

Note: Prof Prozesky was guest speaker at the ceremony.

**ETHICS, BUSINESS AND AFRICA** [: address delivered at  
the graduation ceremony of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg on Thursday  
11 April 2002]

Professor Martin Prozesky

Director

Unilever Ethics Centre

University of Natal

Pietermaritzburg

For my bearings on ethical business I want to quote Ted Scott of the Stanwell Corporation, a major power company in Australia, where Scott and his staff have implemented a significant ethical vision in that corporation. In a recent book he writes that the move away from a merely production and profit-orientated view of business will require "a greater focus on values and ethics - a trend, we are optimistic enough to believe, we can already see signs of. It would be well to remember, when designing this future, the words of Winston Churchill, 'We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give'."

As we work for this ethically rich business future, let us face the disturbing fact of an ethically lean past and present. As is well known, *Time* magazine chose Albert Einstein rather than Mahatma Gandhi as its person of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The message to readers is that science and technology (and I would add, business) have done much better in the past hundred years than politics and ethics.

The editors of *Time* magazine were correct. We humans are now much better at science, technology and making profits than at living caringly, honourably and truthfully in the world we have invented.

Yet our very success is also our greatest danger. We have created a world where the affluent minority must be seen in the context of an impoverished majority that has had enough. As Meyer Kahn, former CEO of SA Breweries and then on secondment as a sort of supercop to the South African Police Services, once said at a workshop I attended, "the have-nots are coming for the haves."

In this situation it is vital that we reconnect the market with magnanimity, cash with conscience. Let me explain why.

Poverty and environmental damage are probably the two greatest long-term problems facing us here in South Africa, after the AIDS tragedy and violence. If these appalling wounds are to be healed we need a blend of moral wisdom and wealth. Morality at heart means being actively concerned about the well-being of others and not just about one's own personal interests. It is the ability to feel something of the misery of others and to *do something about it*.

But without true wealth - morally sensitive wealth - there is precious little we can do about the miserable shacks in which so many of our people live. Or about the lack of textbooks or shoes for so many children. Or about the poisoning of our air, our rivers and our fields. Or about the dreadful tragedy of AIDS.



Few will deny that the only hope we have of generating the wealth that, used wisely, can make a real difference is the business world. The century we have just left behind saw the rise and fall of a massive experiment in seeking social justice by force - the force of the dictatorial, communist state. We will not try that again. The passion for freedom is too strong in people for the politics of even the most benevolent coercion to succeed.

But so far the market has been far better at generating wealth for some of us than at alleviating poverty and protecting nature. There are of course people who see the market economy as a direct cause of poverty. That is why we have this belief by some that the market is the enemy of morality, relentlessly fuelling the forces of greed and indifferent, at best, to the needs of others.

It is here, I believe, that business world-wide and certainly in South Africa faces the vital challenge of reconnecting the creation of wealth with the power of conscience. We have much to overcome here, for the old South Africa with its crimes against humanity was launched not by politics, nor by religion as was the case with the settlement of New England by religious refugees, but by commerce. What was the Dutch East India Company if not a business venture with a huge appetite for profit but very little concern for the greater good, least of all of black people in South Africa?

So we have a deeply flawed business history from which to set ourselves free.

### *Why be moral?*

But now the key question arises: *why should the business world care about ethics?* There are three reasons why the market must reconnect with morality.

The main one is this: a strong morality is the *only* way to achieve what we all really want - the best kind of lasting well-being. We are by nature social beings who can only thrive with the help of others. We can't learn a language, master a skill or reproduce ourselves alone, let alone achieve any large-scale project. Like it or not, life is either a partnership project or it is a failure.

This reality generates a crucial choice, especially for the powerful. We can either win the willing co-operation of others or we can force or manipulate them to serve our ends, if we can. We have all seen what this second option results in - seen it under apartheid, seen it in Eastern Europe. It failed in a world where most people were ignorant, uneducated and isolated, so how can it possibly succeed in a world where more and more people are educated, aware and able to mobilize mass action through the global power of the internet, as we saw at Seattle a few years ago?

That leaves just one option, except for people who are unwise enough to be interested only in short-term gains for themselves, and that is the option of finding ways in which human creativity, energy and brains can work in willing partnerships - like deep friendships, good marriages or even good sports clubs.



