

Developing Young Leaders

The participation of young people in their societies and in the democratic practices and processes is of crucial importance to nation building. It is therefore incumbent on the political and other civil society leaders to direct their attention towards ensuring that there is meaningful youth participation in the leadership of organizations. For this to be accomplished, it means that young people must be afforded the opportunity to develop their leadership potential.

Youth empowerment programmes are known to exist worldwide. These are designed to develop the individuals and to aid their development so as to build their capacity to lead the change process in our societies. Barbados has to be lauded on having established a Youth Parliament, which provides a forum for young leaders to mimic those elected politicians in the island's House of Assembly.

The Barbados National Youth Parliament which was officially launched in April 2014, is opened to It Barbadians and permanent residents ages 14 to 21. Subsequent to consultations with young people on the National Youth Policy, the National Youth Parliament was established.

Fifty students drawn from the island's secondary schools and tertiary institutions such as the Barbados Community College, the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic and the University of the West Indies, as well as young people recommended by recognized youth and community groups or constituency councils form membership of the National Youth Parliament. The aim of the Parliament is to engage young people in a productive leadership journey.

What then is the purpose of a National Youth Parliament? Research findings suggest that it is a real opportunity to make one's own opinions felt and to learn for oneself the benefits of operating in a democratic framework. It is said to aim to facilitate leadership skills and thinking power and increasing awareness on issues of global importance amongst young people.

The early exposure of the youth to positions of leadership, is a decisive step towards ensuring that there is a cadre of persons who are adequately prepared for the passing the baton of leadership within the organizations in our society. It is to be expected that mass based organizations such as the trade unions, would have a definite interest in the training and exposure to be given to young leaders. Politicians, trade unionists, members of the clergy and civil society organizations, ought to be conscious of their actions and behaviours and the signals their sends. These leaders must take careful note that the all young people are watching. Our current national leaders should be weary of being accused of being hypocritical, and condemned for not practising what they preached.

Young people whether as leaders or ordinary citizens are encouraged not to compromise the principles which they stand for. They should never allow the persons to intimidate, dictate or

cajole them into doing or accepting anything that goes against their own conviction. Most importantly, they should reject any attempt to stifle the expressing of their opinion, as is important for them to develop their thinking and to express their opinion.

They are therefore encouraged to take the advice of the Hon. Stephen Lashley, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, given at the installation of the Barbados National Youth Parliament in June 2016. He urged the current members of the Youth Parliament to “be even more vocal when examining the current issues facing society.” Surely a debate on the practice of discrimination against the Gay and Lesbian members of the community is a current issue that ought not to be ignored nor side stepped. It is an issue that ought to be of concern to government, employers, trade unions and civil society. It is unlikely that it will not raise its ugly head in today’s workplace.