

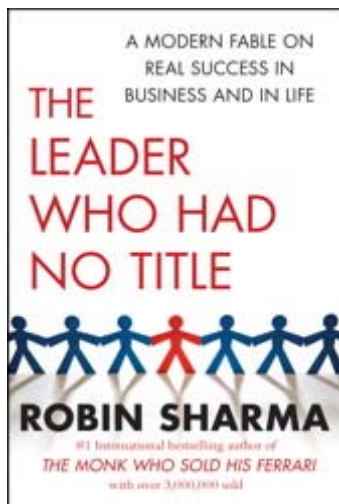


ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 46, 2 FEBRUARY 2011

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1 THE LEADER WHO HAD NO TITLE...



During December as I was looking for books to read (and to put on my wish-lists for Mother Christmas), I discovered a number of recent publications on “leadership” such as “The leader who had no title” by Robin Sharma (2010). Other books on the same topic that caught my eye were: “Leading like Madiba: Leadership lessons from Nelson Mandela” (Martin Kalungu-Banda, 2008); “Lead like Jesus: Lessons for everyone from the greatest leadership role model of all time” (Ken Blanchard; Phil Hodges, 2008) and “Leadership lessons from Emperor Shaka Zulu the Great” (Phinda Mzwakhe Madi, 2000).

I was actually surprised to *not* find books with titles such as “How to have your sushi and eat it. Ten easy steps to becoming a leader, rich and famous in the new South Africa” or “How to buy friends and influence people: a guide to leadership”. The mind absolutely boggles at the possibilities...

What role does institutional leadership play in increasing the effectiveness of teaching and learning? What “type” of leadership will take Unisa forward over the next 10 years? Is it possible that a certain type of leadership is more suitable for an institution (or department) at a certain stage of its history than another type of leadership? These questions were most probably in my mind when I bought the book by Sharma (2010). I read his previous book (“The monk who sold his Ferrari”, 1997) and, at that time, did not particularly enjoy his writing style (despite its status as bestseller and wide acclaim). Though there were some kernels of wisdom that spoke to me in the story of the monk, the quick-and-dirty (and easy...) 24 hour introduction to living a fulfilling life somehow did not speak to me.

But when a colleague described the latest book by Sharma (2010) on leadership as “life-changing” and a “must read”, I decided to give the author (and myself) another chance. I should have been warned by the dedication at the start of the book which read as follows:

I dedicate this book to you, the reader. Your willingness to awaken your inner leader inspires me. Your commitment to work at your absolute best moves me. And your readiness to leave everyone you meet better than you found them encourages me to give even more of my life to helping people Lead Without a Title” (Sharma 2010).

If the dedication did not warn me, the “Table of contents” should have convinced me that this book is *not* for me. The chapters include “Leadership and success are your birthright”; “The sad costs of mediocrity and the spectacular rewards of leadership mastery” and “To be a great leader, first become a great person”. I should have left the book for someone else to buy, but I didn’t.

Soon I was drowning in the superficiality of this “modern fable” with its “powerful lessons” which are given “gently, carefully, and with sincere encouragement” (2010:1); and claims such as: “Our ride will be full of fun, inspiration, and entertainment. The principles and tools you’ll discover will *automatically* cause your career to fly, your happiness to soar, and your absolute best to fully express itself” (2010:1-2; emphasis in the original).

I should have put the book down, but I decided that I will finish what I started. I read about ten pages at a time before taking a break to come up for air. Once the nausea subsided I dived back into the book trying to read at least ten pages. Please forgive me if you enjoyed reading the book. Maybe I was just not born to be a leader. Maybe I was just not born to appreciate Sharma’s writing. Maybe he did me wrong in a previous life or will do me wrong in a next life.

Maybe you will enjoy the book if you can believe the words of the mentee (in the book) when he states: “I want all this success you’re telling me about. And I want it fast” (Sharma 2010:20) (sounds like the political landscape in South Africa). Or maybe you will enjoy the acronyms in the book such as “SEW” (Seriously Exceptional Work) and “LWT” (Lead without a title). Maybe you will enjoy the lists in the book such as “The 10 Human regrets” (2010:34) or the list of 10 rewards which follows (it is guaranteed...) when you accept Sharma’s philosophy (2010:40).

