

The UKZN Griot

Of Gestures and Difference



KEYAN G TOMASELLI

SMALL gestures make a difference. The new HC security and cleaning service providers have re-introduced the idea that users matter. Spanking new branded paper, towel and soap dispensers, and sanitary bins magically appeared in May. The broken seats in the most trafficked men's room in MTB have been replaced, and the door now closes but still needs a door stop (which I have provided). But an urgent paint job is outstanding. Toilets in Shepstone have been renovated, a consequence of representations made by the organisers of an international conference held there in July. Air fresheners perfume the air. Front gate security is alert, smart and interactive. And, librarians are now teaching students how to reference.

Bliss, akin to when parents manage for the first time to get their toddlers to use a potty. Small things do count.

I am of course aware of the controversy of outsourcing. Sadly, CCMS lost its very fastidious elderly cleaner who was not re-appointed. But, the poorer quality of the toilet paper may be indicative of declining standards generally. In any event, Maglen Govender from the University's Safety, Health and Environment division did tell School meetings in June that the quality of the toilet paper was a

pressing issue for his office.

The small things that matter are now getting attention UKZN. Hence the joy of shiny new dispensers, enthusiastic gate guards and the day that we get our students potty trained with regard to correct referencing. Discussion of quality of toilet paper at academic meetings must surely also be a first. Such are the joys of being an academic. Let's not underestimate them.

So I have developed a UKZN Happiness Index. Happiness is:

- When school websites are properly populated; they are key recruitment platforms
- When purchase orders are dealt with correctly and timeously
- When i-enabler has not forgotten to pay staff
- When deans can again be academic leaders
- When the switchboard's telephone directory becomes user-friendly
- When budgets are allocated on time
- When classrooms are made into welcoming, enabling, interactive noise-free pedagogical spaces where students want to be
- When public spaces are properly maintained and when students learn to respect them and the cleaners who clean up after them
- When management realises that their job is to ensure a fully functioning institution-wide

operational environment, to enable us to do our jobs properly, and to help us meet our so-called productivity units

- When we remember that we are a learning organisation, not a factory that manufactures graduates on a production line
- When collegiality is restored by simple things like a staff restaurant at HC, well-appointed common staff tearooms, emitting the aroma of good, affordable, coffee, where newspapers can be read and where we can all relax and talk for a few moments
- When top management is seen to be consorting collegially with the plebs, experiencing life at the ediface, the student-face and the coalface
- When all staff treat each other with respect, forging a common project
- When we really do apply ubuntu. Ubuntu does not use individuals for other people's ends
- When staff (who are humans too) are considered as ends in themselves, and not means to someone else's ends, and when HR actually comes to realise this – otherwise the term, 'human resources' is a contradiction in terms
- When, stress levels are creatively managed by the institution to lessen the burnout factor and increased costs to medical aids
- When the HC entrance is

cleaned up, managed properly and made into a branding opportunity, an inviting and safe entrance to a world-class university

- When students come to class to learn, rather than just to sign the register
- When students complain rather than cheer when a class is cancelled
- When students come to class to study rather than just to do 'time'
- When students come to class pre-prepared, rather than waiting passively to be taught
- When lecturers enable students' self-learning, rather than creating dependency
- When students respect lecturer's privacy, space and time
- When all the MTB toilets are properly tiled and maintained so that they become places academics want to be so that they can contemplate the mysteries of the universe, temporarily beyond the reach of screaming student hordes all demanding their attention simultaneously
- When the Executive admits that SAPSE titles do not necessarily equate with quality, disciplinary impact or NRF ratings criteria (especially in the Humanities)
- When leave categories are 'reconfigured' to enable academics to get out of their offices and to teach from the field in the real world
- When managerial mechanisms like the leave categories, KPAs,

workload measures etc. are applied to enable rather than to impede creativity, research and learning

