

Dame Billie's communication secrets revealed at Durham MBA forum

DAME Billie Miller enthralled an audience of Durham Caribbean MBA students recently by revealing many of the secrets behind her renowned communication skills.

Dame Billie, who was Barbados' and the Caribbean's longest serving Minister of Foreign Affairs, both educated and entertained the students during her talk at the Barbados Yacht Club, which focused on the art of speech-writing and delivery, engaging an audience and communicating a vision.

Describing herself as "an attorney at law by profession and a politician by choice – actually by the people's choice", Dame Billie urged the Durham MBA students to structure their speeches carefully.

Dame Billie asserted that a short speech always worked better than a long diatribe: "Time your speech before you deliver it. One of the shortest speeches I ever made in Parliament is said to be one of my best. When you deliver your

speech, it is important not to shout. You should speak in your natural voice and only raise it when you want to emphasize a point."

Describing her voice as 'my musical instrument', Dame Billie nominated some of her favourite Caribbean orators: "The late Tom Adams was famous for his voice. People would sometimes go to hear him speak just to hear that wonderful deep voice. Tom worked for the BBC for many years and was taught to speak in broadcasting mode."

Dame Billie then emphasized the importance of engaging and arresting an audience: "You must know your audience and adapt your speech accordingly. Grasp your audience from the very beginning and hold its interest throughout.

"You have to know your subject and if you're not entirely sure of every element of your subject, select those elements about which you are most knowledgeable. Importantly your



subject must excite you. If it doesn't, it will be difficult for you to excite your audience.

"You must also communicate well with your audience. Use your voice and your body language – sometimes you can communicate as much in these ways as with your words. Do introduce a little humour and remember to educate your audience. People like to think that they are learning something new or gaining a new perspective on an old theme."

Describing herself as 'in retirement mode from elected politics after 31 years', Dame Billie ended her talk to the Durham MBA forum with an amusing anecdote about her early days on the campaign trail.

"During my first campaign, the opposition tried to capitalize on the nickname of 'Billie Goat' that I had been given by certain unenlightened children at school. The hired a man to walk a goat up and down the ten avenues of New Orleans every day. One morning, a woman shouted from her house window 'I hope de goat don't butt you'.

"I turned this to my advantage by telling the tale when I addressed audiences from the backs of trucks. I would say 'Well, I'm the Billie Goat and I'm here to butt!' This caught on, especially with one man who used to attend all my speeches. When my delivery lagged, he would call out 'Butt, Billie, Butt!'. "