

**Message by the President of the St. Kitts and Nevis Chamber
of Industry and Commerce**

At the

70th Annual General Meeting – February 27th, 2019

Mr. Faron Lawrence, President

Mr. Michael Morton, Governor General's Deputy

Mr. Andrew Satney, Executive Director and Master of Ceremonies

Mrs. Giselle Matthews, Vice President

Miss Carol Boddie, Treasurer

Directors

Past Presidents and Directors

Staff

Members

Invited Guests

Good Afternoon:

As I complete the first year as President of the St. Kitts and Nevis Chamber of Industry and Commerce (SKNCIC), I must say to you it has been one of the most exciting, challenging and educational years of my professional career and my life. Hence the reason that the theme chosen for the work of the Chamber for the past year has proven to be quite fitting - **'Measuring Up'**.

Measuring Up is all about aspiring to be the best in every way. It is about knowing what the best is and creating a pathway that gets us to that point. It is about improving our competitiveness by marginalizing our limitations and embracing our opportunities.

In my report to members at our Annual Banquet in October last year, I raised several points that were intended to encourage our members and indeed our country to take corrective action towards improving the socio-economic state of the Federation. I present a few of them here again for reinforcement as I deem them important and urgent.

There are two key and universally accepted concepts against which we should compare ourselves as a Nation when we are defining the “best”. The first is our score on the World Bank’s Doing Business Ranking and the second is achieving the intended targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs).

Many of the areas for improvement that will positively impact our score on the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business Ranking’ are primarily for the Government to attend to. Where applicable, the Chamber stands ready to work through its members to effect change as part of the process. Based on discussions during our National Economic Growth Forum last year, I am satisfied that the Government is taking this ranking seriously and is making a deliberate and concerted effort to continuously improve our position in the world in this regard.

The global challenges facing societies range from climate, water and food crises, to poverty, conflict and inequality – these are challenges in need of solutions that the private sector can deliver, thus affording a large and growing market for business innovation. The old way of thinking is ‘Those are not business opportunities for us here in little St. Kitts & Nevis but rather for entities in the more developed countries’. It is precisely that mindset that is in urgent need of changing. With the technology available to us we need to start thinking of our market as the entire world. We must strive to develop our country. We must start looking towards providing solutions to challenges being faced in other countries the same

way businesses from other countries are here in St. Kitts and Nevis providing solutions to our challenges. I am of the view that we will be far more productive and successful that way rather than complaining.

As leaders in the private sector we must engage our minds and act to transform business models and systems for the future, with integrity and values playing a huge role.

In my report last year, I spoke to the issue of TIME. I am completely convinced that our mis-use or mismanagement of time results in exorbitant cost to our businesses through inefficiencies. I want to challenge you today to undertake to quantify that cost in your respective businesses and I assure you that you will find the results most astonishing. I therefore hasten to point out here again that:

We, as a people has got to become more respectful of each other's time and time in general. Time may be infinite, but I assure you, your time and mine are not. Time is such a precious and critical resource yet we mis-use it and waste it at very significant cost to us personally, our businesses and indeed our country.

- We must begin to make a concerted effort to turn up for appointments on time.
- We must ensure that when persons turn up at the appointed time, we do not keep them waiting for an impolite and unreasonable duration.
- We must endeavor to do things when we say we will do them – in other words we must meet deadlines, self-imposed or otherwise.
- We must start meetings at the appointed time not when persons arrive.

Changing attitudes toward time will be challenging but we must make a start. It is my view that we as leaders in the private sector,

are well positioned to take the lead on this, by demonstrating respect for time ourselves and expecting and demanding respect for time from our employees and colleagues. Business entities and the country in general, lose too much on account of improper use of and disregard for time. It is imperative that we deliberately set out to practice good time management in the private and public sectors, as what obtains presently, is negatively impacting our ability to measure up.

Why is time so important to us? Because inadequate use or misuse of time can mean disaster for our business.

We must pay attention to what is always happening around us and we must ask the question: “**Are we measuring up?**” and if we are not, we must take corrective actions and make adjustments to alleviate any short-comings in our businesses immediately? Let us commit ourselves as leaders and business people to take the lead on changing our culture and attitude in respect to managing time.

