

COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION AND COURAGE: THE INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

LEADERSHIP SHOWCASE – Lisa Brathwaite-Graham

On 17 March 2020, the Minister of Health and Wellness, Lt Col Jeffrey Bostic confirmed the first two cases of COVID-19 in the small Caribbean nation of Barbados.¹ Just 9 days later, on 26 March, Prime Minister Mia Mottley announced that the country had reached 24 cases and would be entering stage three of the COVID-19 National Preparedness Plan. A public health emergency was declared.²

Lisa Brathwaite-Graham was working as Nurse Administrator for the country's leading general and life insurance provider ICBL when the response plan was announced. She responded to the call to serve by leading the COVID-19 Nursing Response Team at the country's Queen Elizabeth Hospital for 6 months and in doing so, demonstrated not only the importance of determination, discipline, and collaboration in effectively managing the crisis response but also the power of alignment and communication in engaging the hearts and minds of the people on the front-line to achieve outstanding results.

A Call to Serve

"The population of Barbados is very small and our people have a very high percentage of chronic illnesses. So our Prime Minister knew that if COVID-19 reached our only public hospital for acute and surgical care, that the risks for loss of life would be great. She needed to protect those in the population whose immunity could not withstand COVID-19 so she built a secondary Hospital in three and a half weeks to be able to meet the needs of the populace with COVID-related needs."

Lisa Brathwaite-Graham is a woman with a passion for public health. As nurse administrator for ICBL – the leading General and Life Insurance provider in Barbados - she is responsible for managing the company's medical unit as well as designing and coordinating ICBL's health and wellness product, EasyWellness. Trained in Barbados and Jamaica, Brathwaite-Graham holds both an Associate and a Bachelors Degree in Nursing, a Masters in Public Health and lectures part-time in Healthcare Management and Clinical and Corporate Governance at the Barbados Institute of Management and Productivity (BIMAP).

So when the call came in at 8am on 17th March, requesting Lisa Brathwaite-Graham for secondment to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) to lead their COVID-19 Nursing Response Team, ICBL's CEO Geoff Scott said it was a "no brainer" for him. Permission was granted within hours and that evening, Brathwaite-Graham was sitting in the boardroom at the Hospital with the Executive Chair and Board Director discussing what needed to happen next.

"When the pandemic struck and we started having our first cases that was a great transition, because at that time, there was a lot of fear." explains QEH's Henderson Pinder. "We didn't have the requisite number of staff on hand, as it were to manage those facilities. And they were scattered throughout the

¹ *nationnews*. 17 March 2020

² *Loop Barbados*. 26 March 2020

country so there was a need for persons at all levels to assist us in managing this process at a national level.”

As Director of Nursing Services Pinder leads a team of 548 nurses, 150 nursing assistants, 50 health aides, 10 assistant directors, 10 senior nursing officers, and 52 nursing officers to implement the hospital’s strategy for patient-centred care. As such, the Prime Minister’s mandate - that the Queen Elizabeth Hospital remain insulated from COVID-19 – created several logistical and human resource hurdles for Pinder and his team as they rose to meet the challenge.

“This was a new disease,” Pinder says. “There was a lot of ambiguity as to how it was being contracted. And then a lot of persons were more concerned about themselves and their family. We had to put a number of protocols in place. And these protocols were built upon how we would handle someone who came in contact, how we would treat patients and other persons coming into the hospital, how we treat visitors who come to the island.”

Pinder knew of Brathwaite-Graham’s training, education and strengths in communication and her experience in developing public health protocols from her previous lectures with the hospital’s entire Clinical Risk Unit at BIMAP in 2019 as well as her presentation at the hospital’s annual conference in March 2020. So when the Executive Chair reached out to ICBL to request that Brathwaite-Graham assist them in their nursing response, Pinder both welcomed and supported her as she stepped in to chair the hospital’s COVID-19 Nursing Response committee.

From Confusion to Clarity: The Power of the Strategy Map

Brathwaite-Graham recalls the evening after that first meeting vividly. “I got home that evening and I thought, what am I going to do, I’ve never faced a pandemic before? And then I remembered Kit Jackson who came into ICBL around the same time that our new CEO had joined, Mr. Scott.” Brathwaite-Graham was impressed by the concepts Jackson introduced to ICBL and how she brought a standard of excellence that she herself embraced. She was also intrigued by the strategy work she had seen and how ICBL was able to use it as a precursor to change the organisation’s culture.

