REINVENTION SPEECH

FOR

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Hello everyone! It’s a privilege to have this opportunity to speak with all of you about a subject that I imagine is very close to our hearts and continually on our minds. We begin life with a level playing field… I am not referring to living conditions and what you may or may not have. I am referring to human **potential**…as we grow we begin to dream and set goals, our imaginations fresh and unencumbered by the limitations of actual experience gained through the day-to-day “adventures” of living. We wonder, “What am I gonna be when I grow up?” As we get older, each one of us follows a path determined by information, interests, circumstance, necessity, and limitations. Our career trajectories unfold providing greater or lesser degrees of professional and personal satisfaction and sometimes we feel as though we need to make more of a difference in life…. both in our own lives and in those lives around us, yet as we become more tenured in our work and our routines, we may find roadblocks or the need to reconsider our own unique paths. Today I would like to share my journey with you…. starting with my youth and the challenges and struggles I faced growing up in Jamaica, to the steps I took along the way to overcome those circumstances to find my next fulfilling place in this world. Believe me, I have learned that reinvention is a never-ending and lifelong process. From the education I was determined to get and blessed to receive, to my journey from registered nurse to health care executive to business owner, the road had its bumps but tenacity has its rewards. Every step of the way taught me about transition and how we are nothing without change… so we may as well embrace it! Sir Richard Branson said, “You don’t learn to walk by following rules. You learn to walk by doing and falling over.” I would like to add…. “And standing up, dusting off the dirt, and getting back on the path to fulfillment.” We learn to walk through experience and through communication… and with the guidance and support of those who have walked the road before us. Each obstacle on that route, each challenge on our path is an invitation to correct and recalculate our own personal course. Change may be scary but it provides the doorway to untold and unlimited possibility as we test and acknowledge the affirmation of our own endless well of spirit, strength, and resourcefulness.

(**If you want to make a little joke you can say**) A wise man once said, “Change is inevitable…. except from a **vending machine**…” (**And wait for the laugh**) (**I think it’s a good idea to have a little humor- if you want a different quote, let me know**). And anyone that has had to find nourishment on the go will understand what that means! All jokes aside, life is all about change, transition, and reinvention… whether we like it or not. Life is kinetic. It constantly moves. Situations change and we constantly change and whether we realize it or not, every situation, every crisis, every stumbling block, and every challenge is life’s “alarm clock” inviting us to wake up, pay attention, and take stock in our commitment to our lives and careers. Every day we wake up and we recommit to our routines, and whether it is caring for our families, doing our jobs, or going about any and every phase of our lives, it is important to be present and conscious of the choices we have in front of us. Many times we may find ourselves **STUCK**. This has happened to **EVERYONE**. The question is, what do we do when we find ourselves in that position? How do we get **UN**stuck?

I would like to share my own story with you but most of all I am here to share what I have learned in life. I was born in Jamaica…. to a **BIIIIIG** family. I was the youngest girl of **TEN CHILDREN**. When I say I didn’t have much growing up, I want you to believe me. We were **POOR**… but somehow, whether I understood at the time, I must have gotten a good-sized serving of determination. Sometimes that was all I had to go on. I remember…. how could I forget... I remember going to school, wanting to learn, feeling different. I was laughed at…. made fun of… teased…. taunted. My uniform was old and handed down from my sisters. It wasn’t fresh and crisp like the ones the other children wore… and there were other differences. My complexion was darker… The kids teased me and said I was “from the country...” Can you imagine? (**If you want you can say**) Where do kids learn this stuff? I had to put up with this throughout my years in school. I had no friends. I got no support… There were so many times that I wanted to quit, but somehow I made it through. But what I **DID** have was a voice inside me telling me to keep going. Somehow I knew that my way out was through achievement. Yes, I was tempted to quit… many, **MANY** times. And when I left? Guess what? I had gotten the highest test scores of the entire class. I had my doubts about myself… I almost believed **THEM**…. my schoolmates judged me for the wrong reasons. They rejected me for the poverty I did not choose and had to endure. I was not going to allow my circumstances determine my reality. I remained true to myself and I have always been grateful to my family for somehow giving me priceless blessings that cannot be bought. And **THAT** lives within each one of us. After I completed high school I went to nursing school so that I would be able to take care of my family and most of all so that I would be able to take care of my **SELF**.

