

The means are the end

We are doing some work ahead of the 21st celebrations next year, and in the process I have come across a phrase used by some of the school's founding parents to describe the kind of school they wanted.

“That which was unique ...” was the phrase.

It was a way of saying the founders didn't want more of the same. SA was coming out of apartheid then so Christian National Education topped the list of what not to be. But more than that, they wanted a place of learning that would encourage thinking, celebrate the uniqueness of every child, and nurture young adults who can and will make a difference in the world. Many people have worked hard to keep this dream alive, one of whom was Celia Andrews who died earlier this year. She spent three years on the board and we celebrate her life and her contribution today as well.

I am happy to say we are taking another step forward as we have reached agreement to acquire nearly 18 ha of land on the Welbedacht Road. The land will put in place an important piece of a jigsaw that we've been putting together over the past five or so years. It'll create an opportunity to offer something more and take our sport and our community in a new direction.

The sports campus is part of a commitment to living up to the expectations of the founding vision by continually challenging the way we do things. In celebrating excellence today, we draw inspiration from those who have passed through Oakhill and are making their way around the world ... as philosophers and entrepreneurs, teachers and technology wizards and actors, mountain bike champions and Olympians, and by December we could have our first elected town councillor! And we draw inspiration from those sitting here who will go out and do things as they should be done.

Like all schools, Oakhill teaches what it knows and what it must as defined by a system. But Oakhill creates space to explore what we may not know or understand ... because the limits to our thinking should not form barriers to theirs. For example, technology's impact on knowledge and social relations has unlocked new ways of thinking, of strategizing, collaborating, networking and communicating, making money (Shane will talk I am sure about the life and times at 18 of Casper Lee), creating new forms of work and what we called careers in the good old days, and building or rebuilding trust ... and I'll come back to this just now because the struggle between values and ego and money have changed the way we organise and prioritise things, and not necessarily for the better.

Interestingly, the power and transparency of social media is helping create a new relationship matrix in which trust is integral, it sits at the centre ... there is little room to hide in the real world when more than a billion people are connecting to each other in the cyber world.

As special as Oakhill is, it is part of a world that isn't what it should be. The baby boomers are handing over a place that's a little short on peace, equality and happiness. Closer to home, there is also corruption and

cronyism, greed and the trap of the working poor, and a collapsing, decaying education system that is betraying the post-apartheid generation and fuelling the entitlement disease.

There is light shining through this darkness, and some of it is coming from past and present students. There is richness in what has been done before, but tradition has its limits and history can be a cruel judge of those who do things in a way simply because it has been done like that.

The safe options are not always the right options. *“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them”*. Albert Einstein said this, although you don’t need to be a genius to see its logic. The thing is so-called leaders in all walks of life tend to do this and watch seemingly in bemusement as relationships and trust and communities fray and fall apart.

In challenging the way we do things, we need to get perspective around ego and money. They are not bad in and of themselves, obviously, but *ego and money are not the meaning of life*.

Obsessive ego has been in a sense the tragic triumph of the celebrity age. Ego is the enemy of leadership, of fairness and collaboration. It’s the enemy of progress. Being wrong is okay and being persuaded is okay, because it’s how you learn to do things differently.

Just as the ego cult has created issues, so measuring life in terms of money creates issues too in the sense that an end – financial security or comfort – has become the means. It’s pushed trust and integrity and other values which ought to guide the way we live down the, well, value chain. Michael Sandel in *What Money Can’t Buy* suggests we have moved from a market economy, which provides a valuable and effective tool for organizing productive activity, to a market society, in which the market has put a value on every aspect of human endeavor. *“It’s a place where social relations are made over in the image of the market”*.

In short, we are creating a world where everything has a price? But where, he asks, should money’s writ not run? Healthcare? The arts? Education? Culture? History? Spirituality? Child birth? Even freedom of thought?

A quick rewind to Pink Floyd and getting it half right --- we all need education, what we don’t need is thought control. As a school, we believe Oakhill is a leader when it comes to free thinking and expression and making sure the joy of learning actually lives...and I think as education goes through its low point in this country, we realise how lucky we are. Still, the line between free-thinking education and intellectual anarchy is sometimes thin, and the real test is innovation within limits, whether financial, moral, political, or scientific or historical. The clever game is how those limits are tested, explored, and interrogated.

And so ... to close the circle. For me, the wonder of those we celebrate and their co-students who aren’t recognised today, lies in the work, the passion, the honesty in getting to the excellence. Doing things differently, changing paradigms, will come when things are done really well for the right reasons. Fame and

fortune may follow the pursuit of excellence and if so all well and good. The means become the end, I think, when excellence is pursued for its own sake. That which is unique ... *Excellence for its own sake*

For all this, perspective is life's best friend. *Everyone's free to wear sunscreen* appeared first in a column in the Chicago Tribune in June 1997 and later made the lyrics for a song that ran for some time in charts around the world. Its purpose was, I think, to provide balance as people then as now face "challenges..." Here are my favourite gems:

Maybe you'll marry, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll have children, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll divorce at 40, maybe you'll dance the funky chicken on your 75th wedding anniversary. Whatever you do, don't congratulate yourself too much, or berate yourself either. Your choices are half chance. So are everybody else's.

Don't waste your time on jealousy. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind. The race is long and, in the end, it's only with yourself.

Ends