This will only come about, as we all surely realize, when there is fairness for all. Nobody gives their best shot to those who exploit them, lie to them, treat them unfairly. But people are capable of superb achievements when the playing field is level and they can trust the good intentions of those around them.

This is why Ted Scott can talk about a cooperative principle that is as real as the force of gravity: *whatever you give to another you give to yourself*. To which I would add, "whatever harm you inflict on others, you inflict on yourself in the end."

To this law of human nature there seem to be no exceptions. If in doubt, ask Stalin and Hitler. Ask why democratic India has had no famines since before independence, while undemocratic China suffered the worst one in known history. Ask why Judaism (as distinct from the state of Israel), with its strong ethical culture, has survived for over 3000 years despite being small, vulnerable, mostly homeless and often the target of the worst kinds of oppression.

There is a second reason why business and ethics need to deepen and strengthen their connection. Business thrives upon freedom, and freedom thrives when conscience is strong, just as it withers and perishes when conscience is weak or absent. It is no accident that the free market began to emerge, like democratic politics, in a western Europe and an America that had been powerfully charged with the resurgence of conscience that we see in people like Martin Luther and John Calvin in their struggle against the religious monopoly of their day, and in Voltaire, David Hume and Tom Paine in their sense of outrage at the injustice of political despots in France, Scotland and America.. For this reason too, business needs conscience as the powerful muscle of freedom.

Thirdly, genuinely free people of conscience regulate their lives wisely, productively and ethically *by themselves*. They do not leave important matters to others. It is a serious mistake to believe that morality can be left to the government (though we must never cease to demand that governments be moral), and in a secular world of deep religious divisions, the days are over when humanity could simply look to that quarter for its moral values.

From now on, therefore, if we want a worthwhile future, morality must be the privilege and duty of every single one of us. Crucially important is that ethics takes root and thrives in the world of business. As governments, nations and religions shrink in power, the time has come for a golden age of ethical business, where the exploitative entrepreneur gives way for good to the ethical entrepreneur. Anything less merely sows the seeds of its own ultimate failure, and no rational person invests in failure, or in merely short-term success.

### ***Business in Africa***

So far I have discussed business and ethics in terms that apply anywhere where the free market operates, which is just about everywhere on the globe. But we are in Africa, an Africa that needs investment, wealth creation and a new lease of life in which the suffering, poverty and exploitation of the past - and alas also the present - are overcome. To end this address and give today's graduates some orientation towards an Africa-based business future, I want now to make a few comments about African ethical values and culture.



My comments stem from research I have been doing over the past few years. The research is on-going, especially in relation to business, but already some things are quite clear. In passing them on I must thank the various black African people who have provided my research with invaluable interview material - material that forms the basis of what I have to say today, making three main points.

The first one is that we need to remember that the black people of Africa, like those in other continents, follow different value systems. My informants and other sources lead me to suggest that there are perhaps four main ones in South Africa: those whose values are mainly traditional; mainly Christian; mainly secular western; and lastly those for whom the appeal of immediate personal material gain is proving as irresistible as it is to many people in the developed world. In his book *The African Way*, Mike Boon has called such people in Africa "Third World Takers" because they have so little interest in what they can give, driven mostly by what they can get or take.

Of these four groups the most pervasive and most important for the future is, I suggest, the first one - made up of vast numbers of our people in whom the traditional values of Africa remain strong and dominant. Given their strong prevalence in our markets and businesses, those of us who come from different backgrounds and want to succeed in this continent had better make an effort to understand and respect their values, and act accordingly as professionals, managers and entrepreneurs.

My second point concerns precisely those values. My research tells me that the main ones are as follows:

1. Community comes before individualism but does not exclude personal initiative. This is part of the meaning of the great African moral concept of Ubuntu.
2. Given a strong belief in and respect for the invisible, watchful and concerned presence of the ancestral spirits, such people are unlikely to share the secular western notion that people are sovereign individuals who control their own destinies.
3. Supportiveness ranks higher than competitiveness, but does not rule it out, as Africa's huge passion for football makes perfectly clear.
4. Those employed in our businesses are not workers or employees first and foremost, but people with lives and loyalties outside the workplace, to whom the duty of respect and consideration are non-negotiable.
5. Time is more a qualitative reality - a thing in which valuable, deeply enriching experience can happen, than a quantitative reality.
6. Strong leadership is valued but it will only win respect and genuine co-operation when it shows in practice that the leader has genuine concern for the well-being of those under him or her.
7. True wealth and true success include but are not limited to or even dominated by financial wealth. They include such things as friendship, respect and peace.

