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U B U N T U

AFRICAN LIFE COPING SKILLS

Theory and practice

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper Ubuntu (the Zulu word meaning “humanness”) is discussed in context of its relationship with ancient African values, life coping skills and the consequent practical outcomes when these skills are applied.

It will be argued that these human-based life coping skills of Africa are ready for exportation to the global world, since their applications will benefit all leaders on all levels and countries all over the world.

A comparison will also be made with the internationally acclaimed positive life guidelines of Dale Carnegie, influential American writer, to indicate that that Ubuntu life coping skills have the potential of being relevant and applicable to other cultures as well.

As the Black Conscious Movement leader Steve Biko (1970:46) declared: **“The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great still has to come from Africa - giving the world a more human face”**

Ubuntu as an ancient philosophy or worldview has its roots deeply anchored in traditional African life.

It is defined as the “art of being a human being” (Bhengu, 1996: 10).

A more comprehensive definition is: **Ubuntu is an ancient African worldview based on the primary values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family.**

(Broodryk, 2002:56)

These primary values are not abstract, and since they form the foundations of the Ubuntu life coping skills, the values will manifest in their practical applications during the exposition of the Ubuntu personality.

IMPORTANCE OF UBUNTU

The importance of Ubuntu philosophy in South Africa is reflected as Ubuntu being

- the value base of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (see section on Human Rights), which is generally

regarded as a recommendable constitutional model in the modern world

- part of the vision and mission of the transformation of the new public service in the spirit of *Batho Pele* (people first)
- a principle upon which, as stated in the appropriate White Paper, all future policies on welfare will be based
- part of the White Paper of various government departments like the Department of Social Development, Education, Safety and Security
- part of the mission of the National Library of South Africa
- the business philosophy of various companies in the private sector
- taught at tertiary institutions under disciplines like Education, Welfare, Philosophy, Philosophy of Education, Anthropology, Sociology, Criminology, Public Administration, Law and Commercial Studies
- the value base of National Education and being lectured in schools as part of the subject Guidance
- the basis upon which the hearings of the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation commissions was held
- the basis of several national youth development programmes and strategies (Pres Thabo Mbeki reminded 100,000 youth leaders, at a youth rally on 16 June 2006 in Soweto, to maintain and practise the values of Ubuntu) and
- the philosophical framework of the National Moral Regeneration Movement of the Republic of South Africa.

Ubuntu is present in all the languages of Africa, for example

Zulu : Ubuntu

Sesotho : Botho

(A combination of these words is often made to cover the above two languages in Ubuntu-Botho: the meaning however remains the same).

Akan (Ghana) : Biakoye

Yoruba: : Ajobi

Shangaan : Numunhu

Venda : Vhuthu

Tsonga : Bunhu

Xhosa (Transkei) : Umntu

Shona (Zimbabwe) : Nunhu

Swahili (Kenya) : Utu

Kiswahili (Tanzania) : Ujamaa

Ugandan : Abantu
Cape Afrikaans : Menslikgeit

The Ubuntu personality is a reference to the ideal human being as it is manifested in the living of the ancient Ubuntu values.

The ideal man, or leader, who according to the Ubuntu worldview possesses all these virtues of Ubuntu, can be described as

- a kind person
- generous
- living in harmony
- friendly
- modest
- helpful
- humble and
- happy

The mentioned virtues serve as criteria for effective practical leadership. These virtues arose from the traditional way of living in Africa, which was peaceful and harmonious. Respect was shown not only to other human beings, but also to the communal environment, animals, nature and the supernatural.

The well-known African poet and philosopher Leopold Senghor gave a much-respected description (Bhengu, op cit: 16) of African personality, which is similar to the Ubuntu personality. This personality has an ability to cope with life in a different manner when compared with the general global personality.

For example, the African people have a more informal and relaxed way of living and speaking which manifest in singing, dancing, laughing, painting, and sculpturing. Many Africans regard this happier style of living as unique and peculiar to Africa.

It is this reference to a certain way of living that makes Ubuntu life so different from life in other cultures. Africans are generally hesitant to endeavour giving a clear-cut definition of this unique type of partly, or at occasions totally, uninhibited expression of appreciation with life, even in times of temporary misery.

It is difficult to define: it is a natural response flowing from a happy approach to life.

Ubuntu personality could be of enormous benefit to human beings in the global world today where violence, human exploitation, extreme stress, material greed and power-lust seem to be the dominating factors influencing the life of leaders and ordinary people.

It is, for example, alleged (Broodryk: 2005: Introduction) that the legendary Sir Richard Branson, international entrepreneur, shocked the business world and conventional leaders by adopting a new human management philosophy and **style based on a family-type business** where happiness and even fun in the workplace are encouraged!

After all, to some work is merely work. To rigid thinking autocrats, work is not about having fun. On the contrary, to them work is too much of a serious matter to allow any pleasure: pleasure is restricted to the private time framework.

Branson has therefore been practising Ubuntu even though he does not originate from Africa.

Regarding life coping skills, the famous American expert on positive thinking, Dale Carnegie in his famous work “How To Win Friends and Influence People ” of which 21 million copies were sold, identified several positive life lessons, which would assist human beings to cope with the sorrows and problematic issues of life.

These life guidelines also helped the author of this book personally throughout his life, since school days, to always transform the negative threats, events and blockages of life into positive opportunities and solutions.

It is with this deep respect towards the positive thoughts and lessons of Carnegie that a comparison is made between Ubuntu values, life skills and the mentioned positive thinking guidelines.

