



National Competitiveness, Youth, Entrepreneurship and Culture



By Lincoln Bobb

The ability to diversify the economy and enhance global competitiveness hinges on the entrepreneurial culture of the people within the nation. Using that statement as a basis for analysis, suggested approaches for developing entrepreneurship within a nation must not only include creating a conducive environment for the interested, but also stimulating interest and knowledge within the nation.

It must be clearly iterated that I am in no way stating that the creation of an enabling environment for supporting budding entrepreneurs should not be undertaken, but rather that emphasis must also be placed on convincing others within the society, in a very practical way, that entrepreneurship is the mainstay of our future economy. It is my belief that the main target of this stimulation initiative should be the youth of the nation.

In an attempt to illustrate this submission, I will relate a story of my childhood when I lived next to the Joseph family. Mr Joseph, a Trinidadian, was a Spanish teacher that was born and bred in San Juan while Mrs Joseph was a chef/caterer from Maracaibo, Venezuela. Even though the family resided in Trinidad and Tobago, their children, Juanita and Ricardo, were, from a tender age,

exposed to the cultures and languages of both nations. The ability to speak two languages, mix and match cultures, seemed utterly instinctual for them. It was fascinating to see Ricardo, at age seven, speak to me in plain insouciant Trinbagonian dialect and in a split second turn and speak to his mother in Latin American Spanish.

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Mr. and Mrs. Joseph, at that time, understood that in order for the Venezuelan culture to become part of the norm/culture within their children's lives, it was necessary for the language and norms of Venezuela to be lived by their children from infancy. This was not only supported by their activities at home but also by their frequent visits to Venezuela where they were submerged into the Venezuelan culture. The Venezuelan culture justifiably became part of who

they were. Could you imagine how almost unnecessary it was for them to learn conversational Español in secondary school among the Trinidadian youth who struggled to learn how to roll their “Rs”?

In further support of my conjecture, I refer to the paper entitled *Entrepreneurs Success Factors and Escalation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Malaysia* by Raduan Che Rose et al (2006). In this study, University students in northern Malaysia were asked whether they looked at entrepreneurship as a preferred career option. In this research we discovered that mainly the students who came from homes or an environment where entrepreneurship was considered the norm, seriously considered entrepreneurship/new business creation as the preferred career choice. It seemed natural to them.



In reviewing Entrepreneurship Developmental Programs (EDP), not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but around the world, it has been evident that most entrepreneurial programmes tend to focus more on creating enabling environments through activities such as:

- The availability of finance,
- Training persons in dire need of improving their income and
- Even providing low rental units for high valued real estate so that new business owners can conduct business.

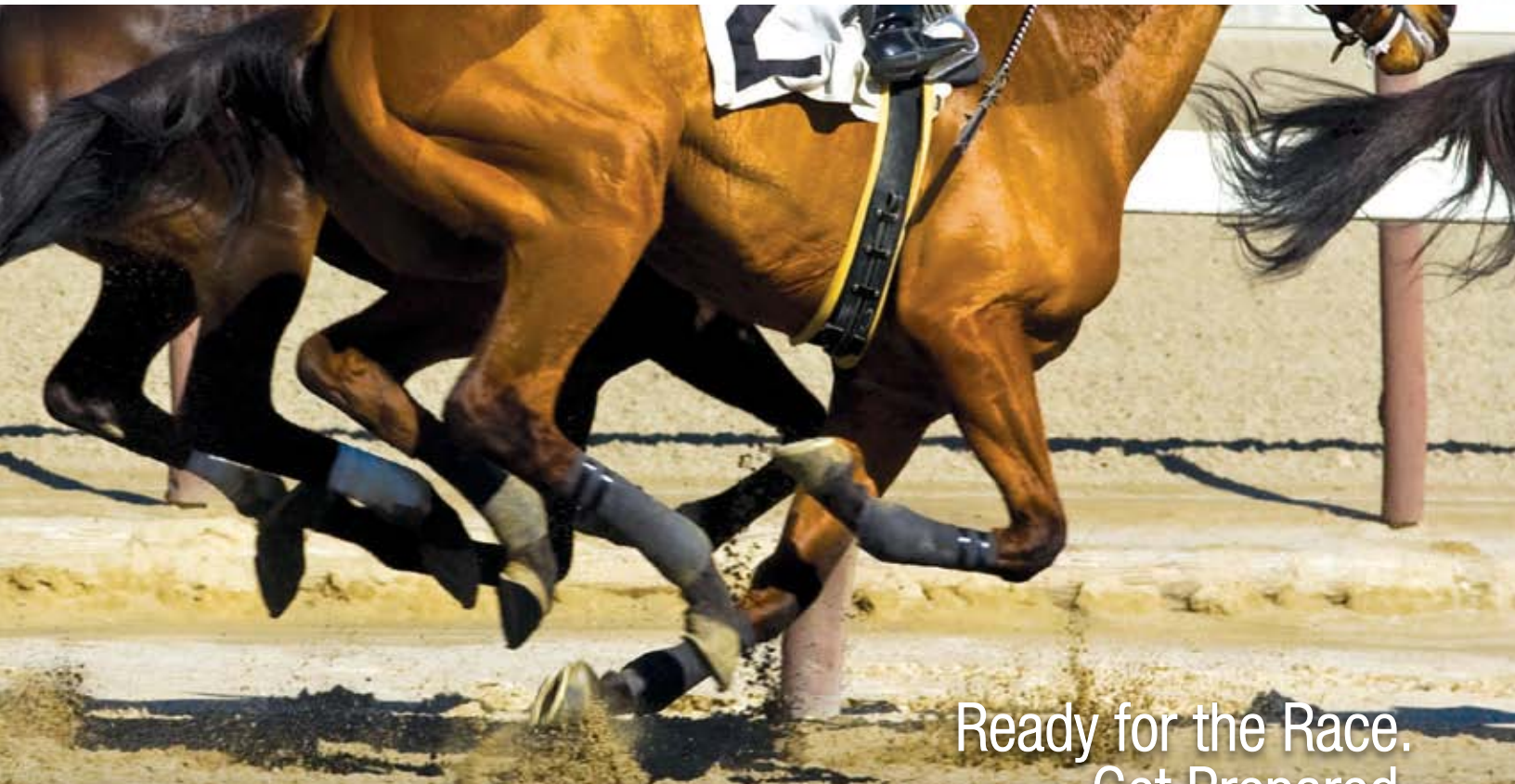


The research highlighted above and the observation of Juanita and Ricardo support the idea that the development of an entrepreneurial culture requires activities that imbue the minds of the toddler, teenager and young adult. Using parents and teachers and multiple media as channels, young minds can be influenced to develop business ideas and start simple businesses, and can be taught the idiosyncrasies of our

economy through a comprehensive program that facilitates learning both theoretically and practically.

Students should be encouraged to compete within simulated industrial conditions and be guided through decision making processes which, will in turn, enhance their possibilities of success in the business world of the future. It is believed that the implementation of such a program would ensure that the nation produces more driven entrepreneurs who will in turn maximise the resources provided for them by the EDP program which focuses on the development of an enabling environment. Without these programs, sustainable growth in entrepreneurship and diversification will be slow and increase in national competitiveness will be difficult to attain.

Lincoln Errol Bobb is currently the holder of a Bachelor of Science in Agri-Business Management, a Masters of Science in Marketing and is due to complete a Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) in 2014 that focuses on the development of an entrepreneurial culture within the Trinidad and Tobago context.



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