The past year has been quite an interesting one for business globally, and when I speak about global developments and happenings, let me urge you to accept that although St. Kitts and Nevis is the smallest country in the Western Hemisphere, global events impact us. They are right here in our space. Whether it is mergers and acquisitions – like the impending Scotia Bank and Republic Bank arrangement; or be it Brexit, or the US Trade policies – such as the ongoing trade war between the US and China; Or whether it be the implementation of International Trade Policies such as the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, the CARIFORUM/EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), the CSME, the OECS Economic Union or the decrease in the ranking of the Federation in the World Bank’s Doing Business report, etc., They all impact on our livelihood generally and in particular, that of our private sector. It is therefore critically important that we continuously pay attention to all those global developments.

We need to improve efficiency throughout our trade and business environment. Indeed, the World Bank Doing Business Report clearly identifies this as an area where we have been lagging or “losing ground”.

The Chamber of Industry and Commerce will continue to execute its mandate on behalf of its members which is to function as a business assistance and research organization to lobby on behalf of its over 100 members.

“We embrace our role as an Advocate for proper governance and public responsibility as we help build a sustainable economy and equal opportunities for all.”

We continue to work very closely with all Government Institutions, Ministries and agencies and other NGOs to enhance the business environment and to ensure that we make informed inputs into all Government policies which will ensure that the interests of our members and by extension our citizens and residents are adequately represented.

At present we are working with the Government making critical input in regards to the Crime situation; the proposed new Labour Code, the proposed National Health Insurance Scheme, the proposed revised minimum wage, the proposed Article 164 implementation and its implications for the private sector as well as other policies and programmes that will impact on the private sector of our federation.

I am certain you will agree that the crime situation in our beloved Federation is omnipresent in the minds of our members, as I am certain it is for most of our citizens and residents.

All right-minded people in our community know and accept that violent crime is the major threat to the peace and stability of our economy and country. Apart from being a threat to the economy

generally, many of our businesses and businessmen have fallen prey to the robbers and murderers.

The Chamber recognizes the very strong efforts and the substantial expenditure made by Government in law enforcement to address and arrest this scourge. We urge the Government to take much further, tougher and unrelenting action as is necessary within the law to take violent criminals off the streets. I call on our membership and the entire private sector to co-operate with and be supportive of our security forces. The law-abiding members of our community should appreciate that they may in the short term have to make sacrifices to facilitate the tough action required by law enforcement.

But as important as the need for effective law enforcement is, there is a desperate need for our society to identify and address the underlying causes of crime. The Chamber plans to play a role in this regard working with other NGOs over the coming weeks.

Members, quite a lot is happening at a rapid pace in our business environment. It is therefore imperative that the full force and influence of the entire private sector be brought to bear on decisions and actions being considered by Government. This is necessary to avoid having to operate under onerous rules, regulations and legislations made without full and effective Government – Private Sector consultation. Toward strengthening the voice and influence of the broader private sector for the benefit of our country, the Chamber has reached out to other private sector organizations including the Hotel and Tourism Association (HTA) and the St. Kitts Contractors Association to explore possibilities for collaboration and combination. We will continue with our efforts in this regard over the ensuing weeks and months.

The Chamber has its challenges, several of them, but with the correct approach and commitment by all members, regardless of the size our respective businesses, we will succeed.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the members of the Board of Directors and staff of the Chamber. They

have all given me tremendous support during my first year as the head of this important institution. I look forward to their continued input during the next year of my “tour of duty”. We have a staff of only 2 members notwithstanding the role of the chamber is quite demanding. We will seek to improve that situation by strengthening the staff force toward providing you, our members value and service.

I wish to thank members of the Board of directors whose “tour of duty” comes to an end today. Special words of appreciation are extended to Ms. Carol Boddie who dedicated her time conducting the business of the Chamber as the Treasurer for the past 4 years. We thank you Carol. I also wish to extend sincere thanks and appreciation to Mr. Gordon Julien whose advice and counsel to the Board and me have been invaluable.

This year will mark the 70th Anniversary of our Chamber of Industry and Commerce. As we commence our celebrations to mark this event, which is a major milestone for any organization in the world and in the CARICOM region in particular, I think back of the past Presidents, Board Members, Advisors, Executive Directors and staff whose leadership, commitment and support have made this tremendous achievement and celebration possible. We thank them all.

I ask of you to please stand and give a round of applause in recognition and appreciation to our past Presidents, Board Members, Advisors, Executive Directors and staff.

It is my hope that our present leadership as well as those to come will emulate those of the past particularly as it relates to hard work, commitment and a genuine interest in continuously striving to achieve the goals and objectives of this our august organization.

I look forward towards a year of continued success and advancement of the Chamber with renewed energy by all members towards realizing the objectives of our Chamber of Industry & Commerce.

Thank You.