Jackson is a globally recognised thought leader and expert practitioner in Strategy Execution and began working with ICBL’s CEO Geoff Scott at the beginning of his tenure to help him to understand three critical factors for ICBL’s future success:

- the organisation that he was just starting to lead;
- the capability of his new leadership team; and
- the strategy that had been outlined.

“The first step in that process was to understand the story of the strategy. And we use a strategy map to do that,” Jackson explains. “We need to start by articulating the strategy, and then building the various elements of the capability to execute, making sure that the organisation is aligned, the leadership capability is aligned, the communication is aligned and the culture, values and behaviours are all aligned. When you adopt this integrated approach where you have capability aligned to the strategy, that’s when extraordinary things take place.”

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Brathwaite-Graham shares how she came across the concept of the Strategy Map as a result of both Jackson's work with ICBL staff as well as how Scott and his leadership team used the map as a way of communicating progress in company updates. "I remember the foundation and I remember the pillars, and then the roof because it is built to resemble a house. I was involved enough to get the gist of it."

Creating the Structure for Alignment

Brathwaite-Graham drew on what she'd seen and developed a Strategy Map for QEH's COVID-19 Nursing Response in one night to address the Response Committee's chief priority: To provide credible, relevant, and accessible information to the nursing cohort to ensure the continuation of nursing service delivery.

The roof represented the mandate of the Prime Minister to insulate the hospital and communication, a critical building block as far as Brathwaite-Graham was concerned, formed the foundation. She then used a combination of her knowledge and experience as a Public Health Practitioner and the available research on pandemic response and crisis management to inform what the right 'pillars' would be – Nurses' Health, Nurse Staffing, and Testing the Crisis Action Plan - and who would be best placed to lead each of them.

The following morning Brathwaite-Graham presented the Strategy Map to the Nursing Response Committee. "Every nurse administrator looked at it, the director, he looked at it, the board director, she looked at it. And they said, we can do this. And the strategy map went into action." Director Pinder confirmed that as the pandemic situation was accelerating rapidly, the implementation plan for the strategy map was agreed in just two days.

Brathwaite-Graham shared the story of the Strategy Map in every ward and every unit in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, showing the staff the plan that had been created for them and bringing a sense of confidence and hope. "I remember the first unit I went on was a surgical unit I showed them how we were doing what we were doing. I would never forget the level of hope that it brought. And because it brought structure, it gave them confidence."

Key initiatives launched include not only rigorous training from the Infection Prevention and Control Team but sessions on Stress Management and coping strategies as well. Educational material was available on the wards supported by counselling support, a centralised communication platform and a digital campaign (sponsored by ICBL).

Without the strategy map, Brathwaite-Graham says her efforts would have had no structure and she would not have anything to report on at the end. "The map served me. It wasn't designed to operate at crisis, but it just shows the versatility of it to be able to be used to respond in a crisis. I didn't know that it was to be used for that. But I used what I had."

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Lisa Brathwaite-Graham

While not part of the team that worked with Jackson on the creation of ICBL's strategy map, Brathwaite-Graham had been part of all staff communications around the strategy map and had seen how ICBL's senior leaders used the strategy map as a framework to talk about the strategy and the progress against the strategy on a regular basis with all staff. "She was familiar with the structure of the strategy map, how she fitted into the strategy of the organisation and how we used it in the organisation," Jackson

says. "And so when she was set a challenge around how to communicate a strategy effectively, she reached out to something that she'd seen work and used this as a basis for her programme. And although it's not being used in the purest sense of the Balanced Scorecard methodology, it's been used extremely effectively to tell a story of the strategy, of the approach to COVID, and in particular how to use it to tell the story to communicate to every individual so that everybody could understand their place, their contribution."

Pinder speaks of Brathwaite-Graham's impact on the nursing teams, citing that his staff were empowered not just to alert him of potential breaches but to have already taken the action required to manage them. "They knew they were educated so they could then put measures in place...by the time they informed us, they had already called the teams, they were already set up to have the person tested, they've already spoken to the relatives and the patient themselves."