These values of Ubuntu will be directly linked to the basic beliefs of the ideal Ubuntu person.

From these integrated linkages between values and beliefs it will become clear of what the great ancient African life coping lessons entail.

UBUNTU LIFE COPING GUIDELINES

The following beliefs are to be mastered as guidelines and transformed into Ubuntu life coping skills:

- **My neighbour and I have the same origins, same life-experience and a common destiny.**

The emphasis is on sameness and *umoya* (**togetherness**). We are together in this life and as a cooperative and community we are heading for the same end result.

Let us then be brothers in our brotherhood.

Being together, we can share what we have, our thoughts included.

Carnegie advises people to encourage others to talk about themselves, and thus share the experiences of others.

Africans have a habit about inspiring others, in great detail, to talk about where the other person hails from, how his family is, how life is treating the other etc. and this is a comprehensive process.

The relevant skill is to establish a spirit of commonness between people. If one shares common experiences with another, a feeling of togetherness is created.

- **We are the obverse and reverse sides of one entity.**

Ubuntu **brotherhood** is based on the expression *umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*

(a person is a person through other persons).

If it were not for the comradeship (intense friendship) of others in the community, I would have had less enjoyment in life. Meaning of life is a reference to the social and physical inter-dependence of people.

People rely on each other for survival and support.

As individuals people are weak: if they stand together and rejoice collective co-existence, they are strong.

In Ghana an analogy is made (Oduro, 2006:3) in the saying that “a tree cannot survive a storm on its own”.

In Zulu the relevant word is *simunye* (unity, solidarity): it is easy to break a single piece of wood, but if it is a united bundle of wood, it becomes impossible to break the wood.

A person should therefore involve others as brothers or team members for general life support. As teams the problems of life seem to be lighter since there are a variety of inputs and advice derived from relevant experiences.

In Africa the members of the group work together as a collective, to solve problems of individuals.

In this respect Mbigi (1995:111) refers to the African Collective Fingers Theory.

According to this theory the thumb, in order to work efficiently, will need the collective co-operation of the other fingers. In practice it means that that one needs to open collective forums, which are inclusive in nature, and must, as much as possible, include everyone in a group.

A spirit of brotherhood is essential for successful teamwork, and this spirit of teamwork is also found globally.

In Western management practice, for example, characteristics of effective teams are identified (Harvard Business Essentials, 2004b: 96) as

- competence (everyone brings something the team needs)
- a clear and compelling goal
- commitment to the common goal
- every member contributes
- every member benefits
- a supportive environment is thus created and
- alignment becomes possible.

One of the largest adverts companies in South Africa, Party Design, developed Ubuntu as its business philosophy.

Staff members were trained on Ubuntu and divided into tribes or strategic unit teams (SUT's) for purposes of cohesion (family atmosphere). These Ubuntu SUT's are working through continuous improvement embracing the Ubuntu values and incorporating the Ubuntu Code of Conduct and the Ubuntu Pledge in the workplace.

Consequently the members of all teams participated in practical workshops on the implementation of Ubuntu in their daily work situations.

Being brothers and sisters provides a "we"-feeling, which is conducive to cohesiveness (*esprit de corps*).

The "we"-feeling encourages every member of the society, in any country or village, and the workplace, to completely identify with the rest of his/her society or community/extended family. It generates a sense of belonging, security and certainty. The "we"-feeling creates camaraderie. According to Koka (1996:10) belonging reveals the oneness of people in the saying "You touch one, you touch all".

- **We are unchanging equals.**

In Africa all people are **equal**.

There is an absence of material class forming.

If a person is progressing materially and receiving more than others, the extras will be shared with the underprivileged brothers and sisters.

Africa does not allow that some eat whilst others go hungry or that some sleep warm whilst others are left out in the cold.

Social classes based on wealth are absurd in Africa living.

Carnegie further stresses the importance of making the other person feel important and to do it sincerely, no matter who the person is. All people should be treated with dignity and respect.

The Constitution of South Africa, which is based on Ubuntu values, also demands that the human dignity of all people be respected and protected. This is precisely in line with the notion that all people are important and equal, irrespective of income, gender, race and culture. Mankind is an integrated whole consisting of different material environments, sexes, racial groups and cultures: all racial and cultural groups are appreciated as equals.

Since the customs of all people are also respected, it is a positive life advice to give recognition to the importance of the names of people. In the past, Westerners were encouraging Africans to adopt colonial names, because they did not know how to pronounce African names, which were given to them at the days of their birth.

Practising this life coping skill of treating all as equals will in turn result in goodwill and friendly attitudes from others.

- **We are mutually fulfilling complements.**

Sharing is an important African value.

People have different qualities, talents and resources and these should be shared in a spirit of cooperativeness for positive living. Everyone will cooperate as sharing human beings and mutually fulfilling complements. This is indicative of the living of values like open-handedness and supportiveness in accordance with needs.

Needs, physical and spiritual, are established when the discussion is focussing on the interest of others.

Carnegie refers to the use of dialogue as a tool in this respect.

The challenge is to talk in terms of the other person's interests, thereby determining how one can strengthen others in their life challenges.

The life coping skill is to provide complementary capacity building assistance to others.

- **My neighbour's sorrow is my sorrow.**

Sympathy is vital in Ubuntu life and it is practised especially in times of sorrow.

Sorrow is an obstacle in life and it is inevitable that sorrow will appear from time to time in the form of death, sickness or other hurtful events. When sorrow strikes a neighbour, who is also a brother, one suffers from that sorrow as well and weeps with that brother, because it is due to such a brother that one is a brother to others too. It is realised that sorrow is temporary.

