

We grow leaders

For some students it was the most challenging thing they have ever done. For others it was not a subject to study, but a process. Some said it made them mindful of their actions and taught them to listen, while most agreed it was about developing themselves.

“At the USB we believe leaders are grown, not born, says Prof Laetitia van Dyk, head of the Centre for Leadership Studies at the USB. However, developing leaders is not about getting MBA students intellectually to understand 20 leadership theories. It’s about creating opportunities for each student to develop as a leader. They need experiences and coaching to turn concepts into leadership competencies.”

She says all over the world employers are disappointed about the fact that few MBA programmes adequately address the development of leaders. Hence, the urgent need for leadership programmes that inculcate real-life behaviours.

Responding to this need, the USB implemented its unique Leadership Development programme as part of its MBA in 2008. Now, more than a year later, the USB is beginning to see how it has shaped the students.

According to Prof Van Dyk, the core building block of positive authentic leadership is a strong sense of self. This is about asking: Who am I? What can I be the very best at? How do I unleash my personal energy and that of others? How do I engage the diversity and authenticity of others in ways that create a larger whole? How do I exert a positive perspective that exudes hope and commitment?

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AMANDA MATTHEE questioned USB facilitators and students about the path to becoming a leader.



Prof Laetitia van Dyk, USB



Prof Julian Sonn, USB

The Leadership Development programme on the USB MBA is made up of modules, journaling, leadership councils and dialogue sessions with faculty members. The modules include Emotional Intelligence, Individual Ethical Decision-making, Diversity, High-impact Leadership and Team-

ing, Organisational Change, Corporate Governance, Employment Relations and Negotiation. Journal-writing allows students to reflect on their behaviour, while the leadership councils support personal and group learning through the contributions and perspectives of fellow-students. Together, these elements cover the development of leadership on a personal, group, organisational and societal level.

“Perhaps the single greatest challenge and leap for the MBA student is to undergo the transformation from deeply socialised beliefs in linearity and cause-and-effect thinking to finding new formulas on how to face challenges in today’s world of work,” says Prof Van Dyk.

Each student has two face-to-face leadership sessions with either Prof Julian Sonn, who teaches Diversity Management, Leadership Development and Transformation on the USB MBA, or Dr Babita Mathur-Helm, who teaches Diversity Management, Organisational Development and Renewal, and Gender Studies.

USB Leadership Development programme:

What do the students say?



“It was ... one of the most challenging experiences I have had to go through in my entire life. It is a tough journey, but you wouldn’t get value out of it if it were easy.”

– Glen Davison, full-time MBA



“If I have to remember one sentence from the Leadership Programme it would be this: Communication starts by suspending my own ideas and first listening to the other person.”

– Francois Loots, full-time MBA



“Leadership is about ... choosing to be a leader. People should be at the core of leadership practices because they are the only competitive advantage that an organisation has.”

– Litha Fatsha, full-time MBA



Dr Babita Mathur-Helm, USB

Prof Sonn says various themes come up in these conversations: "Sometimes the discussions deal with difficult issues such as anger, racism and gender matters. Sometimes students come from an accounting or engineering background and now have to become aware of personal issues and relationship strategies to establish trusted relationships with colleagues. This requires emotional intelligence."

Sometimes students find it difficult to break out of their comfort zones and to engage with people "who are not like them".

"We seek out people like ourselves because it is easier to engage with them. Engaging with people unlike us forces us to talk about the past, and South Africa's history often makes it difficult for us to tell our stories. Some African students come from poor backgrounds, but I'm impressed by their ability to overcome barriers. People who are reluctant to engage with others deprive themselves of an opportunity to establish relationships."

Sonn says many students have never thought of themselves as leaders. "Some students need to make the mind shift to consciously take up a leadership role."

He says we have various identities – a universal identity, individual identity and group identity. "There is a tendency to resist group identity because groups are often the basis of inclusion and exclusion, and power systems that sustain the inclusion of some. But group identity is important. We need to appreciate all aspects of all the identities. For example, some students need to accept their whiteness. We are not educated to be culture conscious – we are blinkered to the culture of others. We as leaders have to create new cultures in which we can eventually expand our identities."

He says journaling is a way for students to become more aware of themselves and their responses. "You have to reflect on thoughts and experiences and learn from them, otherwise you lose the insight they might offer. It takes discipline to journal, but we encourage this."

Dr Babita Mathur-Helm says she sees her role in the one-on-one sessions as that of a facilitator of growth. "I guide students towards a bigger vision. I help them to see patterns between childhood experiences, behaviours and their current work life experiences in terms of their relationships, their psychological needs and their internal conflicts. This helps them to become aware of themselves, and to get clarity so that they can make wider choices."

"Sometimes they need clarity on the difference between leadership and management roles as well as the will to lead. Sometimes they need empathy, without being judged, to help them open up. In the process, they learn to accept themselves without judging and labelling. They realise that they are experiencing a process and that it is not about the end-result. Hence, they may not find answers to all their queries right away. It is about facilitating the process to get them to that Aha! moment." ■

Watch this Leadership DVD

For more information about the USB's Leadership Development programme, view the USB Leadership DVD at www.usb.ac.za under Multimedia.

PICTURES: DON BAYLEY & SUPPLIED



"Before every decision that I make I have to stop and think what the consequences are and I think I've got the Leadership Programme to thank for that. Leadership is a process. Stick with it ... the benefits will become apparent at the end of the course."

- Adrian Nasson, part-time MBA



"Leadership made me focus more on improving my strengths than stressing about my weaknesses."

- Nontobeko Mehlomakhulu, part-time MBA

