



Keith St Elmo Panton

It sometimes happens, Chancellor, that there are persons who are generally known to the public as being of high position and significance, but of whom the public has little idea of the nature and degree of that significance, or of its material impact on the public good. It is therefore, Chancellor, our privilege to be able to instruct the public in the value of this man whom I now present – the Rev. Dr Keith Panton, Commander of the Order of Distinction, Fellow of the Jamaican Institute of Management, former Chief Executive Officer of Alcan Jamaica. That he has not caused his own name to be shouted from the hilltop of Mandeville or down Melrose Hill, is a mark of his selflessness and self-effacingness.

The contribution that we honour is, first, and as we should imagine, in the field of management. It is also, perhaps even more far-reachingly, and as the public at large might not have reason to expect, in the field of education. Not having been born with the proverbial golden spoon in his mouth, young Keith was nonetheless blessed to have a mother and a godmother who were elementary school teachers of good “old-time” quality, the kind of people who are the salt of the earth. With the grounding he acquired at a various schools in rural St Elizabeth, he entered the Kingston Technical High School

Graduating from the Commercial Department, he went back to St Elizabeth, to work in the Accounting Department of the Parish Council. While he was there, someone told him of a college in Ohio that had a work-and-study programme. He applied, and in 1957 he was off to Wilmington College, on a one-way ticket and with only half of the first semester’s fee in his pocket. He worked on the assembly line of an automobile factory to finance his studies, and he graduated in 1961 *cum laude*. Two years later, he earned the MA in Economics from Washington State University.

In 1964 Keith Panton returned to rural Jamaica, not to his "St Bess," but near enough, to the neighbouring parish of Manchester, as Trainee Personnel Officer with Alcan Jamaica. Twenty-two years later he was appointed President and Chief Executive Officer of the company. At an early point along the steady path of his upward progress, he took time out to pursue further studies, gaining the PhD of Washington State University in 1970, his dissertation being on collective bargaining in the Jamaican Bauxite industry.

During his years at Alcan, Dr Panton developed a management style and an industrial relations ethos that have served the company and the country well. He galvanised the Alcan work force by developing in them a set of values which, after a time, everyone knew by heart. It had five cardinal principles: **respect** for the individual; **openness** in communication, **consistency** in action, **excellence** in execution, and **integrity** in behaviour. In this way he ensured the bottom line of profitability by aiming at the top line in ethical values. The initial letters of those five principles constitute an acronym, ROCEI, which in turn produces "Return on Capital Employed and Investment."

Meanwhile, our honorary graduand worked to ensure that Alcan's role as good corporate citizen included a varied and seminal input into the educational system of the country and the region, not least by enriching that system with some of the knowledge and experience that he had gained on the job. His intervention has made a difference at all levels of the system, from primary to tertiary. From early he had been concerned about the relationship between the private sector and the university. Enlisting the help of the present Mona Campus Principal, Professor Kenneth Hall, then an administrator at the State University of New York, he secured his company's involvement in the creation of UWICED, the University of the West Indies Centre for Environment and Development, and in the inauguration of the Chair in Sustainable Development.

In addition, Alcan Jamaica over the years continued to fund postgraduate scholarships and fellowships on the Mona campus. When he was to retire from Alcan, it was on his initiative that the University's academic programme was able to benefit directly from his experience, through the establishment of the Executive in Residence scheme in the Mona Institute of Business. He became the first Executive in Residence. As Senior Research Fellow in the Institute, he drafted a course on Business Ethics, which, it is hoped, will be taught soon enough.

Dr Panton has been Chairman of the University Council of Jamaica and of the Board of Church Teachers' College, Mandeville. He has been Chairman too of an enterprise of which he has been a prime mover, the Manchester Association of Secondary, Tertiary Schools, Health, Education and Association Development Foundation (MASTHEAD). He has served on the Boards of the Munro and Dickenson Trust, Hampton High School, and his *alma mater*, Kingston Technical High School. He has otherwise contributed personally and materially to improving facilities and developing excellence in many schools, including the primary schools which helped to make him. Having enjoyed the honour and the benefits of an Eisenhower Exchange Fellowship, he is still active in promoting the scheme for the benefit of others.

The ways in which the public has benefitted from Dr Panton's voluntary institutional involvements are too many to mention now. Notably, he has been Chairman of the National Commercial Bank and Vice-President of the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica. As an ordained priest in the Anglican supplementary ministry, his faith has also worked toward enhancing the interest of business in the public good. But none of his great work could have been as it was, were it not for the help and support of his wife, Barbara, and their children. He speaks for all of us, his beneficiaries, when he says of Barbara, "Thank God for her." His four children, themselves high achievers, are yet another facet of a productivity that redounds to the benefit of society at large.

Chancellor, an orator wishes for nothing better than a worthy occasion for speaking. Keith St Elmo Panton is the worthiest of occasions. The orator has spoken, and invites you now, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of the University of the West Indies, to confer on him the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.

Mona
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