

Thank You for my SABPP Lifetime Achievement Award



I was most surprised and delighted to be honoured by the Board and Chief Executive of the SABPP at the AGM on 18th June 2020 with a Lifetime Achievement Award. I thank everyone involved for their encouragement and support.

I would like to write a little bit about my thoughts on SABPP and the HR profession, which gives some background to the contribution I have been able to make to the profession.

As mentioned in the citation, I first registered with the SABPP in 1985. I am not the longest surviving member, but one of the longest! At the time, the SABPP had been set up by the IPM as the registration body, with the IPM retaining the role of membership association and training institution (I completed my IPM Diploma in 1978). I maintained membership of both institutions until ten years ago, and made my contributions to the HR profession mainly through the IPM, as the SABPP at that time confined its role to that of registration body (becoming also an ETQA later). Throughout this time, I considered myself to be an HR professional, and equivalent to any other professional in any other profession. I continued to develop myself, obtaining my undergraduate and Honours qualifications through UNISA and my post-graduate qualifications through UJ, while I was building my career in HR to executive level both locally and globally.

During my PhD research, I drew extensively on the Masters degree research work of Huma van Rensburg, long time head of the SABPP, into professionalism within the HR profession, which reinforced my view that an identity as a professional was important to HR practitioners. Sadly, during my research I

found that a large proportion of HR practitioners at all levels of seniority did not recognise their identity as a professional, but rather regarded themselves primarily as employees of their particular organisation. So, instead of aligning with, for example, medical, legal or engineering professionals, who, in reply to the question, “what do you do for a living”, describe themselves as doctors, lawyers or engineers first, without necessarily referring to their employer, HR practitioners tend to describe themselves in terms of their role within their organisation as in “I’m a recruiting officer for xx Bank”.

Luckily for me, at the time I finished my PhD, Marius Meyer had been recruited as CEO of the SABPP and he was keen to initiate new ways to invigorate the profession, instigating the first HR Voice strategy. This matched very well with my views on the profession, and I was honoured to be employed as the first head of the HR Research Initiative at the SABPP in 2012. Since then, history shows the success of Marius’ vision, and I am proud of my role in helping to produce the HRM Standards and all associated publications and products of the SABPP.

I think that, through this work, HR practitioners are beginning to find a more clearly defined identity as professionals and are able to bring their expertise to bear in a more strategic, but also very practical and service-oriented, way. We have a long way to go in building a positive reputation for the profession, but I believe that the direction chosen by the successive Boards of the SABPP will take us in that direction. We have to develop a critical mass of registered HR practitioners across the South African profession so that practitioners can be held to a Code of Ethics and continuing professional development. It is so true that an out-of-date practitioner is an incompetent practitioner. I personally do not believe that statutory recognition will be possible or that it will take us in the right direction in building the profession. I would much rather we increased our sphere of influence through building on a solid foundation of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour. (But that is just my view, I am not pre-empting the Board’s deliberation on the findings of the research into statutory recognition currently being undertaken.) Also, probably also controversially, I am a strong advocate for unification of the profession – a few years ago Marius Meyer found that there were about 28 different bodies representing various interests within the profession. Clearly, there are different interest groupings, but if some way could be found to develop a common, overarching and aligned philosophy of the future of the HR profession, I am sure that we can build a stronger and more visible identity.

I am so passionate about the HR profession because I believe it can contribute so much to building better workplaces and developing a more skilled and engaged workforce. This, in turn, can help to transfer the values lived in the workplace to wider society and help to build a prosperous and inclusive South Africa. And so, I encourage all SABPP members to contribute to the SABPP. I know that most of you are over-busy already, but you can contribute by keeping the SABPP informed of how it can best help you to be a better HR practitioner, asking for the tools and information that will help you, and giving feedback on the products and services. Now that we are more used to communicating in a virtual way, the SABPP will be

extending its direct reach across the country using virtual tools, so that volunteering to serve on committees and project teams will be much easier and less time-consuming. Members who are more senior in years and/or professional level, step up and give back to the profession through writing, offering case studies, speaking, mentoring as well as committee work. We get the SABPP we deserve!

I look forward to being able to contribute as best I can to the SABPP for the foreseeable future, best wishes to the Board, the staff and all the members.