

**ADDRESS DELIVERED BY MS XOLISWA KAKANA TO THE DURBAN  
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (“DUT”) ON THE OCCASSION OF THE DUT  
GRADUATION CEREMONY  
HELD ON 16 APRIL 2013**

Honourable Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Ahmed C Bawa, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Management Sciences, Dr Rishi Balkaran, staff and students of the DUT, parents, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I greet you with excitement on this very special day. However, if you will excuse me, my warmest greetings are reserved for the students, solely because it is to them that this auspicious occasion has the deepest and most intimate meaning.

Dear Graduands, I firstly want to take this moment to congratulate you, on your achievement. You have each shown that you have the resilience and fortitude to follow through on a commitment. However, today’s heroes are your parents, who have given all they could in order to ensure that their children have a good chance in the working world. Most probably, some of you, parents, are in debt because of this commitment.

It feels like it was yesterday, that - like you - I was filled with great excitement, having completed my first degree. I stood in that convocation room, confidently glancing at my mother and father, with a silly proud smirk on my face, for I had completed my task, of giving THEM the degree THEY wanted out of me. I truly believed that now I had arrived, and the world had to stop and notice Xoli the science graduate, isikhokho, the one who knew it all. Looking back to 1984, I cannot believe how much I did not know and to be honest, still do not know to this day.

It was 20 odd years ago, and to be perfectly frank, I cannot even begin to remember, what the key-note speaker said to us on that esteemed day. So when I accepted the honour and privilege of speaking to you on your graduation day - that is important not only to you and your families, but also to this nation- I wondered what it is that I could say to you, that you would hear and hold on to. In other words, I have tried to give an address that I would have wished to hear myself from the key-note speaker on that day in 1984.

I continue to get inspired by Henry Wardswarth Longfellow's poem "*A Psalm of life*".

It reads:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream!  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,  
Is our destined end or way;  
But to act, that each to-morrow  
Find us farther than to-day.

Indeed, things are not what they seem, and we are not born in order just to die. He calls upon us to act so that tomorrow finds us ahead of today. He is telling us “Walala wasala”

As I look around, my assumptions that my 20-year old self had a lot in common with most of you today are confirmed. I was born in Flagstaff, in the Eastern Cape, brought up by parents for whom my education was a great sacrifice. Like you, I had a yearning for a life that would be better than that of my family, so I could contribute to its upliftment. As my homeboy Drake, the rapper, would say: “started from the bottom now we here”.

What we do NOT have in common is that the world that you are entering is much more complex than the world I entered in those years. In those years, with Matric you could still get a job, and live above the poverty line; with a degree you were almost guaranteed a great job and a good life for yourself and your family.

At the same time, you are graduating in the most amazing of times, when being young and educated presents you with immeasurable opportunities brought on by amongst others **our democracy** as we look to establish our rightful place in the rest of the world, the fleeting speed of technological advancement, transformative collaboration in our great continent, and collaborative initiatives from the developing world, like BRICS and the region.

There is a lot that I could talk to you about, but my hope is that perhaps I can hold your interest if I share insights from my own personal journey.

I run a company, ICT-Works, a technology company, which designs, develops and implements systems. I founded the company 13 years ago as I gave birth to my little daughter, Lilitha. At ICT-works, we employ 100 plus people, and have proudly taken on projects that are avant-garde and innovative. I have two other amazing women business partners- technologists who believe that technology is meaningless, if it does nothing to empower and improve our societies. Our driving value is the fact that Technology is only as good as the use it is put to.

We aspire to become a true representation of the African dream. As we speak, our two major projects are a source of pride to us: On 30 March, as many of you celebrated Easter, in the City of Cape Town, we were switching on the EMV-based Automated Fare Management system for the MyCiTI Rapid Transport System. Not only was this the first time that this system was implemented in South Africa, but in the world! Yes, ICT-works was responsible for the design and implementation of that solution. As I speak with you, we are in a 28 day error-free period, and counting.

Our other flagship project is the National Treasury's Integrated Financial Management System's Procurement Management module. Yes, that is indeed a long name, but in short, we have designed, developed and are in the process of implementing the nation's automated system for procurement for all government departments. It has been one heck of a rollercoaster journey, but BOY was it filled with lessons..... Here I begin to share with you just six of the lessons that stand out....

