

Gender empowerment will thrive in inclusive workplaces that allow people to be their authentic selves

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Speaking at a Women's Day lunch at the GSB Solution Space in Philippi, Cape Town, Dr Judy Dlamini said that there are many stakeholders who can play a role in creating meaningful solutions for gender transformation - and that it starts in the home.

Women in leadership need to be their authentic selves, and both men and women need to work together to create inclusive spaces and workplace cultures to enable this.

This message formed part of an inspirational talk given by Dr Judy Dlamini at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (GSB) Solution Space in Philippi Village, at a learning lunch attended by local entrepreneurs and leaders as well as GSB students and alumni, to celebrate Women's Month.

Dr Dlamini, a qualified medical and academic doctor, founder of the Mbekani Group and newly appointed chancellor of Wits University, was sharing insights on women in business and leadership, based on her own experiences and those of the people she interviewed for her doctoral thesis, which was published last year in her book, *Equal but Different*.

She said that the foundation for authenticity should be created in families, where boy and girl children are both told they can be anything they choose to be. While conveying a very positive and at times light-hearted perspective on women in leadership, she spoke strongly about the need for transformation and the creation of meaningful opportunities for women to lead.

"When it comes to solutions for gender transformation, there are many stakeholders that play a significant role," she said. "Women alone cannot solve the inequality problem. We need our collective wisdom, men and women, to change the status quo."

"We need to get them (men) in the room and work with them to ensure that we change the status quo, because change the status quo we have to. It's business leaders running the big organisations, it's academic leaders, it's leaders within society, and it's government leaders," she said.

She argues that there is a need to recognise and acknowledge the leaders, be they male or female, who do create opportunities for women. Dr Dlamini said that men and women in leadership in all spheres of society need to create an inclusive culture that allows people to bring their whole authentic selves to the organisations that they serve.

She quoted Dr Vuyo Mahlati, one of the interviewees in her book, as saying whether it be the township experience, the rural or the urban experience that people bring to their roles in organisations - all should have a voice, as it is this inclusivity and diversity that will enable the necessary changes to take place meaningfully.

Dr Dlamini also referred to prominent businesswoman Cora Fernandez, who features in her book, suggesting that associating with people different from you, people with different perspectives, helps you to deal with conflict and broadens your perspective.

"It's important if you are to be an inclusive leader, to be comfortable with engaging with different points of view," Dr Dlamini said.

The awareness of this need for inclusivity and diversity is shared by the GSB, which established the GSB Solution Space

as a hub in the community of Philippi, Cape Town, two years ago in a deliberate effort to deepen its roots and relevance as an African business school. “The school’s presence in Philippi enables students and stakeholders to engage beyond the traditional spaces of the university,” says Sarah-Anne Alman, Manager of the GSB Solution Space. “Being here creates a space for faculty, students and alumni to engage with local entrepreneurs and organisations and make knowledge transfer a two-way exchange – where conversations are catalysts for change. Inclusive and authentic conversations can reveal diverse perspectives, challenge assumptions, generate rich insights and ignite new possibilities.”

At the learning lunch, the GSB gave away five places to the upcoming Women in Business Conference, to women entrepreneurs from the local community. Director of Executive Education at the GSB, Kumeshnee West, said that the GSB places great importance on its role of creating platforms to develop women leaders.

The UCT GSB launched its first leadership development programme targeted exclusively at women ten years ago, and today offers two short courses catering for women at various stages in their career: the Executive Women in Leadership Programme; and the Developing Women in Leadership Programme.

“We also have a prominent women speaker series that showcases our alumni and the impact that they are having in the business world. It is by championing these women that we can inspire the next generation of women to take on leadership roles in business,” she said.

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