Along the way there were, and still are, many transitions. With each change I faced fear, I made my mistakes, and I learned from every situation…. or at least the ones I was aware of… and as I traveled my path, I started to pay more and more attention. Everything we need to know is usually right in front of us… we just have to know where and how to look.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the great minds, once said, “When you’re finished changing, you’re **FINISHED**.” Change is good. Change is scary. Transition can… and probably **should be** awkward. Trust yourselves. I received my nursing degree and went to work… serving people when and where they needed it most. Let’s face it… being a healthcare professional is a tough job. After all, most of the customers are patients…. that don’t want to be there. They don’t want to need help. They don’t want to be sick or in need or in pain. Being in this industry has taught me more about service and humanity than I could have ever imagined. As the years passed and my experience grew, so did my passion for the work and the clarity that showed led me to the other phases of my career. As I transitioned to becoming a hospital and healthcare executive, I was able to use my knowledge and experience as a nurse to inform the critical decision-making that was required in the managerial responsibilities I accepted along the way. Think about it… what is more valuable than an executive that has been in the trenches- one that understands the challenges and opportunities that arise in the day to day dealings of critical hospital administration? I learned to keep my eyes and ears open to the issues while respecting the requirements of a busy, vital, functioning hospital. Just like the human body itself, a hospital… really any organization… is a living, breathing, organic entity that needs to be nurtured, and attended to on a constant basis. As I served in many capacities throughout the hospital infrastructure, I began to realize that my calling was leading me further along on my path.

Jack Welch, who prefers to be known as a “business leader”… and believe me… his performance, especially at GE justifies that title, teaches us to, “Change before you have to.” That is so valuable on many levels. That simple statement encourages us to pay attention, have a vision, act and trust your instincts, and **plan**. Unfortunately or really **FORTUNATELY**, things don’t always go so smoothly but in the process, we can make some **AMAZING** and life changing discoveries.

The moment had come in my career for me to consider my next transition. It was time for me to explore new possibilities… to forge new paths… to find new ways to serve people more directly… to **STRIKE OUT** on my own. And that’s **EXACTLY** what I did. **BOY**!!! Did I make mistakes!! Boy did I **STRIKE OUT**!!! But WOW!!! Did I learn! (**You can give one or two examples of some of you bigger mistakes here**). I will never forget the time when I first set out on my own. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. And just in case **THAT** wasn’t enough, I then \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (**If you want to give me 2 examples I will fit them in here**). Those early months were **EXCRUCIATING** but I **LEARNED** from every mistake. And those mistakes became golden. Now, I am not suggesting that you act with abandon, be irresponsible and just quit what you’re doing and make mistakes and everything will be great… **WOW**… would **THAT** be a mess!!! What I **AM** saying is that I encourage you to be vigilant about doing your best… at whatever you choose…remain alert and aware, and make conscious choices and learn. You WILL fail. You WILL learn.

There is a well-known legend about the great inventor Thomas Edison. When being interviewed by a newspaper reporter, the reporter asked Edison how he felt about failing so many times to invent the light bulb. Edison replied that he didn’t fail. He just found ten thousand ways that didn’t work. It is believed he also said that he didn’t fail, it just took that many steps to **succeed**. Talk about shedding **light**!! (**Wait for the laugh**). If it weren’t for Edison’s determination, tenacity, thoughtfulness, and persistence, **WE** would be sitting here in the dark!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). We wouldn’t have the symbol of the light bulb to represent an idea!! We would be so much **LESS** inspired!