Carnegie also teaches man to accept the inevitable. Sorrow is also inevitable.

A core component of dealing with the sorrow of others is claimed (Frost, 2003:63) to be able to listen with compassion to the pain of someone else. Just being present can help them feel that they have been heard and their feelings validated. This emotional listening can salve the wound. This skill is also known as emotional intelligence. It is about awareness of the other's emotional condition (as well as one's own) and an ability to manage both. The person who attempts to help might also, to an extent, absorb emotions experienced by one person.

Some incidents or situations however cannot be solved at all. Nothing, for instance, is as certain as death.

A consolation for this inevitable event is found in the saying that God gave man

- the serenity to accept the things man cannot change
- the courage to change the things man can and
- the wisdom to know the difference between the two.

This notion is universally positive and is also applicable to the Ubuntu worldview.

The notion is a useful tool in the counselling process where people are suffering from serious terminal sicknesses, diseases like HIV/AIDS, mental and physical disabilities. These are usually situations no one can cure: one has to accept the inevitable, since it falls outside the power and capabilities of man to change such situations and conditions.

Man however, can relatively easily change other situations.
Man is able to stop smoking, to stop drinking (both moderately and excessively), to stop being overweight, or having depressive moods and miserable personalities.

The life coping skill is to practise sincere sympathy with others: sorrow shared is half sorrow.

- **My neighbour's joy is my joy.**

Sharing joy is double joy.
Double joy is happiness.

Life is about experiencing the greatest **true form of happiness** possible at all times.

It is also called qualitative happiness.

This form of happiness is obtainable through the creation of spontaneous brotherhood of people.

By standing together, enjoying and celebrating together, a spirit of cohesiveness is established.

This is also referred to as togetherness, warmth, and cheerfulness.

The pursuit of happiness is claimed (Parrot, 1987: 13) to be among the inalienable rights of a person, and two ideas are pinpointed which are important to mankind who wish to live out their happiness with inward joy.

Firstly, happiness is a process, a pursuit, and a way of life. Happiness is a habit, and when practised constantly, is so powerful that it can dominate all other attitudes of a person.

Secondly, others will interfere with one's happiness only if one allows them to. If one's right to be happy is controlled from within, one remains in charge of one's own happiness.

Carnegie also propagates happy approaches towards life.

In order to live a happy life, Carnegie suggests that a person should crowd worry out of the mind by keeping busy.

Alternatively, one should try to involve oneself in an activity that requires all the attention of a person. In this way, there will not be space in the mind to think about worries.

Worry and stress are universal negative conditions of the mind.

Worrying about issues and related items should be parked appropriately in the diary of mind.

If the issue is to be addressed on a specific Friday, the issue should be diarised for attendance on that specific Friday only.

One should not allow other days to spoil a worry-free existence.

On the specific Friday the following steps will address the problematic issue

- define the exact problem
- identify the specific root of the problem
- develop solutions to the problem
- prioritise these solutions and decide on the best solution
- identify two alternative solutions if the best solution is not suitable and
- implement the best solution.

These steps are complementary to the main aim of this paper, namely to suggest the active living and implementation of more worry-free, and less stressful, Ubuntu life coping skills.

Keeping busy, as suggested by Carnegie, also implies more informal discussion, and more concentration through active listening to the opinions and deliberations of others.

In practising these activities time for worry and fear is becoming limited. Fear is evil. Religious faiths condemn fear. It is generally known, for example, that in 365 instances the Bible (equalling the total number of days in the year), prescribes that man should not fear or be afraid. When people fear or worry, too little space is left in the mind to accommodate happy and creative thinking.

Happy life also indicates that other human beings should be complemented on achievements, and be shown sincere gratitude for favours done. Carnegie proposes that one gives honest and sincere appreciation to others.

This advice also applies to Ubuntu. To be recognised and acknowledged are the strongest positive tools to plant self-respect in the soul of a fellow human being. Ubuntu builds the self-esteem of people being caring and appreciative in their very basic nature: man is a human being through other human beings and if another person is appreciated in a sincere way, the giver is also appreciating himself as a human being in the process.

A word of appreciation should be genuine, and not given to win the favours of a person: this is a reference to one's credibility.

It is stated (Kouzes etc in Jossey-Bass, 2005:21) that a leader (remember all people are leaders in some or other way) should model the way,

inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. It is this encouragement of the heart that is the secret to the motivation of others. People tend to be more loyal to a leader or person, even in the workplace, if well-meant and honest recognition is given. Research indicates that the first requirement followers put down to follow someone willingly, is honesty. Honesty, which is usually linked to virtues such as truthfulness, ethical behaviour and principled guidance, emerges as the single most important ingredient in the leader-constituent relationship.

This finding is not surprising: people have the right to demand moral regeneration and the maintenance of positive values like the ones contained in an Ubuntu life style.

It is a well-known practise in Africa for Kings to be shown sincere appreciation by praise singers in a joyful way.

According to Mutwa (1997:18) the praise singer was a professional artist in traditional society and the most important person in the culture of the African people. His duty was to recount both the positive and negative deeds of the sovereign in an honest way. Details of the King's bad temper, for example, or his latest misdemeanour would be included. All the battles of the King, victory and defeat, were faithfully recounted in elaborate and ceremonial language. The praise songs he sung had to reflect a true and correct appreciation of the deeds of the king.

