

Commencement Address University of Curaçao

A whole bunch of “tag lines”
Yen di pida “dicho”

Dr. Angelino Viceisza
Assistant Professor of Economics
Spelman College

Good Evening to all/Bon Nochi

I have titled this talk
A whole bunch of “tag lines”

loosely translated as:
Yen di pida “dicho”

And, you will soon see why ...

First, a disclaimer on language

- When I was invited to give this address, one of my first questions was: “What language does it have to be in?”
- Because what came to mind was: I am certainly NOT going to do it in Dutch! No offense, but I rarely speak Dutch these days and if the address were in Dutch, neither you nor I would be able to understand it.
- So, it was a choice between English and Papiamentu.
- Given we live in an environment with colleagues from ALL over the world, English seemed like the more appropriate choice.
- But, in the back of your minds, just remember that I am YDK!

Second, what do I do (as background)? (A)

- I am an assistant professor of econ at Spelman College, one of the oldest universities for Black women in the United States.
- What do professors do?
 - Produce research.
 - Teach and mentor students.
 - Serve on committees, provide expert opinions, etc.
- Best way to describe my research: Who has ever worked in a group? [... show of hands ...]

Second, what do I do (as background)? (B)

- All of us have ...
- Have you ever wondered why someone in the group is NOT doing what they are supposed to?
- That is an example of a social/Prisoner's dilemma – a situation in which one person free rides off the work of others! Quite common in MANY contexts.
- This is aka game theory.
- My work takes game theory (which explains how people interact socially) and incorporates a bit of psychology and real-world data. I apply this approach to issues of:
 - Poverty, entrepreneurship, family relationships, and so on.

Second, what do I do (as background)? (C)

- In so doing, I seek to:
 - Involve students in some of that research
 - Publish in peer-reviewed English-language journals, e.g. *JDE, JEBO, ExpEcon, JES*
 - Present at conferences and workshops, e.g. *AEA, NBER, ESA, EMIp (Curaçao)*
 - Secure grants to support this work, e.g. *NSF, World Bank, USAID, GFMCD (BMZ-GTZ)*
- So, to my father, I am still “studying”. I am still in school; and in many ways I still am.
- This is just background. Now, to the talk itself.

Random ideas & some advice

- So, why have I titled this “A whole bunch of tag lines”?
- Most commencement addresses are a laundry list of advice ... “do this, do that!”
- I will do some of that here, but mostly I have pieced together a bunch of random thoughts, tag lines, anecdotes, and pieces of advice I have gathered over the years.
- These are things I wish someone had said to me when I was at your stage.
 - So, this speech may not always seem consistent, but hopefully it will be useful!

1. What do you REALLY care about? (A)

- Whether you are 18, 25, 35, 45, 65 ... figure out what you actually care about and do it!
- Why?
 - If you do what you care about, it is not work! So, all these discussions of work-life balance become largely irrelevant.
 - You will be happier in the long run.
 - Of course, do it responsibly. I.e. make sure you can support yourself; your family (if you have one); etc. But do what you truly care about!

1. What do you REALLY care about? (B)

- So, now you might be sitting there thinking: “Darn! I just graduated and I do not like the area/field I am in. What do I do?”
- Well, it is never too late to change careers; just do it in a smart way.
 - E.g. I knew around year 2 here at UNA/UoC that I did NOT want to work in accounting. I had done accounting b/c my sister had.
 - So, upon completion, I did an MBA at Temple (it was tri-continent and sounded interesting).
 - Turns out, I was not happy with that either. So, ultimately, I did a Ph.D. and found my niche.
- So, do NOT be afraid of change – just do it responsibly!

2. Mentors: good & bad advice (A)

- Do NOT underestimate the power of mentors and networks:
 - Take GOOD advice!
 - Do NOT take BAD advice!
- The issue of course is that often times, we do NOT know, at that point in time, what is good and bad advice.
- Because the whole reason for asking for advice is because you have imperfect information.
- Also, sometimes the person advising may not know they are giving bad advice.
- So, just like with a doctor – get a second opinion.
 - View advice as suggestions rather than rules – weigh pros/cons!

