

Good day Nonhlanhla and colleagues. Trust that you are well. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about **Excellence**.

Colleagues, as UKZN employees we know that in order to be an excellent employee of UKZN, one has to practice the principles of respect, accountability, client orientation, honesty and trust. The REACH&T principles have been prescribed by UKZN so that we can reflect that we as the Library Staff of UKZN can inspire greatness.

Over the years we have realized that to be a person of excellence, you have to strive to be the best you can be and to do the best you can do. Excellence reflects moral virtue and therefore strives towards what is positive, valuable, and praiseworthy.

Colleagues you may ask is Excellence a skill?

I found that according to Ralph Marston, ““Excellence is not a skill. It is an Attitude.”

Throughout our working career, Colleagues we have been cultivating an attitude of excellence. We have realized that excellence is evident when you do something that you love and when we love something, we reflect a level a passion. When we are passionate about our work we automatically reflect an attitude of excellence.

We have come to the realization that excellence, therefore, is not just an act, but a habit”. We know that by doing something repeatedly, it becomes a habit. So, yes, it starts with an act, but the act needs to be repeated over and over until we can perform it without thinking until it becomes an integral part of who we are. Research indicates that on average, it takes more than 2 months before a new behaviour becomes automatic — 66 days to be exact.

We all know that to live a life of excellence at UKZN, requires strong emotional intelligence, focus, passion, and energy. Throughout our working journey towards excellence we realize that it be challenging, but we need to take heart Colleagues because you can progress quickly when you make the effort to develop habits that allow you to thrive. As library staff we are very passionate about our work and this reflects the level of excellence in all that we do.

One of the questions we ask prospective candidates at interviews refers to how do you display excellent customer service. To work at the Main Issue desk of UKZN Libraries is very challenging. One has to be a person with strong emotional intelligence, focus, passion, and energy. It means that irrespective of how you are feeling on the inside you cannot make that visible to the patron in front of you. For example, you could be upset with your colleague, line manager, your partner or just a having a bad day but you have to be understanding, pleasant and smile at the patron in front of you. We had a staff member at the Library, who had many personal challenges, but when she answered the telephone you could hear her smiley voice or when patrons approached her at the Issue desk, she always had a smile and conducted herself very professionally.

Over the years we, as library staff have achieved excellence by practicing the following in our work day. These include:

- Knowing yourself and your strengths
- Having pride in yourself and your work
- Sharing your knowledge and talents with those who value them
- Practicing gratitude for the small and unpredictable moments
- Learning something new as you work towards being your personal best
- Showing compassion and empathy for others

- Choosing to excel despite the level of difficulty
- Accepting the challenge and choosing to be a leader
- Surrounding yourself with positive and encouraging people
- Forgiving yourself of past mistakes or failures so you can learn from them
- Building a trusted connection with a mentor and seeking advice when needed
- Speaking your truth and letting the world know what you stand for
- Being brave, no matter what the challenge or obstacle may be
- Embracing your authenticity and giving yourself permission to be you

Colleagues, I am sure that over years you may have wondered which is better, Is it success or excellence?

Success seeks the external, status, power, prestige, wealth, and privilege. Excellence is internal - seeking satisfaction in having done your best. Success is external – it shows how you have done in comparison to others. Excellence is how you have done in relation to your own potential.

For Example, there is a RMS staff member at the Medical School boom gate entrance, when you approach the gate, he smiles and he greets you. He will ask you how are you today and he will say something to make you smile and then he will wish you a wonderful day. I look forward to seeing him, I always leave the gate thinking that this person really loves what he is doing and he is truly excellent at what he does.

Coco Chanel once said that “In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different.”

"In striving for excellence, we need to leave a legacy of gratitude, cheerfulness and generosity."

Colleagues, over the years we have been motivating excellence in our staff, students, interns and the DUT WIL students in the following aspects:

- We have built meaningful relationships, e.g., when our students complete their qualifications and go out to workplace, they still keep in contact. With age, we may forget them, but when they see us they always stop and greet us.
- We avoid micromanaging by allowing our colleagues to work in their own space.
- We always try to practice being objective and fair.
- We always try to be mentors and coach our colleagues and students.
- And most of all we always lead by example.

When we strive for excellence, we feel satisfied with a job well done. We learn from our mistakes and don't let them define us. We enjoy the process, not just the outcome of our endeavours. And we remain flexible and can adjust our standards and goals as needed

In conclusion I would like to leave you with the words of Simon Sink “Working hard for something we don't care about is stress. Working hard for something we love is called passion”

Thank you Nonhlanhla and Colleagues.