Motivation happens when others are recognised for good work or deeds done. According to Carnegie the secret lies therein to arouse in the other person an eager want to perform.

Carnegie tries to encourage people to influence others to become enthusiastic about a positive idea or venture.

Ubuntu people are by nature happy and enthusiastic human beings, and this friendly spirit is transparent in their daily life. Laughing and socialising take place informally and are usually enjoyed with natural and spontaneous passion.

- **He and I are mutually fulfilled when we stand by each other in moments of need.**

Empathy is to be able to put yourself in the place and situation of another.

The person that can master empathy successfully will also experience satisfaction derived from eventual overcoming the need of another, since it is through empathy that one realises the need of another.

If one stands in the shoes of another it may be shocking to realise what a suffering it is for others to evaluate one (one may appear to be acting as being selfish, greedy or non-cooperative)!

Carnegie encourages others to talk about themselves, and not to talk in one's selfish own interests.

This is however not unique to Carnegie thinking.

Africans encourage others to talk about themselves when enquiring in great detail where the other person hails from, how his family is, etc.

Carnegie stresses the importance of being an active listener.

It is argued (Sample in Jossey-Bass, op cit:356) that most people, including many leaders, are terrible listeners; they actually think talking is more important than listening. Modern open-minded leaders know it is better to listen first and talk later. And when they listen, they do so artfully.

Artful listening is an excellent means, and skill, of acquiring new ideas and to gather and assess information. It is absolutely essential in any counselling process.

If one can listen attentively without rushing to judgement, one will often get a fresh perspective that will help one to think independently. The art of listening has the result of enabling one to understand the thinking of others.

The attributes of effective listeners are identified (Lucas, 1994:57) as being alert, interested, responsive, attending, non-distracted, understanding, caring, cautious, non-interrupting, empathetic, patient, others centred, and effective evaluators. Ineffective listeners are apathetic, inattentive, defensive, disinterested, impatient and distracted. Mandela (1994:68) remembers that he encouraged cabinet members in Parliament to air their different views in great detail.

He will listen carefully, and make a summary of the views, which will eventually result in good resolutions all agreed to. It is a form of consensus. Doing this, all have ownership in decisions, which in turn creates greater commitment.

Sindane (1994:4) refers to this form of consensus as an example of how Africans view democracy.

Democracy is described as "sitting under a tree and talk until everybody (more or less) agrees".

Sangomas (African pshychologists) are known to have mastered the art of active listening in their daily counselling with patients.

It is generally also a feature of Ubuntu people to listen actively to the problems and words of others. The way and manner in which words are expressed are also indicative of the mood of a human being.

The African system of democracy or consensus is about giving all a change to express views and for all to listen and discuss standpoints, until everybody has reached agreement.

Active listening is an important feature of the African conversation environment.

- **His survival is a precondition of my survival.**

In order to survive in the world of natural disasters, poverty and unforeseen disasters, man is dependant on the survival of all.

This interdependence of human beings, to be able to survive, creates an interpersonal bond of care and love.

In Africa people show their care and love for human beings in very explicit ways.

One would find public leaders and ordinary people hugging each other while greeting heartily.

This is in sharp contrast to some other cultures where a cold and formal way of greeting is the custom.

In Africa human care is recognised in expressions of **compassion**.

Carnegie promotes compassion by advising people to become genuinely interested in other people.

Ubuntu is basically about humanness and its focus is also on becoming interested in the fate of human beings.

The relevant Ubuntu prescriptive is to care for (and thus be interested in) one's sisters and brothers within the human family and this may also be interpreted as similar to Carnegie's advice.

In this respect, Ramose (1999:150) refers to the saying *motho ke motho ka botho* (the essence of caring for others).

In Ubuntu culture and African morality, man, in order to enjoy the status of being-a-human being, must comply with the rules of *botho* (Ubuntu).

An example is that it is contrary to Ubuntu to refrain from sharing, whatever one has, with those in greater need than oneself. Ubuntu people who are employed usually share their wages and salaries with their unemployed kith and kin, and extended family members.

- **No community has any right to prescribe destiny for other communities and never prescribe destiny for any person.**

Respect for other persons, their spiritual, religious, political, economical, cultural beliefs and customs are of cardinal importance in all encounters of life.

Never is another person or community to be prescribed to or forced away from his or her own conventions.

Africa has along history of colonial oppression by Western countries, which included forced Western prescriptions of destinies for communities and persons. Africans were confronted with forced adoption of Western political, religious and economic dogmas, which were in direct contradiction to the beliefs of Africa itself.

On the political arena democracy the Western way was enforced ignoring the way Africans practised their own traditional consensus model of democracy (like a government of national unity).

Regarding the aspect of religion, traditional religious beliefs and religious mediators were even made laughing stock by Western missionaries.

Missionaries did not appreciate the seriousness of African beliefs in the continued existence of the ancestors. They even made laughing sock of the African spiritual world where three types of ancestors were identified (Mbigi, 1997:53), namely positive ancestral spirits, positive oracular nature spirits as found in oracular animals and places like in pools and trees, and evil spirits.

Economically wise Westerners succeeded successfully in making the perception of capitalism extremely unpopular to Africans.

This was especially the case where capitalism favoured a few privileged Western owners of huge enterprises financially at the exploitation of underprivileged African workers.

Africans were not exploiting each other, but assisted each other as equal economical partners.

In traditional days extended families were helping each other to plough lands and the challenge was thrown down to be finished with the work before the rains came. After beating the challenge social celebrations (*pungwe*) were conducted.

