

THE POWER OF POSITIVE INFLUENCE
MR AND MS NGC SANFEST TEEN TALENT
COMPETITION

7th November 2015

Good afternoon everyone. I am honoured to speak with you just before we enjoy that very special competition within the NGC Sanfest 2015: the Mr and Ms NGC Sanfest Teen Talent Competition.

In the Finals today we will experience something quite unique from all the other challenges of NGC Sanfest...something for which the Junior Arts Festival has become renowned. The Mr and Ms NGC Sanfest Teen Talent Competition was introduced into the Junior Arts Festival some 13 years ago. In fact it was the same year that NGC began our partnership with the San Fernando Arts Council. Over time, the Competition has helped bridge the gap between adolescence and adulthood for the young people who take part. Not only does it elevate their natural talents to new levels of excellence, but it also develops their self-confidence, making them well-rounded and articulate individuals. In the words of the Festival theme, this is, indeed, *Empowering Our Youth Through the Arts*.

In preparing for the competition, the Teen Talent hopefuls will have been working furiously on perfecting their knowledge and their performances. But part of their preparation also includes learning to be positive role models, respected leaders and engaging public speakers, while picking up tips on grooming and appearance along the way.

Before our eyes, and the even more perceptive gaze of the judges, the competitors are going to take part in four events. In Sport this would be called a quadrathlon, and that means that the endurance and stamina of the participants are thoroughly tested! The young participants will start out mentally and physically energized, but this is a rigorous programme which is going to demand every ounce of their concentration and resourcefulness. I hope that, at the end of the show, each and every one of the contenders can say, "I'm proud of my performance today. I did my best."

Now I'm going to get to the real meat of my remarks to you today. I call it "The Positive Power of Influence".

Something caught my eye in the Festival programme. As you may know, the 2015 NGC Sanfest is dedicated to the extraordinary Joyce Kirton. Most of you in this room will have encountered Ms Kirton. She is the very first director of NGC Sanfest. A self-described 'dance educator', she's a retired primary and secondary school teacher, as well as a lecturer at Corinth Teachers' Training College, and founder of Les Enfants Dance Company which has been going strong for 53 years. And that only just begins to describe the huge impact of Ms Kirton's contribution to sports, entertainment, nation-building, good governance and promotion of culture through her directorships of the Queens Hall and Naparima Bowl. Over 20 years ago, the Nation awarded Joyce Kirton the Hummingbird Gold Medal for loyal and devoted service, beneficial to the State. The Nation has not yet come up with a suitable award to recognize the last two decades of her work!

In the Festival programme, Ms Kirton was quoted as saying that her long teaching experience has convinced her that an effectively delivered programme of dance in schools can influence behaviour in a positive way.

I'm going to repeat that: Her long teaching experience has convinced her that an effectively delivered programme of dance in schools can influence behaviour in a positive way.

Ms Kirton specifically spoke about influencing through her field of dance. But the sentiment applies to any of the areas which the NGC Sanfest covers: Visual Arts, Creative Writing, Drama, Speech, Music and, of course, Dance.

Let's define what "influence" is. Influence is an individual's ability to affect others' actions, decisions, opinions or thinking. It's about getting a person, or many people, to go along with what you want them to do.

Remember those learnings that the Mr and Ms NGC Sanfest Teen Talent participants imbibe during the course of preparing for the competition? They learn to be strong role models, respected leaders

and engaging public speakers. They are learning how to be influential, in the way that Joyce Kirton is. Can you imagine the thousands upon thousands of students Joyce Kirton has positively influenced over her lifetime?

An American historian who lived over a hundred years ago, a man named Henry Adams, said: "A teacher affects eternity; [she] can never tell where [her] influence stops."

There is no doubt that the extraordinary Joyce Kirton has affected eternity.

Let's go for a moment beyond the walls of the Creative Arts Centre, beyond the shores of T&T. Let's consider the world that young people today inhabit. The students from the over 200 schools that are participating in this year's NGC Sanfest are members of Generation Zed or Zee. Through technology and their addiction to being connected all the time, Generation Zs wield enormous influence. Each one is like a pebble thrown into a pool, where the circles of influence expand outwards with no end in sight. Generation Zs are also known as 'Alpha-Influencers'.

In Trinidad and Tobago, with the high standards of our education and our accessibility to tertiary level education, our Generation Zs are fully-fledged members of the most connected, educated and sophisticated generation ever! The career opportunities that await them are extraordinary. Five of the top 10 most desirable jobs in the world did not exist a decade ago. The challenge for educators, parents, and visionaries of older generations, is how to transfer our knowledge, experience and wisdom in a palatable form, so that this emerging generation can make a positive difference in their era, and for the generations of the future.

The NGC Sanfest is an important channel. It is for this reason that NGC assumed major sponsorship of the Festival two years ago. We love to get integrally involved in projects that have a meaningful impact on the lives of citizens. It happens on an individual level, on a community level, on a national level, and regionally, too. That way NGC is a pipeline between the wealth accrued from one of the

Nation's major natural resources—natural gas—and the people to whom it rightfully belongs.

In closing, I would like to congratulate the San Fernando Arts Council, its Chairman Sherid Mason, Festival Director Winston Bramble and the committed members for putting on a superb Festival. The partnership with Jessel Murray and the UWI Department of Creative and Festival Arts is an important one, and is making an important difference.

A very smart woman once said that when you hold a baby in your arms the first time, and you think of all the things you can say and do to influence him, it's a tremendous responsibility. I would like to suggest that that responsibility could begin at any time. It can and does begin in a forum like NGC Sanfest. And what you do with a young person can influence not only him or her, but everyone he or she meets...and not for a day or a month or a year, but for all time and eternity.

Thank you for your attention. I hope you have a most enjoyable evening ahead.