

TALENT ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

Welcome Speech Given at the Graduation Ceremony of the VODACOM Advance Executive Programme on –October 2008 in Midrand, South Africa.

Chairperson of the SBL Board, Dr. Bongani Khumalo, Group CEO of Vodacom, Mr. Pieter Uys, SBL Board members, our guest speaker, Mr. Brian Molefe, honoured guests, last but not the least, our students and their families, ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed.

On my way, here, I was wondering what I will say to the talented graduates of our VODACOM Advance Executive Programme. Then I suddenly remembered a book I recently read by John Maxwell, titled: TALENT IS NEVER ENOUGH. If I can borrow a leaf from Maxwell with a little modification for my welcome speech, I will like to say that, TALENT “ALONE” IS NOT ENOUGH.

Let me then start with a quote from the 30th U.S. President, Calvin Coolidge, who once said about talent, that, “nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not, the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence, determination and hard work alone makes the difference.” I will also like to quote Irvin Berlin, the famous Russian born American composer. He once said, “the toughest thing about success is that you’ve got to keep on being a success. Talent is only a starting point in business. You’ve got to keep working that talent.”

For all that it is worth, I will now like to share with you some few golden nuggets from John Maxwell’s book that I mentioned earlier. Quoting Peter Drucker, Maxwell advises, “the key choices you make – apart from the natural talent you already have will set you apart from others who have talent alone.”

My friends, have you ever wondered what carried people to the top? Why some people take risks and others don’t? It is not talent, it is passion. Passion my friends, is more important than having a plan. Passion according to Maxwell has no substitute for it is only passion that energizes your talent.

My friends you need more than talent to succeed. You also need initiative. Talent is fine but those who succeed are those who take the initiative. They do not wait for all problems or obstacles to disappear before they make their move. There is a Chinese proverb that says that, “he who deliberates fully before taking a step will spend his entire life on one leg.”

Character protects your talent. Maxwell adds, “people are like icebergs. There’s more to them than meets the eye.” Haven’t we all seen talented people who have easily bitten the dust as soon as they hit the limelight? This is because most of these people did not develop a strong character. In times when they are tempted to take short-cuts, as you know, “short-cuts are always dangerous,” their character prevents them from it.

Finally, my friends, talent without courage is lame. The English writer and clergyman, Sydney Smith once said, “a great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage.” We need courage to discover, and develop our talents. Because, anytime in this world that we want to do something, or move forward, obstacles, difficulties and indeed problems get in the way. Novelist H.G. Wells ask, “what on earth would a man do with himself if something didn’t stand in his way?”

So my friends, these few words of wisdom borrowed from John Maxwell I hope will come in handy as you move up the corporate ladder. A “word to the wise is enough.” As Sadi will say, “he who learns the rules of wisdom and achievement without conforming to them is like

a man who labours in his fields, but did not sow.” May you have warm words in a cold evening and a full moon on a dark night. Congratulations on your graduation from the VODACOM Advance Executive Programme.

Thanks

© 2008 David Abdulai