



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF M S MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR
CONGRATULATORY ADDRESS - TOP PERFORMERS AWARDS

PROTEA RESTAURANT: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Members of executive management, colleagues, recipients of awards

Most people, I suspect, would like to believe that they are top performers. If any of us had any doubt about that, we would just have to watch a single episode of the Idols competition. Contestant after contestant shuffles nervously onto the stage and almost without fail, subjects the judges to the most horrible sounds - which they seem genuinely to believe - represent singing that is good enough for them to be the next Idol. Of course those of us at home have mixed reactions. Sometimes we are shocked into silence and disbelief and we feel embarrassment on their behalf. And other times we just can't help laughing out loud at the misplaced hope and self-delusion of the contestants. We think to ourselves and we even say out loud: "Man, how on earth did he or she ever think that they could sing – they are just so terrible!"

But the interesting thing is that they *do* believe that they can sing and what's more, they have families who also believe that they can sing. It is only the judges, whose experience, understanding and knowledge of what it means and what it takes to be a truly good singer, who are able to make an accurate assessment of the performer and the performance, in terms of the quality and the potential to succeed in an extremely competitive environment. Many people can sing, but few have the potential to become stars. Many people can draw, paint and sculpt, but few have the potential to become renowned artists.

Many people can write, but few become best-selling authors. Likewise many are good employees but few have that “star quality” that is recognised and acknowledged by others.

So what does this tell us colleagues? I would like to suggest that it tells us that the assessment of ability and performance is a very emotive issue, more so when it comes to one’s own performance. I would like to suggest that top performance is only real, that it only acquires force and effect, when it is recognised and acknowledged by others.

And once we accept that this is true then we begin to understand how fraught the whole process of performance management could be in any institution. We begin to understand that suspicion and even fear and mistrust will mark the process. People are not only afraid of being assessed, but many, especially in an academic institution, feel affronted that they should in fact be assessed at all. After all, have they not proven over the years that they are superior performers simply by virtue of their academic qualifications?

But, as we all know, it is not as simple as that. A qualification, irrespective of its inherent value or status cannot be the sole predictor or indicator of meritorious performance. It is how, and the level to which one *applies* that knowledge in alignment with the institution’s vision, strategy and planning, and one’s concomitant responsibilities and accountabilities, on a day-to-day basis, that provides the best evidence of top performance. Put simply, top performance requires that one consistently exceeds expectations in virtually all aspects of one’s job, to the extent that it is noted and acknowledged by one’s peers.

Unisa’s Integrated Performance Management System provides a means of measuring performance in a consistent manner, and while some might argue that that assessments are still too subjective and uneven across the institution, and that the KPAs are too generic or do not reflect sufficiently their particular work situations, there are I believe, sufficient checks and balances in place to ensure as fair a process as possible. Of course no system is perfect and there is definitely room for improvement. But it must be said in the same breath, that Unisa’s IPMS undergoes ongoing review and adjustment, and I for one am satisfied that it offers the best possible instrument of measurement for Unisa at present.

I think that what currently irks many colleagues is that they are not yet being paid performance bonuses. But colleagues should note that the issue of performance bonuses is receiving ongoing attention at the UBF and it is from that forum that a resolution will have to emanate. As you know, Management *must* negotiate with the unions to arrive at a satisfactory dispensation in regard to performance bonuses, for staff at P5 and below. I am therefore unable to give you any assurances on my part, but I hope and trust that we will ultimately arrive at an outcome that is amenable to all.

At Unisa, good performance is not only acknowledged via the IPMS. We acknowledge progress and excellence in a variety of ways. One thinks here for example, of the Excellence in Tuition Awards, the Chancellor’s Awards, the Chair of Council Awards, the Apex Awards, the Hiddingh Curry awards, and

various other research and other awards, all of which are aimed at acknowledging performance excellence in one way or another, in pursuit of Unisa as a high performance university.

But all of these are acknowledged publicly, while at present, our top performers in terms of the IPMS ratings are not, especially at levels P5 and under. So I am really pleased that this breakfast is happening, because it offers that same opportunity for acknowledgement as the other awards I have just mentioned.

And of course, our top achievers are also being noticed when it comes to Unisa's talent management programme. In line with international best practice, we too are implementing a programme that is aimed at identifying and grooming our institutional talent for bigger and better things. It is an exciting and challenging process. For those who elect to consistently achieve excellently, I can say that your efforts are not going unnoticed and they are in fact much appreciated.

But there is another side to top performance that is sometimes overseen. Each of you here this morning, has the power to influence those about you in a positive manner – to inspire them to emulate your example and to work hard at raising their own levels of performance. In any institution people know who the top performers are by virtue of the consistently excellent service and outputs that they provide, irrespective of their rank or status. It is hard to imagine that by far the majority of people would not want to aspire to improved levels of competence and excellence. Having received this acknowledgement you are in a position to encourage and mentor others into being the best that they can.

And so colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour and a privilege for me to acknowledge Unisa's top performers today. Unlike so many of those really rotten Idol's singers, your song - or more pertinently, your work - has been seen, heard and experienced by others as being excellent. You can walk out of this room today, head held high knowing that when it comes to your effort and application in relation to your work, you have been judged and you have come through with flying colours.

It therefore gives me pleasure on behalf of management and in fact all colleagues at Unisa, firstly to thank you for serving our institution in such an exemplary manner and secondly, to congratulate you on the formal acknowledgement of that excellence here this morning. We are very proud of you and we look forward to more of the same in the years ahead.

Thank you.