exclusive of you.

Admittedly, I have seen you, through your president, carving out a space in the national dialogue through a weekly column in one of the dailies. It is my hope that this be maintained after she passes on the baton of leadership.

I also want to commend your initiative the national psychological trauma centre as in your own words:

***"THERE IS A CRITICAL NEED FOR NATIONAL TRAUMA
CLINICS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO HEAL OUR VICTIMS
OF TRAUMA."***

And to urge you to be relentless in the pursuit of making it a reality.

If I may be permitted a suggestion, you must be reminded that there are avenues available through your parliament to be of service as professionals. There are 14 committees of the parliament, which conduct the oversight function ranging from financial scrutiny to human rights, national security to education, and health to social services.

On the website of the Australian psychological society, they have listed the varied aspects of work of psychologists as follows:

- **Assessment & therapy**
- **Organisational and social change**
- **Research**
- **Psychological testing**
- **Support to Schools**

I have no doubt that your members offer similar services to clients or carry out work of that nature.

I want to particularly urge you to make available such of your research as may be relevant to the inquiries of the parliamentary committees. The committees issue calls for public comment as a regular part of the inquiry process and submissions are presented in writing. You may wish to consider this as an avenue for your association to be of service to the common good.

The late President of the Republic, **Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson** has be quoted as saying that *“the mid-class has failed our society”*. Don’t let it be that our professionals be recorded in history as having failed our society for not giving service when they were required to do so.

In closing, i remind us of our national independence pledge. I shall not recite it in its entirety but shall limit myself to the words, which, i believe that are of particular significance to your theme.

“I solemnly pledge to dedicate my life

To the service of god

And to my country

I will strive in everything I do

To work together with my fellowmen

Of every creed and race

For the greater happiness of all

And the honour and glory

Of my country.”

When we all act out that pledge in our daily lives we shall be of service to others-our fellow citizens- as professionals.

I thank you!