



WORK MATTERS

COLUMN

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The Ethics of Professionalism

Theme II of Vision 2030, in part, states as its objective the “Delivering of Service Excellence”. Further, it “envisions a society where integrity and morality in public life is of the highest priority and the government serves the public good above all else”. Notwithstanding, I have witnessed the one of the most insensitive and savage abuses of power by public servants on the evening of December 17th, a date which my conscience and feelings of national pride will not soon forget.

Now there are always two sides to every story, and there are always silver linings, or so they tell us. Allow me to recollect my unfortunate experience.

On his arrival to Trinidad on the 17th at 5:30pm to leave for his homeland in Guyana on the 18th, he was asked to produce a return ticket as he was ‘in transit’. Clearly the young man who was bellowing at him while I stood in shock, has not heard of or has not been trained on the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. And to add salt to the wound, the supervisor who appeared to be equally ignorant of the provisions of the Treaty, sought to justify the position of her subordinate. They insisted he had to get his ticket printed by their staff, who did not have access to a printer, but had to source a code to get access.

They despatched him to a desk by pointing vaguely in a general direction where it printed.

Did I mention he is obviously visually impaired. The one silver lining in the ugly episode was from the immigration usher, who assisted him to the new station.

Then after finally being allowed to enter the country, the senior immigration officer says ‘yuh see allyuh Guyanese’. This is a prime example of insularity, xenophobia, ignorance, abuse of power and total disrespect. Do we now again have a ‘Guyanese bench’?

These officers, as public servants are the first point of contact to visitors to my country, they are my ambassadors, but clearly failed to dispatch those du-

ties with the honour, respect, and professionalism that they entail. Sadly, this situation gave further credence to the other disturbing anecdotes about poor customer service that other passengers have faced in the recent past at the hands of such officials.

Shame on you.

Remember I spoke about the silver lining? I had a great experience with two public servants, who exhibited professionalism, a high sense of duty, and respect for humanity, as well as showing high levels of ethics in their interaction with me. One was a mapping supervisor at the Central Statistical Office and the other was an officer at the Elections and Boundary Commission. They are and remain true professionals and credits to the public service.

I believe that with training, and consequence management we could get the type of employee that we desire. Further, it is imperative to have mechanisms to supervise and appraise our frontline workers to ensure a higher level of professionalism and work ethic that is required by persons in authority.

While this was a most distasteful, arrogant, unprofessional display and I am ashamed, disappointed by the words, and behaviour of the two immigration officers, I do not assume that all public servants are of this calibre. I am also not suggesting that all are as professional as the two I have mentioned from CSO and EBC, but what I am suggesting is that we have to do better. I have a working knowledge of bureaucratic systems, and of personality types, and am aware of the challenges that will be encountered to train individuals who are lacking in knowledge, protocols and ethical and discretionary behaviour. Notwithstanding, I have been asked by the offended not to speak to this issue, but I feel obligated as a national of Trinidad and Tobago, to say we can do better. To their supervisors, I hope that this ‘conversation’ will encourage them to pay closer attention to the individuals in their charge, and

to insist on the development and delivery of updated, robust, appropriate and targeted training that is necessary for Immigration officers and all frontline staff.

I am confident, as I have seen in my travels in the Caribbean, that Immigration officers can be viewed as allies, and not the adversary to travellers. I am sure that we can improve our emotional intelligence and customer service skills and we can engender the spirit of CARICOM in this country once more. We should do our best accommodate our Caribbean neighbours and make them feel at home in our country as they make us feel in theirs.

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