



SPEECH BY

HIS EXCELLENCY
MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC (Retd)
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF
THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

MORNING TEA IN SUPPORT OF GROUP TRAINING AUSTRALIA AND LAUNCH OF
“TODAY’S SKILLS: TOMORROW’S LEADERS 2005” PROGRAM

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
WEDNESDAY 17 AUGUST 2005

- Mrs Marea Moulton, Chair, Group Training Australia
- The Honourable Gary Nairn, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
- Mr James Barron, Chief Executive Officer, Group Training Australia
- Representatives of Group Training Schemes, Training College, Employers, and Government authorities
- Apprentices and Trainees

Marlena and I are delighted to welcome you to Government House this morning, and I want to say what a privilege it is, as patron of Group Training Australia, to launch the Youth Development Program, “Today’s Skills – Tomorrow’s Leaders – 2005”.

An especially warm welcome on this cool Canberra morning to the program participants from every Australian State and Territory.

And may I say how impressed I am by the breadth of your specialisations:

- Electrical, Electronic and Mechanical Engineering
- Commercial Cookery
- Light Vehicle Mechanics
- Office Administration
- Painting and Decorating
- Electro-technology Systems
- Information Technology

- Meat Processing
- Horticulture

It seems to me that trade specialists demonstrate their skills so deftly and with such ease that their accomplishments are grossly undervalued. I know you will agree with me that tradespeople understand the material universe and the way things work. Tradespeople identify quality by performance.

They know that actions, not words, are the true measure of a person. As Benjamin Franklin wisely noted: "well done is better than well said."

We look to you at a time when our nation needs very highly skilled men and women as it moves forward through the challenges that lie ahead.

The 21st century will be the most complex yet experienced by trades.

You will be expected to learn traditional skills, take on board new processes, adapt to product developments, and, to use that daunting term, 'be competitive'.

Vacancies for skilled Trades nationally have risen by about 50% in the last three years and that trend is continuing.

All areas have skills shortages including engineering, automotive, chefs, cooks, construction, electro-technology, hairdressing, carpenters, bricklayers, plasters and plumbers as well as cabinetmakers and furniture upholsterers. Vacancies in automotive trades rose by 6.8% in 2004 and by more than 27% for electrical and electronic trades.

I believe tradespeople have a crucial role to play in enabling us all to get on with our lives, protecting public health and creating sustainable communities throughout Australia. You have an increasing responsibility to create a safe, innovative and environmentally friendly society as you deliver the services we need to survive.

As we look to the future, in this era of an ageing workforce and some lower than desired participation rates by apprentices in study, industry needs to think hard on how to capture young minds and hearts with the promise and the reality that trade specialisations are exciting, diverse and an essential force for good in the community.

How does industry give young people the tools to transform their natural creativity into valuable contributions to our nation? What more can we do to support industries that are already getting in early, and hosting events in regional communities that tap into or create a market that engages with young secondary students? And how do we encourage others 'to come on board'?

I am quite sure that many older hands in the trades, and highly motivated young apprentices and trainees like yourselves, would be eager to help spread the message about trade work and the broad range of additional opportunities such as trade teachers, supervisors, project managers, contractors, administrators and managers.

And as part of that critical educative process I want to commend the trade teachers in our secondary and TAFE colleges for the magnificent contribution they make to Australia's technical and economic well being by imparting their extensive knowledge and the wisdom gained from experience.

Another powerful tool to support potential apprentices is voluntary mentoring programs where grand-parent equivalents help youngsters with learning difficulties to become literate and numerate, and thus capable of taking on post secondary studies, including apprenticeships and traineeships. Mentoring also has special relevance in indigenous communities with its power to transform lives.

May I recommend to the trades industry in general, the magnificent Croc Festivals held annually throughout regional and outback Australia – the two and three day life skills learning programs for thousands of indigenous and non-indigenous youngsters living in rural and remote Australia.

I recently opened the Croc Fest on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait, and met with workshop facilitators, teachers, community leaders, parents and local citizens providing learning opportunities and career information for the hundreds of youngsters there.

I can see great value in trade industries hosting their own information centres at Croc Festivals to advise and inspire thousands of young people both indigenous and non indigenous, on career options as apprentices and trainees.

Ladies and gentlemen. We look to young Australians. We rely on young tradespeople moving through the ranks valuing and utilising time honoured and proven practical skills. We also look to them to devise new solutions to old problems, to add value to their knowledge.

And so I applaud you, apprentices and trainees. You have set a fine example of character, application, dedication and knowledge. The study, hard work, commitment, the occasional failures, and the triumphs – already you have proven, most convincingly, that nothing worthwhile comes without effort. Congratulations to each one of you on all your achievements.

May I commend Group Training Australia for its visionary leadership program for young Australians.

I have every confidence in the growing partnerships between Group Training and employers across Australia and I wish the GTA programs which are working so effectively and efficiently across our nation the continuing and growing success they deserve.

Finally, as Patron of Group Training Australia, I want to congratulate the participants in the leadership program. I am certain this will be a memorable experience for each of you, where you will learn from one another, and I hope be motivated to continue giving the very best you have for the benefit of our country.

Keep up the great work. It is now my great pleasure to declare the Training Program, “Today’s Skills – Tomorrow’s Leaders 2005”, officially launched.