## **1. Engaging uncertainty with an open mind.....**

Handling uncertainty is necessary in every career so, you will take risks, and you will experience failures. As I celebrate my success, I am reminded that when we hear about such glaring successes, we only see the glamour of the projects that ended successfully, without peeling back and examining the plethora of risks and at times failures. These failures have been my biggest education after my academic education.

It can be very humbling. What is important and defining however, is what happens afterwards what you do. Do you learn to recognize when things go wrong? Do you take steps to set them right - because the difference between triumph and defeat, you'll find, isn't about willingness to take risks, it's about learning to master rescue.

It is also through these failures, that I have discovered a lot about myself, my resilience, my strong will, my ego etc. A lot of my celebrated successes have emerged from lessons learnt. I say this because I truly believe the biggest source of paralysis is fear of uncertainty and to fail.

Artist and Author Keorapetse Kgositsile in *Wounded dreams* says; "Though the present remains a dangerous place to live, cynicism would be a reckless luxury".

If you are not making mistakes, then you are not doing anything! Mistakes **are** proof that you are trying.

## **2. A call to action**

One of our most celebrated Kwaito stars, articulates Longfellow's call to action beautifully when he asks: Uzoyithola kanjani uhlezi ekhoneni?

The world is not sitting waiting for your skill; nor is it trying to read the intentions you have, inside your heart. The world reflects back what it receives from you. If you do not give it your best that is precisely what it will give back to you. In my pursuit of my dream, I have several times found myself challenged to throw rationality out of the window and act in ways that I could never have imagined before. Thirteen years ago, I was employed as a senior manager, living comfortably with my son Sandile, and highly expectant with my daughter. At this same time I recognized an opportunity in the market place that could be addressed by my skills and capabilities. I acknowledged the risk, took the plunge and started ICT-Works. Despite all the challenges I have encountered, I have never looked back.

I implore you to develop a capability to recognize opportunities, and to go after them with gusto. There are several other people, skilled in the same way, if not better than you. The difference is in recognizing these and going after them with everything you have.

### **3. Continue to dream**

Whatever the circumstance, please never stop to dream. You must have passion for something bigger than your own egocentric predicament. Actually, "If your dreams don't scare you, then they are not big enough" ICT-Works is born of a dream...a big dream...to see Africans develop African solutions and also to see women excellence celebrated in the field of technology. Thirteen years ago, one would have told me this

was a pipe dream, but today we are beginning to see this reality emerge. We see a number of local innovations, and of course more women are beginning to claim their right to participate meaningfully in this space.

#### **4. Patience and tenacity pays**

As your dreams begin to unfold, and success begins to knock at your door, remember that **it** has to be a servant to something bigger than itself. You are most likely to be challenged by the attraction of instant success, short cuts and quick wins, which is likely to expose you to issues of corruption in a quest to fit in. Kaloku today, instead of keeping up with the Kadashians, we have to keep up with the Kunene's. It is a time of the izikhothane.

We in our business have seen many such attractive looking propositions, which look easier, and are a quicker way to success. Longfellow talks clearly to this as he continues:

Let us, then, be up and doing,  
With a heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing,  
Learn to labor and to wait.

You just have to remember that in the end, your life will not be measured by what you have. It will be measured by the fruit you bear and the life you live. So, strive to always be true to your self, and act with integrity.

#### **5. Never forget who you are and where you have come from**

Remember that **Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu**, synonymous with the beautiful Nigerian Ibo and Yoruba saying that "it takes a village to raise a child". We must always remember that the progress we are enjoying is a result of the sacrifices of many others. We stand on the shoulders of many who have passed before us, and many others who still exist in our communities. One living example for me how the parents in my community, e Norwood, eMthatha, got together and fought to have a school built closer to where we lived, as children were getting knocked down by cars on the way to the existing school which was 4km away. I am one of the children who benefited from this initiative. I was the child of every adult in that community.

Many other members of that community contributed in many different ways to where I am today, even if it was only by encouraging me to study hard and make something of myself.