But he did and we are, and now it’s **YOUR** turn to find the light that will guide you on **YOUR** path to success as you transition and reinvent yourselves. How did I go from being a young schoolgirl in Jamaica who was ridiculed for being just who she was to connecting with the spirit and drive and passion to serve others? I want you to know that I don’t often speak of my early days. It was difficult living through them and recalling those times always takes me back… the sensations of shame mixed with an almost defiant determination are what guided me to be here, to find my calling, to be so much more than the crises and challenges that were placed in my way. …and If there is **ONE** thing I know **FOR SURE** is that I **KNOW** that passion and determination exists in each one of you. So many times in so many ways throughout life we accept potentially unacceptable circumstances as “normal.” We go through life and it becomes almost a habit to tolerate the life we are given instead of stepping outside the lines to find the life we are meant to be living. As a nurse and as a person used to being around suffering and relief, I have learned from observing transformation. I remember there was one person in the hospital. She was admitted as an emergency… she had failed a nuclear stress test and needed to have an angiogram and then an angioplasty- she needed a stent to open one of her almost totally blocked cardiac arteries. She had to be awake for the operation and she said something that amazed me. She felt when the dye was injected during the angiogram procedure, and she felt the moment that the stent was in its place afterwards. She described a relief from pain under her left shoulder blade…. she had gotten so used to what her body felt like that **she didn’t even know she had pain until it went away**. In a lot of ways we get in the habit of accepting situations without even realizing that there might be a solution, but we must remember we have choices. The female cardiac patient was observant enough to get to the doctor before permanent damage set in. It is possible for each one of you to begin the process of finding what truly interests you…. And it may be exactly where you are… with some conscious modifications, or it might be setting out and transitioning to something different… it may be time for reinvention.

President John F. Kennedy said, “Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” Are we as human beings programmed to resist change? Are we too set in our ways? I read somewhere that Napoleon said; “One must change every ten years if one wishes to maintain superiority.” I think we have evolved enough to be able to redefine “superiority.” In this day and age, perhaps it’s more important to find one’s purpose in life. I think we have evolved since Napoleon and besides; he was really focused on conquering. To us in these modern times, superiority can be seen as fulfillment and heeding one’s true calling.

I have spoken quite a bit today, but have I said anything that has caught your attention? I certainly hope so!!! Change is scary. Failure will happen… and if you’re **REALLY SMART**, you **WILL** learn **priceless lessons** from your mistakes. Your life is a moving, living, breathing organism that does **NOT** stop changing. There are constant transitions and phases in life and in your work life and identifying the opportunity for reinvention may be just what you need. So how do we do that?

* Listen to that inner voice. Think about the pros and cons of your current situation. Pay attention to what really interests you. Consider the challenges, the attitudes of your co-workers and colleagues and then think of the way you act and react in different situations. Think about what you have, what you are no longer willing to tolerate, where you are and where you want to be. Think about what you would choose to be doing to exhaustion… what gives you joy… what you are passionate about doing that wouldn’t feel like “work” and go find a way to do it!
* Once you identify the conditions that exist in your current situation and once you make a sincere effort to responsibly rectify and transform, see if the modifications you’ve implemented have made enough of a difference to encourage you to stay where you are. This step, by the way, is a form of reinvention. As Maya Angelou has said, “If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.” And I would like to add, “If you can’t change your attitude, then it’s time to transition to the next phase of your life.”
* Do your research. Think and search in different ways and in different places. Consider your skills and talents from new vantage points. Don’t use circumstances… your age… your geographic location, your history, to limit your imagination. With all of the negative talk about how tech has overtaken our lives, remember there are also positive aspects to living in such an incredibly connected society. More and more people are working remotely and are finding and building new careers thanks to technological advances. The world is literally at your fingertips. Use it for research, connection, ideas, and moral and professional support.
* Find the clarity you need in order to take the next steps. Consider where you are, what you have, and the impact you want to have in this world. If you’ve tried whatever you can to leave your unique mark in the world and it hasn’t manifested, then move on… with thought, care, determination, and a **plan**.
* Life is short. Take action. Doesn’t it seem like only yesterday you were five years younger? (**Wait for the laugh**). You’re not. Time flies… faster and faster. Find your passion and act on it.
* Remember that ultimately, **YOU** are responsible for your life and only **YOU** define what success means to **YOU**. Have your considerations. Weigh your obligations against your dreams and find the way to make your own special reinvention work for you.
* Find a mentor or someone that is experienced and that can act as a mirror to guide you through the process of reinvention. In the end, all of the choices will be yours and you must be accountable and responsible for the path you choose, but as with any big decisions made in life, a guide is someone that invites you to step outside of your situation and encourages you to make responsible and positive choices.

These are very exciting times that we live in. While it may seem like we are working more and possibly enjoying it less, the **good news** is that we have **OPTIONS**. With opportunities like this to meet and network, chances to do research more completely than ever before, and access to meaningful and encouraging support and guidance, as we find the courage, enthusiasm open mindedness and determination needed, each one of us will succeed on our own chosen paths to fulfillment. I wish all of you the very best of luck and I encourage all of you to reinvent and recommit to your professional lives!

Thank you all!