Sharma (2010) continues to share 4 lessons in order to live (and die) a great person and leader.

Lesson 1: *You need no title to be a leader.* You “just” need Innovation, Mastery, Authenticity, Guts and Ethics (making the acronym IMAGE) (Sharma 2010:84).

Lesson 2: *Turbulent times build great leaders.* And another two acronyms, “KMF” (Keep moving forward) (Sharma 2010:121) and “SPARK” (Speak with candor, Prioritise, Adversity breeds opportunity, Respond versus React, Kudus for everyone) (Sharma 2010:126).

Lesson 3: *The deeper your relationships, the stronger your leadership.* And yes, there is an acronym namely “HUMAN” (Helpfulness, Understanding, Mingle, Amuse, Nurture) (Sharma 2010: 146-151; 155).

Lesson 4: *To be a great leader, become a great person.* Mmm, yes, you have guessed it, there is an acronym, “SHINE” (See Clearly, Health is Wealth, Inspiration Matters, Neglect Not Your Family, Elevate Your Lifestyle) (Sharma 2010:177-190).

If you are still with me, you may wonder why I reflect on this book in this communiqué. I think despite the absolute frustration that I experienced while reading the book, the book made me think firstly regarding leadership at Unisa and in general; and secondly, on how we write study materials and use narrative.

Let us start with the way we write study materials and use narrative.

My experience with both books of Sharma (2008, 2010) made me realise that often the invented case studies and scenarios we design to entertain and entice students, may actually frustrate a (huge ?) number of them. While I do love classic (and modern) fables and legends, there is something very contrived in Sharma’s approach to the modern-day fable that just put me off completely. After struggling through his latest book I made a promise to myself to never fabricate a story or a narrative in the service of a bigger ideal without thinking of Sharma.

The second lesson I learnt from this book is about leadership, and then specifically about leadership.

If there was no promise of having a “title”, would we have had such a competition to outdo and out-perform one another in the race for the top? I do not agree with Sharma that “leadership and success are our birthrights” (2010:1), but I do believe that I want to do my best I possibly can in whatever context I find myself in – whether as leader or not. And doing my best will not necessarily always result in “success”. I further belief that my integrity is at stake when no one watches, or when there is no title, reward or applause. I also belief, this time in agreement with Sharma (2010:127) that the quality of and integrity in my relationships affects the quality of my life (professional and personal), and affects my leadership when I am in such a position of trust.

And lastly, none of the leaders that I admire went out of their way to consciously try to be a “great person” (as Sharma proposes, 2010:156). Their “greatness” was awarded to them by the people they served.

I end this (hopefully not to bitter) reflection with sharing a thought from the opera “Don Carlo” (by Verdi). King Phillip the Second (1527-1598) ruled Spain in the years of the Spanish inquisition. Although very powerful, and in a certain sense very successful; he is not a happy man. Three marriages later, with a revolt in his kingdom led by his son, he laments, in a very rare moment of vulnerability, that despite his power as monarch, that he does not understand the human heart. In a very touching aria reflecting on his third marriage and the state of his kingdom, he sings “If only my crown gave me the power to read the human heart”.

May Unisa have leaders without titles and a commitment to understand (and care for) the human heart.

2 ODL LAUNCH 2011: HOW FAR HAVE WE COME? HOW FAR DO WE STILL HAVE TO GO?

Today, **Wednesday 2 February 2011**, (Senate Hall, 10:00-13:00) will see the launch of the ODL initiative for 2011. The event will provide us for a moment of reflection on how far we’ve come, but also time to reflect and share ideas on how far we still have to go.

I will provide feedback on the launch in next week’s communiqué as well as start to systematically explore the ODL plan for 2011 and beyond.

3 MUMBO JUMBO 3: WHAT MAKES A GOOD LECTURER, IF IT IS NOT NECESSARILY RESEARCH OUTPUTS?

This week we continue to explore some of the “urban legends” in the context of Unisa, or in following Wheen (2004), some of the “mumbo-jumbo” that has conquered Unisa, seemingly unchallenged. Last week we explored the rather lengthy article by Marsh and Hattie (2002), [“The relation between research productivity and teaching effectiveness: complementary, antagonistic, or independent constructs?”](#) In this article they claimed that there is *no clear evidence that this is indeed the case*. Though Marsh and Hattie (2002:604) found that there may be a *complimentary* relationship between research outputs and the quality of teaching; that such a complimentary relationship does not happen *automatically*. Often the relationship between research outputs and the quality of teaching is actually *contradictory* or *antagonistic* (Marsh & Hattie 2002:605).