Carnegie also refers to a challenge that is to be thrown down to obtain results.

- **My neighbour is myself in a different guise.**

People have a tendency to judge and belittle others when these others are obedient to strange or unfamiliar customs or behaviour patterns.

Point is that people should have more **tolerance** with different religions or other beliefs and cultures.

African people are not easily rushed for purposes of mere time punctuality.

Westerners have reputations for being ruled by the so-called time of the watch and the belief that time is money. In Africa time is not viewed as money. Very productive long discussions can take place, which could on the long term generate more money or better results than quick formal and impersonal deliberations.

Long discussions are also linked to the concept of African time, as well as the tendency of not keeping rigidly to meeting times. In traditional Africa the usage of Western time (arm watches and time clocks) were unknown. People would rise at the first sight of daylight and work until the day is done. Africans, regarding time consciousness, exercise tolerance. Tolerance is promoted if people have a say in ideas and decisions.

Carnegie advises that during planning exercises or discussions the other person should feel that the idea is his/hers.

This is also very Ubuntu-like.

In the Ubuntu working place everybody is part of the collective extended family style of business. Meetings are held as a team (which is attended by all and not a few managers only) and as a collective all ideas are shared and once resolutions are taken, everyone has the privilege of thinking that the resolution was also his idea.

This is the reason for allowing all opinions. African etiquette dictates that a person would put his case without any interruption whatsoever, and that others would follow putting their cases without any interruption. In this way all opinions receive a fair hearing and consideration.

This means that everyone is bound to implement the collective decision of the team because all have ownership in the resolution.

The emphasis is however not on the individual: it is not “I” who scored, but “we” that decided and the individual person is merely part of the “we”.

- **Equals do not oppress each other.**

Oppression in Africa is not a popular concept, and some people and cultures are not more superior to others.

Oppressive attitudes are rejected by the masses and in the family life oppression is not tolerated at all.

In the folktales of Setswana a prominent story which is told (Malimabe, 1999:3) to children, under the name “*Segwagwe le Leswafe*”, a couple struggled to have children for many years.

Eventually they were blessed with two children: one child was a frog and the other an albino. The albino had sores all over his body, and because of her unfortunate appearance, she was thrown in the bush to die. The frog baby was very lazy and did not do the chores she was supposed to do during the day. She rather spent the day visiting her friend, the hippopotamus. During her absence, the albino baby would come out, clean the house and cook delicious food. The frog ate and relaxed, thinking that some magic did the house chores. The parents were very happy.

One day the father decided to remain at home to watch how the frog baby did all her chores. He was surprised to see the albino baby sneaking into the home, and doing everything. When the albino baby tried to get back into the thorn bush, her father grabbed her and held her tight so that she could not escape. The albino was welcomed back by the parents.

The lesson is that one should never discriminate against another on the basis of appearance, disability or race.

The life coping skill of **love** giving is highly honoured in African family and community life, and emotive feelings are being manifested in various positive bodily ways and body language. All people are treated as equals.

Certain respectful conventions and rituals, which are obeyed, and may be mistaken as signs of superiority by other cultures.

An example is the convention of not looking dignified persons like chiefs directly into the eyes. This gesture however is merely a sign of respect. Chiefs and people in leadership positions are known to be democratic and supportive to all. Everybody is granted an equal opportunity to state cases or opinions.

Carnegie comments that respect is to be shown for the other person’s opinions and one should never directly say “you are wrong”. One should rather try to understand the reason for the opinions or actions of others. Respecting other opinions is part and parcel of Ubuntu culture.

In traditional Africa the king had advisors (*indunas*) and when they were having meetings concerning problems of the community (*kraal*), all

elders were invited to participate in the deliberations. Everyone was entitled to his opinion and nobody was bluntly evaluated as wrong or right, thereby discouraging new opinions.

Carnegie further advises that if one is wrong, one is to admit it quickly and emphatically.

To be able to admit mistakes and to say sorry, is not an unknown phenomenon in Africa. This is a positive act and indicative of a person being honest with himself.

On the issue of honesty, the Ubuntu Pledge, a moral document, demands people to live honestly and positively at all times.

All political parties and religious groups in South Africa support the Ubuntu Pledge.

The Pledge prescribes to people to be good and do well, to live honestly and positively, to be considerate and kind, to care for brothers and sisters in the human family, respect other people's rights to their beliefs and cultures, care for and improve the environment, promote peace, harmony and non-violence, and to promote the welfare of the country as a patriotic citizen.

Ubuntu also does not differ fundamentally from the Carnegie guidelines on the practising of honesty.

- **To be inhumane is to be like an animal**

The biggest lesson Africa can export to the world is how to appreciate the value of **humanness**. Humanness is also the very essence of Ubuntu. It is due to this affinity with humanness that apartheid South Africa never experienced a bloody revolution. This is the humanness, which saw a political convicted but civilised Nelson Mandela leaving prison after 27 years not being embittered, but propagating for understanding and reconciliation between the races of South Africa.

A human gesture in Carnegie tradition is to start conversations in a most friendly way.

Carnegie touches here on an important aspect of Ubuntu communication behaviour. In Africa, as was noted, it is regarded as good manners to greet others heartily and in an enthusiastic way, and to enquire in depth and the greatest detail about the other person's well being before one discusses any other issues. During research author found in the rural areas of Kenya that these enquiries even included the well being of another's cows!

This warm method, and good interpersonal communication, is not always evident in other cultures.