Now to my third and final point about African values and business. Most people with knowledge of the business world in South Africa know that we have just seen the release of the final report of the King Commission on corporate governance, and we all await our hard



copies in the next week or so. What I do know from a member of the commission is that it adopts the device of the triple bottom line - so that companies have to report not only their financial bottom line, but also their social and environmental impact. These are central ethical concerns and they are with us to stay.

In addition, I hear that King II specifically includes Ubuntu in the values it endorses for corporate South Africa. I think these features of the report strongly underline the attention I have given today not just to ethics in business, but to African values. Best of all, those values not only agree with the best in the ethical traditions of the rest of the world while being authentically African, they are the best way to achieve sustainable success.

I end by directing myself specifically to those who are receiving their degrees and other qualifications today. My best wishes and congratulations accompany you all on the important road ahead. It is in your hands to make it the high road to true and lasting fulfilment for yourselves and those whom your professional and business practice affect. I know we can rely on you for a better future.



Received April 2002  
from Mr Vic Winterbach,  
I think.

[Commencement address by  
Dr. Carolyn G. Williams\*, President,  
Bronx Community College, of the  
City University of New York, at the]  
**Graduation Ceremony**  
[of the Faculty of Education],  
**University of Natal,**

copy of  
final  
speech.

**Natal Midlands Indoor Sporting Centre**

**Pietermaritzburg, South Africa**

\*Carolyn Grubbs Williams

**Friday, April 12, 2002**

Good evening! Warm greetings to the Acting Vice  
Chancellor, David Maughan-Brown, and to all the distinguished  
guests, graduates, families and friends gathered here today.

I am honored and delighted to stand before you and  
congratulate you on this momentous occasion. Today, you have  
reached a milestone. Through hard work, sleepless nights, with  
the love and support of your families, the sound instruction of  
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reached the end of a long road.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says "The schools  
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see a new future taking shape. For those of you for whom this is a first degree, I know you are eager to get out into the world.

And for those of you who have been in the field and have returned to perfect and deepen your skills, I know you are anxious to share what you have learned with your students and colleagues. But before you take that first important step, let us dwell for a moment on the place you are about to leave and what it symbolizes. For the past several years, this campus has provided a kind of shelter – it has protected your thoughts, nurtured your growth and it has enabled you to create new ideas and concepts. It has brought you new experiences, and it has helped you plant the roots of your dreams. When as graduates, you leave this university, you become its standard bearers. It will be up to you to build a new ethic of fellowship.

The best educational institutions of the world, and I count the University of Natal and my own Bronx Community College



among them, pride themselves in being institutions that provide support and leadership for our communities. I quote W.E.B. Du Bois - a famous African-American teacher and philosopher, "the function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools or to be a center of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization." Our universities are both a resource and a conduit to the larger world.

The University of Natal, like my own campus at Bronx Community College, brings together an eclectic mix of cultures. Students come together from diverse backgrounds. Each student brings a unique perspective. Education enables us to use the occasional friction between us to generate new energy and develop new ways of reaching our students.



The great Martin Luther King wrote, "We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, [we are] tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects us all indirectly." These words are even truer today than when Dr. King wrote them in 1963, in his letter from a Birmingham jail. Today the world is moving very quickly. Drastic change may come at any time and new horizons open every day. We must not forget those who walk more slowly, who need a helping hand. We are all linked in a single garment of destiny. Every step you take, every thought or idea that you nurture reverberates through the world – it is not confined to your classroom, your city, or your country. The problems that you see before you are not your problems alone – educators all over the world – whether in Natal or in New York face the same challenges, the same struggle as we work to reform education.



When I was growing up in Georgia , I had no idea that I might be the first female President of a community college in the Bronx. I grew up before the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's brought integration to the institutions of the American South. Among the many injustices of those days, one of the most egregious was that African Americans in the South were barred from attending public colleges. My family did not have the resources to send five children to private colleges. So, my father decided to move our entire family to the North, where there was affordable tuition at the integrated public universities.

