

BE BRAVE AND RENAME THE FUTURE

The Bumble Bee syndrome

A motivational speech delivered by

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On the occasion of the
South African Heritage Day Celebration Lunch Braai
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University of Cape Town
23 September 2011

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Introduction

Director and Head of the GSB, Prof Baets, members of faculty, staff, students, special guests, ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon.

I am familiar with delivering a keynote speech, an after-dinner speech but never before have been asked to deliver an after-braai speech at a Graduate School of Business.

The concept is not unfamiliar. In my culture and given my heritage, an after-braai speech is a dangerous thing because the speechmaker is never held responsible for what he/she says. After all, it's the braai liquid (also known as alcohol) that talks. So if you hear me say some things today that don't sound quite like it should then ... remember, this is an after braai speech at a university for that matter.

Context: History and definitions

Our minds are focused today on one of South Africa's 12 public holidays – Heritage Day – the one that almost got away. You see, the new democratic government identified 11 official public holidays for adoption in 1994 as part of the Public Holidays Act number 36 of 1994. And then the leader of the Zulu party, the IFP, complained and insisted that 24 September, which in Zulu tradition is Shaka Day, must be incorporated as an official public holiday in South Africa. Shaka Day is the occasion when Zulus remember the unifying powers of King Shaka as he united the disparate Zulu clans into a monolithic Zulu nation. And so we have Heritage Day (Shaka Day) as an official holiday for all South Africans and not just for Zulus.

More recently some want to call it Braai4Heritage day – since the only thing that we seem to have in common as South Africans is our love for boerewors rolls.

For the more erudite among us, these days we define heritage day as

"that which we inherit: the sum total of wild life and scenic parks, sites of scientific or historical importance, national monuments, historic buildings, works of art, literature and music, oral traditions and museum collections together with their documentation."

It is not dissimilar to the World Heritage Day which is celebrated on 8 April each year where the focus originally was on the preservation and protection of monuments and historical sites. The definition only later came to include human

beings – an interesting myopia emerging from the free world at the time – and we are talking 1982 (not long ago) when the idea of a World Heritage Day was first mooted at UNESCO.

In South Africa, each year has a particular theme for its Heritage Day celebrations. For this year, 2011, the focus is Celebrating the Heros and Heroines of the Liberation Struggle in South Africa. Sounds strikingly similar to Black History Month celebrated each February in the USA.

The challenge to rename the future

Regardless of the chosen theme, heritage day, in the main, is a day dedicated to the celebration of cultural heritage, symbols and all the trappings of meaning we attach to our past, be it in the form of memory, traditions or physical monuments. In South Africa, that is of course dangerous and sometimes a divisive exercise given our recent history. I do not want to be a party pooper but rather a realist and note that Heritage Day in South Africa is no doubt laced with controversy and we are in a constant state of redefining our heritage – our past – by renaming things, places and people.

With my speech today I want to suggest that we stop renaming the past but instead, **be brave and rename the future**. I do not deny the past but I would ask that you do not judge me by the past that I cannot change. Instead, I invite you to judge me by the future I want to become and not the past I represent. I argue this point more fully in my recent book *BULLETS OR BALLOTS*, in a chapter where I call “**A new fulcrum for nation identity**” in South Africa – a national identity and a national psyche that deliberately and decisively moves away from its current race obsession and moves towards what I have called industrial consciousness. (See *Bullets or Ballots: The ultimate solution to crime and unemployment in South Africa*, chapter 4, p.71ff)

From poverty to prosperity thru industrial consciousness

It will come as no surprise to this audience, as a Graduate School of Business, that the only way for a nation to move from poverty to prosperity is through industrial development. And so, logically, we need an industrial psyche – an industrial consciousness to be the new DNA of a South African culture and heritage, if we are to make any serious inroads into reducing poverty and inequality in our society. It is after this institution that alerted the world that

South Africa is the most unequal society in the world – thanks to your Gini Coefficient analysis.

So we celebrate Heritage Day in the midst of crippling poverty and a growing restlessness among a generation of unemployed youth – who actually outnumber those who have a job. The authors of a recent book capture this well with their title: THE NEW DIVIDE (edited by Richard Pike, Loane Sharp and Ted Black). They make the simple yet profound and scary point – that the new Apartheid – the new divide in contemporary and democratic South Africa is the divide between those who have a job and those who do **not** have a job – a “them” and “us” scenario.

Let us dream a new dream

Let’s not depress ourselves by being too real today – it’s a braai after all – not a political rally. Let’s rather pretend and dream: Dream of a better life for all – a society where there is congruency between what its constitution says on paper and the social and practical reality on the ground.

That’s the kind of society I want to live in. So dream with me for a moment – lets dream about what for some may seem to be the impossible. Yes, I believe we can create millions of jobs in South Africa – yes I believe we as South Africans are a miracle working nation – yes I believe we have enormous challenges.

Lessons from the bumble bee

Let’s take encouragement and lessons from the bumble bee and learn how to accomplish the impossible.

The story line about the bumble bee is this: Rational, intellectual and scientific analysis concludes and provides empirical evidence that the bumble bee cannot fly – it’s natural design militates against its ability to fly – aerodynamically it is impossible for the bumble bee to fly – it’s body is too big and round and it’s wings are too small. Its wing span is too short and its body (i.e. engine) is not powerful enough to create the air turbulence and thrust required for lift off.

Yet the bumble bee flies around, effortlessly – zipping around as if there were no tomorrow. Is there a lesson for us there? What have you been told you cannot do – what have you been told is impossible to achieve?

I am optimistic that with a new mind set – a new consciousness – indeed an industrial consciousness - we can push ourselves and consequently our country, in the right direction – away from poverty and inequality towards health and wealth for more, if not for all.

The final word

I believe in the power of dreams. So as I conclude I want to invite you to dream with me for the next 60 seconds or so. Imagine many years from now - the end of your life – *for some of you that may already have happened.*

Imagine that you are sitting on your rocking chair and looking back at life all the way back to this day – Heritage Day Braai at UCT 2011 and you recall this after Braai-speech. You recall a rambling guy – some tall bald chap. You cannot remember the content of the speech – only that he made some bad jokes about Tutu’s coloured nose for trouble - that’s about all you can remember.

But you can recall that you decided that day to **BE BRAVE and RENAME THE FUTURE** – your future and the future of your country. You decided that renaming the past is for the birds. You decided you want to live with the future in mind. You decided to make some changes in your life that would make a difference.

You look back on your life and get a warm feeling, with tears beginning to well up in the corners of your eyes. You appreciate that you have had this incredible life in South Africa – that you have been able to do all the things you have done – that you have made a difference – that you have contributed to the birth of a South Africa where there are more jobs and than people, and where there is health and wealth for more – where you have literally sucked the juice out of life – where whatever life threw at you – be it helplessness, joblessness, unemployment, rising crime, racism, disbelief, truth fatigue, unemployment fatigue - you have positively overcome - and your inner being says

“WOW – I was part of the solution to one of my country’s biggest challenges. I helped to diffuse the ticking bomb of poverty, crime and unemployment.”

I want you to get a sense of how that feels. How it feels to have made a difference – how it feels to have used your skills, networks and money to create a better country and a better life for yourself and for others.

With those warm fuzzy feelings overwhelming our hearts, let's go out there and make a positive contribution to our lives and the lives of those around us. Let us be proud patriots of our beloved country. Let us celebrate our heritage with an eye on the future – a future that we can change.

I thank you.