



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MANDLA S MAKHANYA  
WELCOME ADDRESS  
PRINCIPAL'S SUMMIT  
ROYAL ELEPHANT HOTEL, CENTURION  
4 JULY 2011**

- Mr Programme Facilitator: Prof Kuzvinetsa Dzvimbo
- Dr Mathews Phosa: Chairperson of Unisa's Council
- Prof Narend Bajjnath: Pro Vice Chancellor
- Prof Deon Rossouw from Ethics South Africa
- Mr Gordon Cooper from the Phoenix Foundation
- Panel facilitator: Prof Tinyiko Maluleke
- Colleagues on the discussion panel: Prof Dirk Kotze, Prof George Subotzky and Dr Neil Eccles

Good morning colleagues.

I'm really pleased to welcome you to our annual Principal's Summit this morning, which, as you will have deduced from your preparatory documentation will not be "business-as-usual." The format of this year's summit is quite different. In line with our institutional focus on innovation and creativity, and the strategic imperative of ethical servant leadership, we decided to adopt an approach to the Summit that we trust will get us thinking in different ways about the manner in which as individuals and a collective, we live out our professional - and even personal responsibilities - as employees of the University of South Africa. Put simply, how we can live out the notion of ethical servant leadership as the leaders of this Institution?

You know, one of the unwritten, unquantifiable – and sometimes overlooked - perks of working at a university, is that it is filled with interesting and clever people – some admittedly more clever than others – many of whom have fiercely individualistic streaks and quirky personalities. Certainly one finds that “towing-the-line’ doesn’t come easily to many colleagues, but I like to think that that is the stuff that universities are made of.

And perhaps we shouldn’t underestimate it, because it is the stuff that has ensured intellectual freedom and autonomy throughout the ages and it is the stuff that has created the space for the generation of new knowledge and the flourishing of ideas that may not enjoy popular support, understanding or acceptance at a given time. So on one hand (and perhaps at a more abstract level), the lofty purpose and ideals of universities come with their own perks, pleasures and peculiarities. But on the other hand, in order for the knowledge and ideas so generated to have “*some force upon other minds*” (to borrow a phrase from Virginia Woolfe) and bearing in mind that we speak here of our students, our universities have to be run efficiently and effectively (and by the way that is also a key higher education goal). Equally importantly, we have to ensure that the knowledge we generate and disseminate is not only of unquestionable quality and value, but that it is communicated in an appropriate and effective manner.

In preparing for this Summit I did some reading up on communication between professors and their students, between academics as colleagues and between leaders in universities and government and I found an absolute treasure trove of anecdotes and even legends. Some professors have even gained cult status over the years, lending credence to the assertions of characteristics and quirks I have just mentioned. I thought I would share a few with you.

There was a certain philosophers club that became legendary within philosophy circles because of a meeting on 25 October 1946 at Richard Braithwaite's rooms in King's, where Karl Popper, a Viennese philosopher, had been invited as the guest speaker. Popper's paper was "Are there philosophical problems?" in which he struck up a position against Wittgenstein's, contending that problems in philosophy are real, not just linguistic puzzles as Wittgenstein argued. Accounts vary as to what happened next, but Wittgenstein was apparently infuriated and started waving a hot poker at Popper, demanding that Popper give him an example of a moral rule. Popper offered one—"Not to threaten visiting speakers with pokers"— at which point Russell had to tell Wittgenstein to put the poker down and Wittgenstein stormed out. It was the only time the philosophers, three of the most eminent in the world, were ever in the same room together. [49] The minutes record that the meeting was "charged to an unusual degree with a spirit of controversy."

This story was told by Stephen Hawking: A well-known scientist (some say it was Bertrand Russell) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun,

in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise." The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, "What is the tortoise standing on?" "You're very clever, young man, veeery clever," said the old lady. "But it's turtles all the way down....."

Prof Connolly, whoever he may be, has achieved legendary status amongst his students.

Scene: Classroom with floor to ceiling glass windows on the corner of a busy street.

Players: One crazy professor with 12 patient students

Prof Connolly is in the middle of a lecture when he stops mid sentence, makes a beeline for the window and presses his face up against the glass, peering outside at something.

Prof Connolly: Class come over here, you all need to see this.

Class: gathers round

Prof Connolly: Look at professor H smoking a cigar by the library! I can't believe he's taken up smoking again. Let's all wave at him and see if he notices.

Class: Waves enthusiastically at the professor across the street who is quite oblivious.

Prof Connolly: Everyone walking by thinks we're nuts now. You can go and sit down.

Student: Prof Connolly is a complete idiot! He is unprofessional and rude. He once wrote on my paper: "I can't believe you made it this far." For the past six years that note haunted me. He should not be teaching adults.

Fellow professor responds: Prof Connolly scared you? Poor babies! He may be different in his candidness and sarcasm, but at least he refuses to surrender to the narcissistic tendencies of this generation of students. If you are still "haunted" by a comment he left on your paper, you seriously need to get over yourself and frankly, I can't believe you made it this far either!"

And finally, just to prove that the teaching hardship and stress can work both ways, one student said: I had a biology professor who routinely came to our 9.00am class with a mug full of Jack Daniels.....

Colleagues of course teaching at an ODL institution is slightly different – well actually it's a lot different. But we still have among us a wonderful array of personalities and obviously, very different students. The point to be made is that notwithstanding our various personalities, quirks, characteristics and competencies, all of us here are in leadership positions and as such we have a very real responsibility to serve both our students and our institution in a manner that will ensure that *both* receive fair value in every sense of the word. None of us can exempt ourselves from that responsibility on the basis of our personalities or our personal likes and dislikes. We are all members of a team and the failure of one

member renders the entire team vulnerable. Non performance of one member has a knock-on effect on the team, the institution and our students. So we firstly need to understand that when it comes to leading, we cannot act as lone rangers with our own agendas. We cannot ignore directives, policies or what we perceive to be the “rules” because we don’t like them. Along with the perks, leadership comes with a responsibility that may not always be to our liking.

And so today we will be looking at, and finding clarity on the idea of ethics as they apply in our management and leadership of Unisa. Ultimately your insights will contribute to the drafting of an Institutional Policy on Ethics. We will also be broadening our understanding of servant leadership and all that it entails, and how we as the leadership at Unisa will apply that in our daily functioning. Colleagues, this will not be a one sided conversation. It is intended to be a free and frank discussion and debate and the fleshing out of a leadership paradigm that must become embedded in our hearts and minds and of course in our Institution. Ultimately we hope to come away from this Summit with a very clear understanding of what is expected of us as ethical servant leaders and how we can apply that understanding in a proactive and productive manner. I trust that each of you will make the most of this opportunity to share with colleagues your views and insights. They can only add value to the process.

And so welcome once again colleagues. I trust that this year’s Summit will be the start of an ongoing process of inclusive and complementary engagement and growth as the leadership of Unisa

I thank you.