

- **Mentorship - it's Crucial Role in the Education Crisis** -

Shelley Coleman-Marsh

Director

Mentoring 4 Success (Pty) Ltd

shelley@m4s.co.za

+27 (0)11 958 0619 / +27 (0)83 440 5231

“There are 5 things that need fixing: Education, health, jobs, corruption and crime. There is only one thing that fixes all of these – Education”. (Bob Head, ex-CFO of SARS, 2014). The truth of this statement formed the catalyst and inspiration for my participation, involvement and contribution to the ‘Partners for Possibility Programme’, brain child of founder and CEO, Dr. Louise Van Rhyen.

Mentorship is *not* a new concept. It’s been around since Ancient Greek times. (Starting from the Archaic period of the 8th to 6th centuries BC and lasting to the end of antiquity - c. 600 AD).

So, why is it then even more relevant in today’s complex world, where immediate ‘access-to-information’, and instant gratification is the name of the game?

Why is it so important when ‘Personal Social Branding’ and rebellion against having to ‘fit in’ and conform, is the signature of the Millennial?

Why is it the one thing that can help transform and heal the ailing education system?

Having embarked on a *second career* journey over 20 years ago, into the world of the entrepreneur and of knowledge management consulting (after having spent the first half of my career in the technical Civil & Structural engineering corporate world), I found my true passion and voice in Mentoring. After a business trip to the USA, I discovered the Success Insights® Mentoring programme, and although not ideal for the unique South African environment, it sparked the beginning of 15 years of development of our now well established Mentoring 4 Success™ and Knowledge Mentoring™ programmes.

With this background and experience, I was approached by the passionate founder of the Partners for Possibility (PfP), programme, Dr. Louise Van Rhyen, whose audacious vision was to improve the *Quality of Education* for all children by 2025. Her programme partnered experienced business leaders from a multiplicity of different sectors with school principals from ‘under-performing’ schools across South Africa, in a year-long programme of co-action and co-learning.

The challenges facing schools across South Africa is not unique to us, but is indeed a global challenge, with over 58 million children not attending Primary school and with over 250 million unable to read or write, according to a report commissioned by the UN Education Agency. (The number in South Africa is around 8 million)

Dr. Van Rhyn's ambitious vision was for engagement and a collective action and agreed responsibility between government, business and school principals and leaders.

I joined the programme in January 2015 and was paired with the experienced and long-serving principal, Barbara Peega from Mashudu Primary School in Kagiso, West of Johannesburg.

Our relationship consolidated early on, and we bonded immediately, being of similar generations and having vast experience in our chosen areas of work, and expertise of over 60 years plus between us!

We were part of one of the many formal PfP "circles" across the country, and ours comprised 8 business leaders and principals. During the course of the year long programme we met on a 6 weekly basis to collaborate, share challenges, provide solutions and build a network of support to ensure that we could maximise the learning potential and our contributions to each other.

We also attended numerous workshops, such as Nancy Kline's "Time to Think" and Peter Block's "Flawless Consulting" and "Community Building". In addition to these were rich learnings from the COPs (Community of Practice) meetings, CoLPs (Community of Learning Principals) and coaching and support by the circle's facilitator, Chantal Dawtrey.

Barbara introduced and coached me in the detailed workings and complexities of running a non-fee-paying school of over 1000 learners from all over Africa, with the associated challenges of fund raising, encouraging parental involvement, and the supporting and training of SMTs, SGBs and many other bodies needing to be juggled in order to maintain a delicate balance between success and failure.

I, in my turn, introduced her to the tools and techniques from our own organisation and our formal and structured mentoring programmes, such as 'behavioural profiling' and the impact of behavioural styles on her team, as well as the latest research on the Neurosciences (how we learn and retain information), in order to improve support and buy-in from her team. Leadership Development workshops and networking opportunities also vastly improved her competence and confidence, along with improved capability in her computer literacy skills, emailing and general

efficiencies around simplifying her complex environment, such as submitting SARS requirements and e-filing.

Overall, the experience was rich and varied, albeit also on occasion tough and frustrating. Without the mentoring methodology and relationship building, the results would never have been so well accomplished, or the participants engaged in the Pfp programme, so rapidly transformed.

The Pfp programme has been so successful that the Department of Higher Education and Training has committed their support for the engagement and participation of more schools and the current circles will be extending their support into *Year Two* of formal mentoring. Currently around 410 partnerships are engaged, or have completed their mentoring year. Further work is being done to “drill down” to the Deputy Principals, HODs and teachers through the innovative Mentoring 4 Success™ Mentoring App provided by our organisation. This will assist in supporting remote mentoring relationships and help to extend networks and to consolidate the lessons learned through these networks, ensuring the continued success and growth of the programme. It is an ambitious programme, with a vision to engaging 20 000 business leaders over the next 5 years.

In closing, the words from the Partners for Possibility website of :

	<p>Trevor Manuel Minister in the Presidency in charge of the National Planning Commission <i>“The National Development Plan is all about different parts of society working with government to increase capacity. The Pfp programme is exactly what is needed to make the NDP real and take our education forward. I commend the initiative for what it does for education. But I also commend the initiative for how it develops business people and gets them into communities those business people would not necessarily get involved with. That has to help nation building as well. Well done Pfp.”</i></p>
	<p>Advocate Thuli Madonsela Public Protector of South Africa <i>“Sometimes we focus on moaning, but there’s far more nobility in taking the initiative and doing something about education. There is a very clear link between educational inequality and societal inequality, and the efforts of Pfp are really about lighting a candle and improving people’s lives. Business must be commended for its involvement in Pfp and I encourage many others to become involved in the future.”</i></p>

REFERENCES

DION CHANG – FLUX TRENDS

DR. LOUISE VAN RHYN – SYMPHONIA & PARTNERS FOR POSSIBILITY

PHILIP MARSH – KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

RECOMMENDED READING

TIME TO THINK - NANCY KLINE

FLAWLESS CONSULTING: A GUIDE TO GETTING YOUR EXPERTISE USED - PETER BLOCK

COMMUNITY: THE STRUCTURE OF BELONGING - PETER BLOCK

PARTNERS FOR POSSIBILITY - DR. LOUISE VAN RHYN

KNOWLEDGE MENTORING - PHILIP MARSH