

LA CITADELLE'S HEADMASTER
10th ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS

Mesdames, Mesdemoiselles, Messieurs, distinguished guests, friends, teachers, members of staff and students! We are gathered here today to celebrate the tenth anniversary of La Citadelle and I am honoured to be in your presence on such a momentous occasion. As the founder and first headmaster of this young and prestigious institution of high learning, I look back and reflect on the last ten years with a sense of pride and melancholy as we steadily cross together this milestone into maturity.

How did it all start is a life long search for a meaning to my life. All I knew is what Louis Pasteur so eloquently stated when he said "These three things – work, will and success – fill human existence. Will open doors to success, both brilliant and happy; work passes these doors, and at the end of the journey success comes in to crown one's efforts".

Ten years ago, disillusioned by the educational system, I only had a dream and a vision and an untapped sense of audacity. And as Barack Obama said in one his speeches "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the one's we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek". So, unfazed by the colossal magnitude of the competition and the opposition, I embarked on this precarious monumental enterprise trusting the universe and believing in the enormous potential of all children, in the true art of teaching and in the good nature of people. In a consumer society that has a tendency to uphold materialism and selfishness as values, I envisioned a paradigm simply founded on holistic education and on the pursuit of knowledge and decent human values and have been consequently blessed to unearth a wealth of magnificence and graciousness all around me on a daily basis.

The course has nevertheless been quite arduous and demanding with obstacles that seemed at times insurmountable. I had to deal with financial, organizational and curriculum issues while navigating multiculturalism, societal trends and archetypes and learned all the while to lead, to trust, to share and compromise and in the process, to discover who I really am.

I have seen it all and, reflecting on our path, truly believe now in magic and miracles. La Citadelle started modestly and discreetly with three students in the basement of my church in Richmond Hill and grew to nine students by the time we moved to our present location by the end of the second term that first year. That initial stage remains anchored in my memory as a time of ingenuity and innocence and I will forever cherish the experience.

En rétrospection, je suis impressionné par l'ampleur du développement et le niveau de maturité atteint par l'école en dix ans, par le nombre d'individus impliqués et par nos réalisations collectives. Je suis notamment inspiré de voir autant d'individus dédiés à l'école et à sa mission. Nous avons parcouru un bon bout de chemin en si peu de temps et vous et tous ceux qui ont contribué à façonner cette école au fil de ans, méritent nos félicitations et nos éloges. Le chemin parcouru a été souvent ardu et le travail accablant ; mais nous y sommes parvenus. Et nous avons réussi parce que nous avons cru en notre potentiel, parce que nous avons cru les uns aux autres et surtout parce qu'année après année nous avons eu le courage de croire en notre rêve collectif.

Indeed, we have made it because so many believed in our potential, because we believed in each other and because, year after year, we had the courage to believe in our collective dream. The screenwriter, Robert Mark Kamen, summarized this reality so well when he wrote "Great changes can come from the power of many. But only when the many join together do they create what is invincible. The Power of One"

I am first and foremost an educator and it is indeed a challenging time in education with so many experts telling us that we should either be filling pails or allow children to play when in reality we should be lighting fires. The essence of education is to help children discover their own potential, to teach them how to develop them and to show them how to give it away.

As Abigail Van Buren said “If you want children to keep their feet on the ground, put some responsibility on their shoulders.” At La Citadelle, children have followed one of the most unique, thorough, comprehensive, advanced and unparalleled curriculum. In that context, students have learned to master many a subject in languages, arts and sciences and technology while maximizing their physical and intellectual potential and opening doors for the future. They have also learned to organize themselves, to study independently and to assume many responsibilities. All in all, our students have proven themselves to be truly responsible and competent and are worthy of the highest praise. In simple terms, I am really proud of them.

Martin Luther King Jr said” An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity” and that is what we have taught our students above all. Not only have they worked diligently to acquire an incomparable substantial body of knowledge and attain invaluable skills but they have learned to take care of themselves, to respect the well-being of others, of each other, to care for people in need and, in short, to give of themselves and to be extraordinary human beings. And I am very proud of all of them.

I feel honored at this junction to have been at the helm of this enterprise and feel privileged to have been instrumental in shaping so many young lives and in having been allowed to be part of the life of so many people over the years. I have also been blessed and privileged to be surrounded over the years with professional and dedicated teachers and staff who truly espoused my vision and transmitted its values to the students. Together, we have attempted to reach that goal in spite of all obstacles and will continue to strive to achieve it. I love what I am doing and I thank God everyday for giving me the opportunity to work in such a rewarding profession and in such a unique loving and caring environment.

I would like to thank the parents, the teachers and staff for their support, their generosity and above all for their trust in me over the years. Many of you have walked a mile with me and in the process, provided me with valuable insight, not only into where we are but also to where we should be. And I thank you! We have reached an exceptional level of harmony and with the new many wonderful new arrivals next year; I promise you we will strive to make la Citadelle one of the best, if not the best.

In retrospect, we have accomplished our mission by utilizing teamwork, by embracing high expectations, by creating a positive attitude, by adapting to change and by promoting hope. We will continue to believe in this institution, to take on challenges and crises with grace and dignity, to be patient and professional, to contribute our talent and goodwill to tough tasks, and above all, to minimize our mistakes and to maximize our strengths. Thank you for collectively trusting me and for helping me create a nurturing culture of excellence and civility.

Some of you have heard me say that I like endings and milestones because they give us an opportunity to start again on stronger foundations, to reaffirm and recommit to higher goals and ideals or to reexamine them from new perspectives. I think that celebrating the past ten years and feeling a sense of pleasure and pride in our accomplishments is an excellent way to look forward with anticipation and optimism to the next ten years. This is a time to remind ourselves of what La Citadelle is all about, what our values are relative to the school’s mission, how each of our roles, combined, strengthen and achieve that mission, and what our next ten years should be.

I like growth and change. I believe they are both exciting and inevitable. We will continue serving our students, we will remain committed to academic excellence, we will create new or re-envisioned arenas for academic programs and community service opportunities, we will continue to celebrate and build diversity – of talents, ideas, philosophies and ideologies, and of cultures and genders and will continue to sustain and nurture an organizational holistic culture that values the individual, recognizes and rewards talent and service and respects a communication process that reflects openness, responsiveness, respect and trust. I will do my utmost to defend those values, to protect our students and to defend our acquisitions against all odds. And that is my commitment to you. It has been a rich and wonderful trip and many new students, parents and teachers will be joining our ranks in the years to come. We will have a larger school with a much higher number of students, we will create the best secondary school, and we will have new experiences, new challenges and together, we will continue to write the next chapters in the success story of La Citadelle.