One finds that Westerners would sometimes be quite satisfied with a mere cold greeting of saying “hi” to the other person without any further genuine inquiry about the other person’s well being.

Carnegie also recommends the usage of a genuine warm smile, which is a good therapy when suffering from illness and depression.

Smiling is very important and natural African life.

To smile and laugh are very basic behavioural elements of the daily Ubuntu lifestyle. This is the reason why cold and grim faces as found in some other cultures are strange to Ubuntu people.

The advantage of a smile is that it has a reflective type of response: smile at strangers and usually they will smile in return. A smile breaks cold atmospheres and stressful situations.

It reflects compassion.

A previously imprisoned political leader told (Sisulu, 1993:1) author during an interview that he was more lonesome in a certain part of Europe, which he visited after his release, than he had ever been during the years in prison on Robben Island. On Robben Island he experienced the warmest compassion thinkable. All were comrades and intense bosom friends. They even shared toothbrushes.

In Europe he found the people extremely cold and in a way even hostile to each other.

The first social rule when meeting an African (for the purpose of communication) is to smile very broadly and naturally, and not to grin in a crocodile style.

- **All that one lives for is to be the best that one can be**

This piece of wisdom confronts meaning of life and to be in peace with oneself and one’s capabilities. It is an encouragement for a person to endeavour excelling in whatever one is doing, and not to stress if about irrelevant issues.

It does not matter whether one is a shepherd, academic, businessman, labourer, or chief; one only has to do one’s best, as an equal to all other human beings.

Not all people are intellectuals or leaders or skilled for business.

This does not mean that some are more equal than others, but merely that people have different roles to play.

To be the best that one can be is also to be an African personality living life in peace and **harmony**.

Life has its ups and downs, but it is the harmonious person who finds solutions to daily problems. The best of one person and the best of another person will differ according to talent and blessings. But if everybody tries to strive to be a better person according to the values of Ubuntu, a new worldly order to the benefit of all is bound to be.

In this respect Carnegie warns that people should never criticise, condemn or complain, but keep their cool.

People tend to be overwhelmed with intolerance and stress-related behaviour under certain conditions.

The consequences of stress are devastating: stress is said (Losyk, 2005:xvii) to be the biggest single reason people (in modern societies) become sick or die prematurely: every health problem from headaches to heart attacks, from psychosomatic disorders to stroke, can be linked to what is known as the plague of the twenty-first century.

The emotional impact of stress includes (ibid:15) negative behaviour, worry, obsessive thoughts, fear/phobia, sadness, irritability, anger/rage, loneliness, confusion, hopelessness, insomnia, nightmares, depression and suicide!

These manifestations are totally against the spirit of Ubuntu. For example, traditionally suicide was a completely unknown deed in African society. The tendency of a child committing suicide for not passing school subjects, is unheard of in African society. If a child fails a year at school, he/she merely returns back to school the next year to repeat the course without any feelings of inferiority or shame.

Harmonious personality is therefore to be promoted to counter-act stress, which prospers especially in times of crises.

During these periods it seems to be a natural tendency for people to be criticising or condemning others or complain emotionally.

This type of behaviour is not promoting harmonious relationships and affecting the harmonious being of a person.

The skill of harmony, which is to be exercised during these circumstances, comprises of the recognising ability of impending crises, to maintain absolute calmness of mind, and not allowing emotions of anger and frustration to rule one's behaviour.

Suggestions provided (Harvard, 2004a:63), which are applicable to all situations in recognising crises, are to pay attention when your instincts tell you that there's something wrong, to confront disturbing factors as

you find them, to seek the counsel of others, and to let your values guide you.

Universal key principles proposed (McKenna etc in Jossey-Bass, op cit:564) in times of crises is to calmly attempt to get the facts, identify the problem, decide how the situation should be handled, involve others (delegate) if necessary, and remember that in a crises, everything (for example emotions, results) is magnified.

Crises should therefore be approached in a harmonious mode, as far as possible.

Ubuntu is a philosophy that embraces harmonious thinking, talking and behaviour.

Harmonious talking eases tensions in all situations. Mandela (op cit:172) says he discovered that in discussions it never helps to take a morally superior tone to the other person or opponent: superior tones and attitudes increase tension. Kindness should prevail.

The skill of kindness is simple to practise: it is helping crippled people over a busy street, holding the door open for others, allowing another driver to go ahead of one on a highway, standing up in an overcrowded bus for elders to have a seat, giving beggars something to eat or drink etc.

On the practising of more harmonious approaches, Ubuntu does not differ from the stated Carnegie prescription.

Ubuntu is indeed in essence about applying non-critical attitudes for increased harmonious living.

Even when others do harm to a person, a cool approach is to be followed. Keeping one's cool includes the effective control of anger management. Anger management is a reference to people who are more "threat conscious" than others. Their personality and genetic make-up, as well as learned experiences throughout their lives, make them more likely to become angry without needing much provocation.

The appropriate solution to cool one's anger, is to become aware of one's rights, which include:

- the right to have an opinion
- the right to say 'no'
- the right to ask for what one wants
- the right to make mistakes
- the right to put oneself first at times
- the right to change one's mind and
- the right to protest against unfair treatment or criticism.

These advices are also applicable to Ubuntu anger coping skills, and the practice of living in peace and harmony.

As Battion (2004:114) advises: “It has been said that the best revenge on people who have given you negative or witch messages, or wish you ill..... is to live well – to live your life as if it were the only one you have, to make each moment count, to succeed in whatever has meaning for you. In a sense we are all dying from the moment of our birth: some of us only take longer than others. Live well”.