He says, "[Lisa's] greatest impact is a realisation that we need to communicate better, more effectively, we need to simplify communication," Pinder says. "We also realised that stress was a major problem that the staff faced during this period. And once we were able to sit with them, to hear their fears, communicate and help them over it, that was an important milestone for us."

Coming Home

Brathwaite-Graham says that she was glad to accept the call to serve her country back in March 2020 and speaks highly of both ICBL and CEO Geoff Scott, and their willingness to support her and provide whatever resources she needed. To this end, Brathwaite-Graham took the initiative to prepare a literature review report for the hospital, had it designed by ICBL's Marketing Executive, and presented it to hospital leadership on 1st September 2020 before "coming home" to ICBL.

A fortnight later, QEH's Executive Chairman Juliette Bynoe-Sutherland, paid ICBL's headquarters a visit to thank management personally for their quick decision to release Brathwaite-Graham for national duty. Bynoe-Sutherland said "Lisa was able to get the nurses rethinking their processes, building on what they already knew and inherently understood. It was at that moment, at the time of our greatest crisis of fear and our confidence, that Lisa came along and inspired and motivated a pool of nurses."ⁱ

In responding, CEO Geoff Scott mentioned that his agreement to Brathwaite-Graham's secondment was one of the easiest decisions he'd had to make as CEO. "I met Lisa during my second week at ICBL, and she left quite an impression on me from the very beginning. She is not only a nurse who works with our customers; she is very interested in people as an educator and motivator. The way she stepped up to work with the hospital, with so many unknowns, is a testament to her character."

Her secondment was one of the easiest decisions I've had to make as CEO. The way she stepped up is a testament to her character - Geoff Scott

Jackson also applauds Brathwaite-Graham's leadership and commitment in the face of the crisis. "Lisa was always recognised from early days as being an asset, a rough diamond that was deep in the organisation. She took every opportunity to develop herself, this was a great opportunity to showcase her capabilities, and she stepped up. Lisa did an amazing job with the limited information that she had. She has no formal training in this and it speaks to her capability as a leader, how she was able to pick this tool up and use it so effectively and do what she did."

"Coming back into ICBL she has had a promotion. She's seen as key talent and will continue to progress and to develop and I see her using all the skills and tools that ICBL are providing her for the benefit not just of the organisation, but also of the nation. I imagine there are great things to come from Lisa Brathwaite Graham."

It speaks to her capability as a leader, how she was able to pick this tool up and use it so effectively and do what she did.– Kit Jackson

Brathwaite-Graham says she's learnt a lot about herself and what she is capable of during her months of national service. "I'm stronger than I thought. And I also learned that I can take charge." she states with confidence. "You sort of expand yourself, you learn so much."

Leaving a Legacy

During her visit to ICBL, QEH's Bynoe-Sutherland particularly points to her reasons for taking the opportunity to say thank you publicly. "We don't have many stories like this, and this is a story of how the private and public sector can work together, with the right individuals to make a difference for Barbados."

And despite the experience teaching her so much, the thing that Brathwaite-Graham speaks most proudly of is the opportunity to serve her country and its people.

"I'm a nurse. I will always be a nurse. It doesn't matter where I go in life. And I have a desire to see people do well. I really care about people. I care about people individually, and I care about them collectively. So I'm able to put things in place to be able to address people's needs. And from the time the opportunity came, I forgot about the fact that I was nervous. I forgot about the fact that I didn't know what I thought I needed to do. I just took it on because of that desire to care for and to respond."

"There's room and there's plenty I think to learn from each other. I can celebrate our wins. But it was definitely a team approach. I never saw myself as anything grand. It's always tough as a member of a team. And I felt as if I had something to offer them and they had something to offer me."

There's room and there's plenty I think to learn from each other - Lisa Brathwaite-Graham

"The Minister of Health and Wellness in Barbados asked Barbadians to come together to save the lives of our people. And people from all walks of this country donated their time. And Barbados is doing very well. And it is because of our people."

ⁱ <https://www.barbadosadvocate.com/news/qeh-thanks-icbl-its-support-during-covid-19-health-crisis>