



Minna Israel

Chancellor, for the past few decades, debates concerning gender equality have raged across the academy at home and abroad. Locally, strenuous efforts to reform the law and change gross inequalities in the employment of women have been met more recently with the slogan that it is ‘men who are at risk’. Indeed, a casual glance at the ratio of women to men among our graduands here tonight would tend to support this assertion. Yet, a closer look at the statistics might suggest a different conclusion. Certainly in government and politics, women occupy scarcely one-tenth of the seats in Parliament and an even smaller proportion in the Cabinet. And in the private sector, while the UWI certifies growing numbers of women with master’s degrees, the top positions are still largely reserved for men. This Chancellor, may not last for much longer, as the fracture that Minna Israel has generated in the proverbial glass ceiling may very well have terminally compromised its structural integrity.

A self-described ‘little girl from the country’ Minna Israel attended high school at Clarendon College in Chapelton, before studying business management at CAST in Papine, now the University of Technology, followed by a degree in management studies from the UWI and later an MBA from the University of Western Ontario. Aside from these, she has spent all her adult career in banking. From her initial nine years at Royal Bank in Jamaica, Ms Israel worked at Scotiabank in Canada and Jamaica and for three years as Managing Director of Scotiabank (Bahamas) Ltd, leading some seven hundred employees in our sister archipelagic nation. Since January 2008, Minna Israel was appointed President and Country Head of RBC Royal Bank (Jamaica) Limited. She remains firmly at the helm as the local

operation, purchased by Royal Bank of Canada in 2008, undergoes its process of rebranding and integration into the wider Royal Bank network. And for the last two years to boot, during this period of heightened activity, she also held office as the historic first female President of the Jamaica Banker's Association.

The begging question Chancellor, if I may dare to tread on dangerous gendered territory, would be what qualities propelled this pioneer of gender equality to the empyrean heights of a traditionally male dominated profession? The answer, perhaps not surprising, is a deeply inclusive approach to managing and a compassionate engagement with the peculiarities and needs of both staff and clients. A close colleague mentioned in an interview that: "She is willing to get hands on. If you are having a difficulty with a customer she will step in. She is willing to meet clients and you would believe that she knew the person ten years ago." And he states further: "She breathes life into the room...her personality is energetic...she is very pleasant and full of energy, very positive...what I like most about her is her willingness to praise loudly and correct softly." And Minna herself, reflecting on her style retorts: "I learnt so much from my customers; I have developed good customer intimacy and they give me frank criticisms. They incorporated (the bank) into their business plan and in turn we incorporated them and their needs into our planning."

It would, Chancellor, be remiss of us not to recognise that beyond these daunting duties, she has continued to give outstanding service to her *alma mater*, through the University Selection Committee for the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence, and the UWI Capital Development Taskforce and through her membership in service organisations including the United Way Women's Leadership Initiative and the Rotary Club of St Andrew. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including The American Foundation of the University of the West Indies Caribbean Luminary Award and induction into the UTech Alumni Hall of Fame. And tonight Chancellor, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of the University I ask that you confer on Ms. Minna Israel, the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

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