- **Wealth must be shared and your neighbour’s poverty is your poverty**

The Ubuntu personality is focussed on sharing, and does not accommodate the qualities of greed and selfishness.

The pursue of individual wealth and riches is absent in traditional African life. This statement is supported by Hountondji (Sapina, 1997:15) referring to “false Bantu” (meaning Africans with a lust of money): “I heard some older wise men repeatingthese are men of lupeto and of money. They explained to me that these young people living with white men knew nothing about money, that was the only thing with any value of their life; they abandoned the wise Bantu vitality and respect for life for a philosophy of money; money is their only ideal; money is their goal; the supreme goal of their acts”.

Asked about a definition of happiness, a Kenyan sage commented (Odera Oruka, 1991:99) as follows: “In our society, a happy man is he who has wealth and is ready to share it with others. Such a man is held in high esteem. So, for one to attain happiness, he should not just be a wealthy man. He should be a man who loves others too. Even a poor man can be happy, provided he mixes with others and shares whatever little he has with them.”

Redistribution of wealth is a known convention in certain cultures and religions. Wealth does not include material assets only. It could also refer to nonmaterial resources like knowledge and morality. It is recommendable that those who have knowledge, share it with the have-nots.

The same applies to morality: if values of morality are unknown to an individual or group, it is only fair to educate those on moral expectations of society.

Due to the high growth rate of the disease of HIV/AIDS in Africa, many orphans from affected families, who cannot be accommodated by extended families, may become street children. Street children are very much likely to be suffering from a lack of morals since there is not a family educator to teach them about life's social norms and values. It is therefore necessary for informed persons to redistribute their knowledge on social morality to these orphans.

It is advisable to understand the needs of others to enable one to share relevant assets one has. Carnegie emphasises in this respect that one should try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view. On this aspect of empathy concerning redistribution, there is from the Ubuntu viewpoint a common understanding.

In Africa there are many different cultures and languages. In South Africa alone one finds eleven official languages. This fact amazingly does not cause any real conflict because Africans use English as the medium for communication with other cultures and thus doing they put themselves in the place of other cultures and tribes daily. This assisted them to understand opinions of others.

For example, an African delegate at a conference confessed reading Afrikaans newspapers of the Afrikaner white minority tribe regularly to see "what make them tick". By doing this he puts himself in the shoes of the other culture.

- **Ones' father and mother's law are ones' law, my relatives' and societies' law is my law.**

Mores and customs are learnt in the atmosphere of the family and extended family life team.

This family atmosphere of Ubuntu is regarded (Ramose, op cit:102) as the basis of African law.

African law is about recognising the rights of groups. The group precedes and super-cedes the individual.

Ubuntu customs and conventions, as the underlying components of African law, were transferred verbally throughout generations to give order to African societies.

Law, ordinances, regulations and rules have as their sole purposes the structuring of society. They have to be obeyed to ensure order.

To obey the law of the family and society is to prove **obedience** to the values of one's cultural environment. These values are highly respected and manifested in giving people names, even nicknames, indicating obedience, order, respect, commitment, trust etc

Carnegie reminds one to remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.

Carnegie is so right.

In the African environment traditional names have a special respectful meaning relating to an event, which took place, or specific idea, which was applicable at the moment of the baby's birth. If it was raining at that time, the baby's name could be "Phumula" (meaning soft rain). Another example is the name "Gatsha" (name of Zulu political leader) which means "tree branch". He is only like a tree branch now, but will grow to become an entire tree himself as he progresses in life

Sometimes a name also describes the character of a person. An example hereof is the Zulu name Nokulunga, which means "mother of kindness".

Respecting all people leads to obedience of interrelated conventions like being courteous. People in respected cultures obey basic positive mannerisms like upholding dignified behaviour, exercising fairness to all and finding richness in other people.

In family and community life positive mannerisms prepare the ground for the development of ground rules. In this way discipline is established to provide space for constructive co-existence between members of a tribe, community and nation.

Constructive co-existence is a reflection of the possibility of effective team or community work. It is alleged (Stone, 2003:170) that a sense of teamwork implies more commitment, and builds a momentum that leads to benefits like better problem solving, greater productivity, more joy from work or association, and a sense of purpose that is motivating and fulfilling.

- **Knowledge is the challenge of being human so as to discover the promise of being human.**

The African personality embraces humanism and the art of being a human person.

Embracing humanism and humanness is an indication that such a person has gained vast knowledge of the subject. Gaining human knowledge is primarily to learn about Ubuntu and African humanism, which is **wisdom**.

These beliefs and guidelines are meant to make life more meaningful and also of those around a person. They are typical African and from the Ubuntu perspective guidelines for younger and all generations to be honoured, valued and lived.

The most important lesson of Ubuntu is for mankind to accept, strive to and live according to the above basic and simple human values and principles for the attainment of the greatest individual and communal happiness.

In Africa life lessons and life coping advice are taught by so-called sages (wise people). The Kenyan philosopher H. Odera Oruka recorded the wisdom of various sages, which merits more study to researchers of wisdom. The sages, when asked to explain their special roles were in society, and their general roles in life, they reported that their lives were devoted to the betterment of their communities, as well as their service to individuals in their communities.

Philosophy is about the love of wisdom and to be wise, is to possess the skill “to make mature statements judgements about the use of human knowledge in the context of daily life” (Presbey, 1997:3).

In every society one finds wise sayings.