## **6. Africa Rising:**

**It is not a mistake that you were born where you were born, on this continent Africa, in this country South Africa, in your community and your family**

It is from this context that you can begin to claim your existence. I got very excited when I read the degrees being conferred on you today, as these are the areas in which very critical questions begin to arise; The vitally important questions that we are struggling with today are those of a struggling economy, questions of poverty an inequality, unemployment, service delivery, and the lingering gender inequalities etc.

Selecting one example of unemployment, unemployment in South Africa, is generally quoted at 24, 9 % and this is the narrow definition that does not include people who



have stopped looking for work. Furthermore, we have over three million youths who are not in employment, nor in schools. These young people are a walking time bomb and it is our responsibility, mine and yours, to make life worth living for them. This means it is our responsibility to grow the economy with the skills we have with gusto and determination. It is our country we are developing, a country in which my children and your children, in the future, must live and so must generations to come.

We cannot shy away from this historic challenge. World economies are bleeding and the global environment has become unstable as more people are retrenched or find themselves out of employment or closing down their companies. That **is** also affecting us as we buy and sell to these overseas countries. We are tied to them. When they go up in smoke, we are affected.

It is thus our mission to develop our environment, identifying the opportunities that will create the jobs we need regardless of what is happening in the rest of the world. How do our entrepreneurs begin to develop entrepreneurial models, which tackle the challenges of unemployment in ways that have never been seen before? How do we fervently and aggressively develop solutions that seek to address our challenges?

We depend on you to help find these answers as our generation has evidently struggled to find the answers.

How do we begin to have civil servants whose commitment is beyond reproach recognizing that the master is not the minister in their department, but the old lady,

who comes in to apply for her ID, which will go a long way in making her life and that of her family easier?

How do we begin to give an Ubuntu face to business, and redefine the rules of business to include society? How do our economists help us to begin to look at economics differentially, begin to unpack the opportunities that are presented by BRICS and several other regional initiatives, in ways that put people at the center?

For all of you it is a time of reflection to now, not only find yourself a future in the challenges we have, but to relish in accomplishing what you can.

We have inherited a great legacy, from the sacrifices of many great women and men - young and old - who were activated to realize the vision of a South African, an Africa, a world in which we live in freedom based on the recognition of and respect for the dignity of each human being. A vision which necessarily entails striving to unleash the full potential of each human being. If we continue to recognise the place for this vision in the world we live in today, indeed, we open up our hearts to carry on the legacy of our great forebears with honor, courage and dignity.

In the previous decades young people like yourself gave their lives for the democracy we now enjoy. It is your opportunity to pay this debt forward, and make it possible that South Africa realizes what they sacrificed for, that will be done by being the best you can be.

I will here and now implore you to go into the world, live through your souls, filled with love for yourselves and the world you live in, and boldly create **miracles**. The world, our continent, our country, our communities and surely our families, need these miracles. Please do not allow yourselves to be scared by the power within each one of you, embark on the path of discovery so that you can answer the question "WHO AM I?"

Finally, whilst I do not know what the exciting discovery will unveil for each and every one of you, there are some truths that are **certain** that I can provide you at this very moment, that I wish had been provided to me then, 28 years ago and they are:

You are not anything you have - not clothes, not car, not house, not money, not friends, family, qualification, intelligence, religion, not the physical body you exist in. You are not your experience, your past or your background - whether good, bad, painful, destructive, disappointing. **YOU ARE NOTHING THAT YOU MAY HAVE.** Who you are is your being. It is forever, it never changes. You are what you put into your family, your community, your work.

As I re-emphasise my exhortation for you to remain in your dreams in order to create a better world allow me to share with you in the words of one of the world's most talented dreamers. Ben Okri in the epic story he tells in his novel "The Famished Road" write words that capture my very being with the centrality of their meaning when he says:

"God is hungry for us to grow. When you look around and you see empty spaces, beware. In those spaces are cities invisible civilisations, future histories, everything is HERE. We must look at the world with new eyes. We must look at ourselves differently. We are freer than we think. We haven't begun to live yet. The man whose light has come on in his head, in his dormant sun, can never be kept down or defeated. We can redream this world and make the dream real. Human beings are gods hidden from themselves. My son (and I take the licence to add, my daughter), our hunger can change the world, make it better, sweeter. People who use only their eyes do not SEE. People who use only their ears do not HEAR. It is more difficult to love than to die. It is not death that human beings are most afraid of, it is love."