We settled in Detroit, and I enrolled at Wayne State University. I lived at home, took public buses to school, and had a campus job to pay my tuition. Our family was uprooted for the sake of our education. As you can imagine, this was not easy for any one of us, but it taught me a lesson, as valuable as any I learned in all my years of college and graduate school. It taught



me the paramount value of education. It provided opportunity where there was none before. It opened new vistas and new possibilities to a young girl from Georgia. No matter how difficult a particular course was, or how long the hours of work and school turned out to be, quitting was never an option. Not after the sacrifices my family made so that we could enroll in a university.

It is perhaps no surprise, given that early lesson, that I ended up as an educator. The poet, William Butler Yeats once said that education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. It has cast a light that continues to shine for me.

My husband, Houston, my sister, Joan and a very dear friend, Jenene traveled with me, to be with me on this special occasion and I want to take this opportunity to thank them and my family back home for their loving support and encouragement



through the years. It has not been easy, but it has been worthwhile.

My involvement with South Africa is an outgrowth of my belief in the value of education. My work here began with my participation in the National Center for Urban Partnerships which involves a group of educators, representatives from community-based organizations, and corporate and political sectors in 16 cities around the United States, who come together to collaborate on ways to improve urban life through education. I first became involved in their work in Michigan and continued my involvement when I became President of Los Angeles South West College in California and now as the President of Bronx Community College. In fact, the National Center is located on our campus and two of my colleagues from the Center, Dr. Richard Donovan, Founding Director and Ms. Barbara Schaeir-Peleg, Associate Director, who provide the leadership for the Center, are here with me today.



Dick, Barbara – please stand. I applaud you for initiating and sustaining the South African partnership that continues so strongly.

I believe very strongly that CHANGE occurs through partnerships– with each other, with communities, with cities and indeed, with countries. Though we are separated by many miles, we face many of the same problems. And we can be instrumental in helping each other find solutions.

In 1989, the Ford Foundation made a commitment to assist urban areas in developing and sustaining initiatives that would increase the numbers of urban minority students in attaining Baccalaureate Degrees. Real systemic change was necessary at all levels of the educational pipeline to overcome the many obstacles these students faced. The National Center for Urban Partnerships undertook this project. As part of our plan, a ten-person study group, representing five South African universities and



communities, visited with the teams in the United States, soon after the historic South African Elections. At the end of this exchange program, we recognized how much common ground we shared. We were all engaged in the struggle to make education available to all segments of society.

Over the next few years, I had the pleasure of working with several outstanding South African colleagues – Professor John Butler-Adams, Professor Trish Gibbon and Professor Fiona Bulman, to name a few and I am so glad to see them here today. John, Trish, Fiona – please stand. Working with you has been a wonderful experience and I look forward to many more years of partnership with you.

Together with my counterparts in the US team, we visited South Africa. We toured various educational institutions and set up local partnerships. Both the US team and the team from



South Africa felt that we should continue to work at reforming the framework of the education system in South Africa. Today, many universities in South Africa are making significant progress, University of Natal being prominent among them, in fostering links between schools and colleges and establishing a new educational system. Bronx Community College has been honored to join the University of Natal in two initiatives based in this region. With the iNdlovu (I N L O V U) Partnership for Lifelong Learning, my college and your university have been working with 43 Natal-based institutions and organizations to offer short- and intermediate-length courses to adults who are under-educated and too often, out of work. We hope these courses and this training will help people find jobs and consider further education. The other initiative has enabled school principals from Pietermaritzburg, the Bronx and Newark, New Jersey--both in person and through videoconferencing--to discuss school organization, curriculum development, and teaching. Both



of these promising initiatives have helped strengthen the links between our universities and have been very satisfying to me personally.

The University of Natal created the Faculty of Education primarily to meet the challenge of educating the educators. South Africa needs you – in schools, and in adult and higher education. The School of Education, Training and Development and The Center for Adult Education, under the able leadership of Dr. John Aitchison, provides the kind of alternative education that is so critical today. We cannot isolate learning from the currents of contemporary society; so much of what we need to do to survive depends on how well we link the two. This School provides so many resources – through its programs, its research and its involvement in policy-making for teacher and adult education. The partnership between South Africa and the US focuses on improving practices in education in all its aspects – in teaching and learning,



assessment and quality assurance, curriculum and materials development and education management. In the last few years, there have been new policy initiatives, new steps in translating policy into practice, new goals as historically marginalized institutions are brought into the fold and new projects as partnerships between universities, colleges, businesses and rural and urban schools are created. I look forward to continuing this work, with the help of today's graduates.