Just to recap: Marsh and Hattie (2002:632) claimed that it is worthwhile to explore “how we should enhance this relation (of course, assuming that we wish to do so)”. And they do indeed wish to do so, based on the observation that it is difficult “to imagine today’s university teachers not being aware of recent research” although they do not necessarily have to produce such research... Marsh and Hattie (2002:634) then propose some very helpful (in my humble opinion) ways on ways institutions could “re-weight research and teaching *within* institutions and departments”.

In their article Marsh and Hattie (2002:635) concluded by stating that if “universities want to improve teaching and research, then they need to select, retain, promote, and support academics who are good at both teaching and research”.

This week I continue to explore the nexus between research outputs and the quality of teaching by referring to an article by Prosser, Martin, Trigwell, Ramsden and Middleton (2008), “[University academic’s experience of research and its relationship to their experience of teaching](#)” (*Instructional Science*, 36:3-16).

Prosser et al (2007:4) reiterate the fact that empirical evidence indicates that “there is little or no relation between teaching and research performance”. In this study Prosser et al (2007) focus on *research-active staff* to establish how they experience the relation between their research productivity and the quality of their teaching. They found that “there is an underlying structure in the way research-active staff experience research, subject matter and teaching (Prosser et al 2007:11). It is further important to note that this study only interviewed 37 research-active staff and very specific to only research-active staff; and therefore it is really impossible to generalise from their findings (Prosser et al 2007:12).

Prosser et al (2007:12) found an *indirect* relationship between research productivity and the quality of teaching of research-active staff. Research productivity increases the “understanding of subject matter” and this in turn impacts on the quality of teaching (Prosser et al 2007:12).

So where does this leave us at Unisa? My gut feeling is to accept the research findings of Prosser et al (2007) as a *starting point*. It seems to make sense that research in a specific discipline or subject area *may* increase one’s understanding of the subject matter depending on the focus of your research. It is quite possible that one’s research becomes *so* specific and focused that one may lose a feel for the general developments in the subject area. Therefore, if the research focus is so specific, I suspect that such a researcher’s focus may actually impact negatively to teach in the broader field of his or her study. In the article by Marsh and Hattie (2002) the point was mooted that good teachers are often the “generalists” with a broad overview of the whole field.

I still have a feeling that the literature does not bring into play the impact of a teaching qualification and years of experience as a teacher on the nexus between research outputs and the quality of teaching. Let me immediately add that having a teaching qualification does not necessarily make you a good teacher (our schools and universities abound with examples...). But I suspect that there is “something” in the nexus between research, teaching experience (including formal training), and pedagogical subject knowledge.

The plot thickens... Next week we will explore the relation between the quality of teaching and the use of technologies...

4 **IMPORTANT UPCOMING ODL EVENTS**

Monday 7 March 2011 (Senate Hall, 10:00-12:00): *ODL Forum - Using portfolios as alternative assessment practice.* During this event we will explore current practices and interrogate the challenges and opportunities of using portfolios as formative and summative assessment opportunity.

Tuesday 8 March 2011(Senate Hall, 11:00-13:00): *ODL Forum – Social technologies: Noah’s ark or Pandora’s Box?* As more and more lecturers are using various social media platforms (eg Facebook, Ning, Twitter, etc) there is huge potential to either increase the quality of teaching or potential for a disaster... Join us for a critical exploration of the issue.

Thursday 17 March 2011 (Senate Hall, 09:00-13:00): The second celebration of innovation in teaching and learning. We would like to celebrate examples of innovation in teaching and learning (including student support, administration, etc) at Unisa. Please feel free to send me (prinsp@unisa.ac.za) the names of possible participants?

5 **ODL REPOSITORY AND BLOG**

All the ODL task team reports, the overview of the recommendations of the STLSC and other ODL documents are available on the Unisa Library’s Institutional Repository. The repository is updated on a regular basis and if you register on the repository, you will get notifications of any new uploads.

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this ODL Communiqué represent my personal viewpoints and do not represent the viewpoint of any other member of the Unisa community.