2. Mentors: good & bad advice (B)

- Example of “good” advice
 - I would probably not be standing here today – at least in this capacity – were it not for some simple, but path defining GOOD advice from a person who is actually sitting on stage today. Anyone know who I am referring to? Yes, drs. Renny Maduro.
 - After my MBA, I returned to Curacao and was trying to figure out what to do. At some point, he said something to the effect of: “You did well in my statistics course; have you ever considered a Ph.D.?” (doktorado, doktor)
 - Until then, it had never dawned upon me that this was an option. Why? B/c I had no such role models and many of us do NOT.
 - Clearly, he saw something in me that I did not and it paid off.

2. Mentors: good & bad advice (C)

- Example of “bad” advice
 - Any type of advice that says: “You can’t **PERIOD**” is typically BAD advice.
 - The words “You can’t” are not necessarily bad advice if they are followed by “unless ...”
 - E.g. I regularly say to my students things that they should NOT do, unless ... E.g. you cannot do a Ph.D. at this stage, because you should take more math courses or you need more research experience.
 - However, if someone’s advice to you is just plain-’ole: “You can’t...” **BEWARE!**

3. Useful tag lines (A)

- Don't write down your CV/resume and believe it (Rev. Dr. Renita Weems)
 - Remember sweat/pain behind each accomplishment
- Well-behaved women seldom make history (Dr. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 1976)
 - This can apply more generally; i.e. sometimes you must disrupt the status quo to make a mark!
 - Especially, in these globally politically sensitive times
- If you go through life without ever making an enemy, something is probably wrong
 - It means you are too agreeable and stand for nothing. That does not mean you should always cause trouble – That can be problematic; but some trouble is OK!

3. Useful tag lines (B)

- Social media (IG, SC, twitter, FB) is useful until not
 - As you know, people have made careers off SM (Kardashians, just one example).
 - It can be extremely lucrative, entertaining, fun, etc. and powerful (e.g. #BlackLivesMatter)
 - But, it can also be extremely damaging – “any idiot” has a voice now; so consume and produce information critically. Do NOT just assume stories are through.
- Ignore (cope with) annoying people
 - Do NOT waste time on people who bring nothing to the (your) table. People who want to stand in your way (even on a small scale) for no good reason are not worth your time.
 - Los perros ladran y la caravana sigue su camino
 - Laga nan de ma’i Señor

4. Pa nos sigui krese... (A)

- The late Joceline Clemencia (may she RIP) once gave me a book titled “Het grote camouflagespel van de OPI (*Organisashon Planifikashon Independensha di Ellis Juliana*)”.
 - For those who do not know, JC was a mother, feminist, writer, and importantly as well, social activist ...
- Here’s the book [... show ...]
- While the contents of the book, which by the way is a publication of UNA/UoC, in itself are important, what I want to leave you with is the inscription:
- She wrote “Pa Angelino ... pa nos sigui krese” [translation: for us to keep on growing].

4. Pa nos sigui krese... (B)

- Interestingly, Joceline gave this to me on [... what day?...]
 - June 30, 2000 (**EXACTLY 17 years ago**)
- So, I do not think it is a coincidence
- So, today I leave you with JC's words: **Let us keep on growing (ALWAYS)!**
 - The day you believe you have reached your maximum, there is probably something wrong.
 - There is more you can do!

Thanks (A)

- Thanks to many Commencement speakers over the years; all of whom have had an influence on what I said this evening.
- Thanks to many colleagues and mentors over the years, some of whom are here this evening.
- And of course, thanks to all my family – in particular, my father and his family who are here this evening.
 - You're just as much part of this as I am!

Thanks / Danki (B)

- Thanks for your attention and once again, congratulations to all graduates and their families!
- This is a milestone; however, there is more work to be done!
- Welcome to the alumnae network of the University of Curaçao!
- Masha, masha danki.