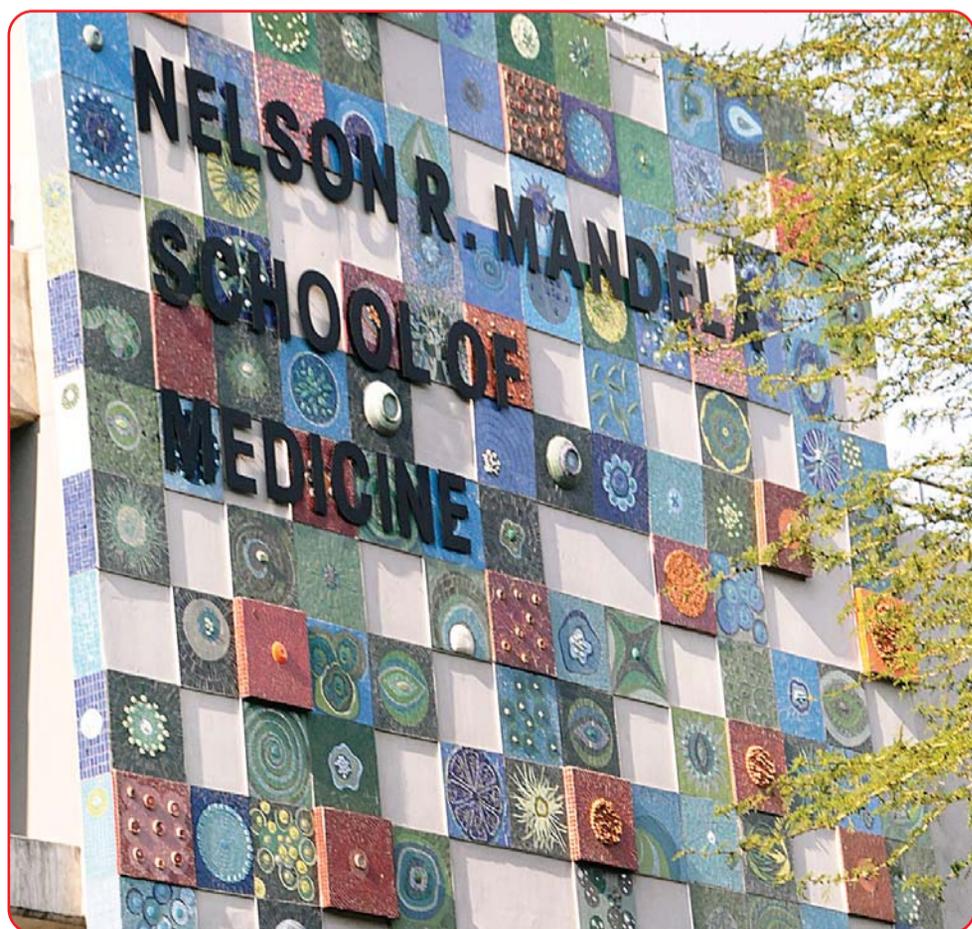
• When I get further suggestions from readers of this column that I will list in forthcoming columns.

If we can implement the 'Whens', we can stop being 'When-we's' and join in the larger future-oriented project. Let's get beyond Jones's Law that states: "The man who can smile when things go wrong has thought of someone he can blame them on".

** Keyan G Tomaselli is Director of The Centre of Communication, Media and Society. He is pleased that some students in the School of Applied Human Sciences actually do study what is known as 'work engagement' and 'happiness levels'. Sometimes, academia can be fun, and student research is directly useful and relevant to the institution in which they are registered. We should call more on our research students to help shape happiness and work engagement at UKZN.*

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this column are the author's own.

K-RITH under construction



UKZN together with the US-based Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) are in the process of completing one of the world's most advanced research facilities for Tuberculosis and HIV on the campus of the Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine. This distinctive building will be officially opened on **October 9, 2012**. K-RITH aims to conduct outstanding scientific research, translate these findings into new tools to control the deadly diseases of Tuberculosis and HIV, and expand the science educational opportunities in the region.

PHOTOS: ANAND GOVENDER

"A woman is like a tea bag – you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water." – Eleanor Roosevelt