Today, as I accept this honor from the University of Natal, I know that this is an affirmation of our work together. I know that we have created a partnership that will endure, that embraces our differences and celebrates our similarities. I know that we have truly learnt from one another. Our relationship proves that education is not limited by political or national boundaries. Teachers bring the world together. Together we can be the best



ambassadors for healthy and prosperous communities and nations.

The future of the world depends on the resources, both human and physical, to redress the growing divide between the rich and the poor. The new economy can only progress with the support of universities that teach, encourage and advocate a free and just society. The world faces new challenges. Our institutions must be socially responsive; we must react ethically and intellectually to the problems we face as a nation, and the problems we share as citizens of the world.

Universities and colleges have become a key resource in this process. We have developed programs for lifelong learning and we must continue this work; we have become an essential partner in keeping businesses and industries competitive in a global economy. Communities become better, richer and



sustainable because you, as the teacher, have invested your dreams for the future in that community.

The African American writer Zora Neale Hurston wrote, ....  
"few people truly see visions and dream dreams." I urge you to be one of the dreamers. Dream of a different world, where every child, regardless of circumstance, has the opportunity to learn. Envision a world where education is the lever of democracy, where learning can lift every individual willing to exert the effort. Imagine a world where the Internet is used as a global classroom, where education does not end at age 12 or at 18 or even at 50.

" One of the prime challenges of the 21st century will be to implement the standards of democracy, human rights and education for all - to complete the unfinished business of the 20th century." And we look to you to do just that. The essence of any



nation is its commitment to an unbounded future of achievable dreams. We look to you for those dreams.

Congratulations! And godspeed. Thank you.



## Commencement Address

by

Dr. Carolyn G. Williams      Carolyn Grubbs Williams  
President, Bronx Community College  
Of the City University of New York

At the Graduation Ceremony of the Faculty of Education  
University of Natal  
Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

[on] Friday, April 12, 2002

Good evening! Warm greetings to the Acting Vice Chancellor, David Maughan-Brown, and to all the distinguished guests, graduates, families and friends gathered here today.

I am honored and delighted to stand before you and congratulate you on this momentous occasion. Today, you have reached a milestone. Through hard work, sleepless nights, with the love and support of your families, the sound instruction of your professors and perhaps a bit of divine intervention, you have reached the end of a long road.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says "The schools of the country are its future in miniature." As I look out at you, I see a new future taking shape. For those of you for whom this is a first degree, I know you are eager to get out into the world. And for those of you who have been in the field and have returned to perfect and deepen your skills, I know you are anxious to share what you have learned with your students and colleagues. But before you take that first important step, let us dwell for a moment on the place you are about to leave and what it symbolizes. For the past several years, this campus has provided a kind of shelter – it has protected your thoughts, nurtured your growth and it has enabled you to create new ideas and concepts. It has brought you new experiences, and it has helped you plant the roots of your dreams. When as graduates, you leave this university, you become its standard bearers. It will be up to you to build a new ethic of fellowship.

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Universities and colleges have become a key resource in this process. We have developed programs for lifelong learning and we must continue this work; we have become an essential partner in keeping businesses and industries competitive in a global economy. Communities become better, richer and sustainable because you, as the teacher, have invested your dreams for the future in that community.

The African American writer Zora Neale Hurston wrote, .... "few people truly see visions and dream dreams." I urge you to be one of the dreamers. Dream of a different world, where every child, regardless of circumstance, has the opportunity to learn. Envision a world where education is the lever of democracy, where learning can lift every individual willing to exert the effort. Imagine a world where the Internet is used as a global classroom, where education does not end at age 12 or at 18 or even at 50.

" One of the prime challenges of the 21st century will be to implement the standards of democracy, human rights and education for all - to complete the unfinished business of the 20th century." And we look to you to do just that. The essence of any nation is its commitment to an unbounded future of achievable dreams. We look to you for those dreams.

Congratulations! And godspeed. Thank you.