

2015: BERNARD DULAL-WHITWAY (1946–2009)

When Bernard Dulal-Whiteway died six years ago, it was a huge loss not only to his family and friends, and to the conglomerate he headed—Neal and Massy, as it was then—but to the country and to the region.

His son Graeme says Dulal-Whiteway would have been pleased and proud of this recognition.

“But,” he explains, “Dad was a very humble gentleman. He didn’t like pomp and glory. He only liked being in the spotlight when it was a tool to spread ideas for the benefit of the younger generation, for the future—unless it was at the races and he had won the Derby.”

Dulal-Whiteway came from Cedros; he was one of eight children of a schoolteacher. In 1966 young Bernard was working for Texaco, and won a scholarship from the company to study accountancy in England. There he married Cheryl, née Sanguinette, a fellow southerner, and on their return home he joined Neal and Massy as an accountant.

He rose rapidly through the group, working in various arms. In 1987, he was the general manager of Neal and Massy Industries Limited, which manufactured vehicles in Morvant. It was he who took the decision to move the operation—a \$50 million investment, which had 1100 employees at its height—to Santa Rosa, then a rural community. The move proved a success, and a lot of the employees—originally from Morvant—stayed there.

“That was an example of his being a visionary,” says Earl Boodasingh. Now an executive director of Massy Holdings, Boodasingh also joined the group as an accountant, and reported to Dulal-Whiteway. The two had a close working relationship for 27 years.

Summing him up, Boodasingh recalls, “He was a very charismatic leader. People listened to what he had to say: he had a clear vision.

“He balanced cost-cutting and operational efficiency. He was very frugal—but he also liked to see growth.

“He was able to build consensus—although he could be the iron fist in the velvet glove at times.”

But at the same time he was very much a people person. “He was upbeat and enthusiastic, interested in people’s careers.”

Boodasingh personally benefited from Dulal-Whiteway’s firm belief in investing in young talent.

“I went to Harvard Business School thanks to him—and that wasn’t cheap—and many training courses. Other people did too. He said you would train people, and they would leave—but it was worse if you didn’t train them, and they stayed.”

To Boodasingh he was a mentor and friend as well as a boss. He learned from seeing how Dulal-Whiteway, even as a very senior manager, acknowledged the importance of every single employee.

“He had relationships with people from the lowest to the highest in the company, and they were built on trust and integrity. His words and his actions were the same.”

Dulal-Whiteway wasn’t only being friendly, though he had a profound respect for other people. He believed in managing by walking about...“and being accessible. When someone met you in the corridor, they would tell you things they wouldn’t tell you if they come to visit you in your office. He said you could learn more about a company from talking to the cleaner than talking to some managers.”

On a larger scale, Boodasingh recalls Dulal-Whiteway as a “calculated risk-taker”; this led to some of his—and the group’s—major accomplishments. Dulal-Whiteway became the executive chairman of Massy Integrated Retail Inc., with bases in Miami, Guyana, St Lucia and elsewhere in the region; revenues of TT\$7 billion; and 6,000 employees. Then, “After he became group CEO in 2000, he doubled the profits, and then doubled them again.”

In 2007 he spearheaded what Boodasingh calls “one of the most exciting acquisitions in the Caribbean,” that of the Barbados Shipping & Trading Company, “the largest conglomerate in Barbados—so Neal and Massy spread throughout the whole Caribbean.”

It was a huge undertaking for the group. “People were frantic and upset—but he was extremely calm and thoughtful. He always saw the bigger picture, and sought value for shareholders.”

The extent to which Dulal-Whiteway thought ahead can be judged from his constant emphasis on getting Neal and Massy staff to learn Spanish, aware that the English-speaking Caribbean was only “five million people—surrounded by 270 million people who spoke Spanish.”

Dulal-Whiteway also reached out to young people who were not among the group’s staff. He avidly supported the Neal and Massy Foundation making it sustainable by arranging for it to receive a percentage of group companies’ profits. The foundation gives scholarships to employees’ children, and runs a “Boys to Men” programme four times a year in challenged communities.

“We take young executives along, to show the boys what they can aim for,” Boodasingh explains. “We also offer them employment in Massy Stores and our distribution and automotive companies.”

In addition to his heavy workload and responsibilities, recalls Graeme, his only child, somehow his father kept a rule he had set for himself: always be home in time for the news and dinner.

“He was very good at balancing his life in that way...He was strict—but a wonderful father: dedicated, a shoulder to lean on.

“You knew when he was angry but he wasn’t unreasonable.”

Dulal-Whiteway also turned out as a medium-pace bowler for Queen’s Park—and in addition to his well-known interest in horseracing, he also kept birds.

The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is indeed honoured to induct Mr. Bernard Dulal-Whiteway (posthumously) into the Business Hall Fame on this 7th November, 2015.

He found time too for public service, chairing the Vision 2020 sub-committee on industry and entrepreneurship. He was chairman of Yara Trinidad, and sat on the boards of Republic Bank, Trintoc, Ispat, Tidco, United Way and TSTT.

His son lived overseas after finishing his studies, but returned home two years before the family learned his father was terminally ill. During that time, “We were inseparable,” Graeme recalls.

Dulal-Whiteway’s early death, in December 2009, was a blow for Neal and Massy too, but Boodasingh recalls that admiringly “He had invested so much in the younger generation, that there was a smooth transition. The leaders of the group all subscribed to the same business values of integrity, discipline – so there was a strong management team. And there was succession planning.”

Neal and Massy Holdings chairman Arthur Lok Jack called Dulal-Whiteway an inspirational leader who touched many hearts. Gervase Warner, who acted as CEO during Dulal-Whiteway’s illness, and then succeeded him, echoed Lok Jack, and going so far as to describe Dulal-Whiteway as “a sacred gift.”

Graeme sees his father as an exemplar: “You don’t have to have a cut-throat attitude to be a businessman. People still write to me about what a kind, gentle man he was. He was never involved in any scandals or questionable affairs.”

Summing up why Bernard Dulal-Whiteway deserved to be inducted into the Business Hall of Fame, Earl Boodasingh singles out the breadth of his vision.

“Bernard understood the importance of business in the wider community. He understood profit, he knew companies had to do well—but he understood all facets of it: he was passionate about the Caribbean, the role business could play to integrate the Caribbean community, and the wider contribution it could make in Trinidad and Tobago.”

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