African sayings, often based on the experience of observing animals and natural phenomena, include (Leslau, 1985:15):

- It is a bad child who does not take advice
- Even though the old man is strong and hearty, he will not live for ever
- He who cannot dance will say: the drum is bad
- Two small antelopes can beat a big one
- When the moon is not full, the stars shine more brightly
- Love is like a baby: it needs to be treated tenderly
- The frog wanted to be as big as the elephant, and burst
- When spider nets unite, they can tie up a lion
- Because a man has injured your goat, you do not go out and kill his bull
- A little rain each day will fill the rivers to overflowing
- Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodiles won't eat you
- However full the house, the hen finds a corner to

- lay in
- Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.

These are typical of wise sayings.

This does not imply that all sayings found in Africa are wise.

In this regard, Odera Oruka (op cit:53) distinguishes between firstly popular wisdoms or wise statements, secondly by commonplace statements and thirdly by foolish statements.

APPLICATION OF UBUNTU VALUES AS LIFE COPING SKILLS

The challenge following from the above guidelines is to implement the Ubuntu values as life coping skills and achieving outcomes.

Outcomes are the end products of exercises, and they are informed by one's ability to cope with life.

Outcomes are related to the achievement of mastering life coping skills, which can benefit one's personal life environment and even community.

An outcome in psychological sense is described (Bellis, 2000:54) as the development of a person. It has as such the attraction of learned abilities.

The following personality values, which were discussed in this paper, are of importance .

Ubuntu personality values:

- togetherness (*umoya*)
- brotherhood (*ubuzalwane*)
- equality (*ukulingana*)
- sharing (*isabelo*)
- sympathy (*isisa*)
- empathy (*uzwela*)
- compassion (*umunyu*)
- respect (*ukuhlonipha*)
- tolerance (*yeka*)
- humanness (*ubuntu*)
- harmony (*ubungane*)
- redistribution (*ukwabelwa*)
- obedience (*ukulalela*)
- happiness (*singcolile*)

- wisdom (*ubudoda*).

The following Ubuntu life coping skills, flowing from these values, are consequently to be mastered:

- facilitating togetherness
- implementing brotherhood
- support equality
- endorsing sharing
- expressing sympathy
- practising empathy
- honouring compassion
- maintaining respect
- allowing tolerance
- saluting humanness
- propagating harmony
- redistributing wealth (and knowledge)
- applying obedience
- living happiness
- loving wisdom.

The outcomes of applying the above Ubuntu life coping skills are as follows:

- facilitating togetherness: improved teamwork, family atmosphere, moral support
- implementing brotherhood: experienced unity, *simunye* (we are one), solidarity, commitment
- support equality: practised non-discrimination, acceptance by all
- endorsing sharing: created different responsibilities, happiness and sorrow-participation
- showing sympathy: applied listening, problem analysis, consolation
- practising empathy: established open-mindedness, understanding
- honouring compassion: valued peace, cohesion, warmth
- showing respect: structured order, discipline, dignity
- allowing tolerance: self-controlled calmness, coolness, forgiveness
- saluting humanness: lived softness, bliss-ness, helpfulness
- propagating harmony: resulted steadiness, non-chaos, clarity of vision

- redistributing wealth (and knowledge): obtained sustainability, cooperation, capacity, empowerment
- applying obedience: justified relationship, convention, custom, values, norms
- living happiness: enjoyed spontaneity, long life, friendliness
- loving wisdom: executed resolution, decision, evaluation, happiness.

Lastly, the main secrets of good life the Ubuntu way are simple:

Have fun.

Just be happy.

Be.

The following poem is of relevance:

LIVE FOR NOW

Live for now
 Seize the day
 Treasure the present
 For you are living in it
 Tomorrow will come to the world
 But not guaranteed to your life
 Fear not of death because it is inevitable
 Rather try and achieve it happy
 Life is given and taken back
 So appreciate it while you have it
 Go all out, be grateful for it
 Laugh, and take advantage of today
 Where and when else are you gonna do it?
 You only live once
 When you wake up alive
 You should celebrate
 Dwell in life rather in death
 If you lurk in the shadows of death
 You'll live in a cold, dark cloud
 You'll focus more on what you don't have
 You'll conceive life as miserable
 So live for now
 Love life and life will love you

Many birthdays lead to your death
But you celebrate them
So why not just celebrate life?
Untame your spirit, live happily.

(Uhuru Phalafala: 2004)

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Dr Johann Broodryk

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

How about a long, deep sip from the calabash of beer on the life coping skills of Ubuntu?

Dr Johann Broodryk was the first person that obtained a doctorate's degree on the ancient African philosophy and worldview of Ubuntu. The theme of the D Litt thesis was "Ubuntuism as a worldview to order society", which he dedicated to Nelson Mandela, previous President of South Africa. This degree was awarded by the Department of Philosophy at the University of South Africa. He also served on Unisa's Research Unit for African Philosophy.

Broodryk was mentored by several acknowledged African intellectuals on the subject of Ubuntu, like the late Walter Sisulu and Kgalushi Drake Koka, and he did empirical research in different remote areas of Africa from Kwa Zulu-Natal up to Kenya in Africa. He established the Ubuntu School of Philosophy, which is a training and research enterprise and consultancy based in Tswhane, South Africa.

He teaches Ubuntu life coping skills, advise employers on Ubuntu management skills, and trains counsellors to counsel people through Ubuntu philosophical counselling.

Broodryk has appeared on various television and radio programmes on the subject of Ubuntu. He has also contributed academic and general articles on Ubuntu and delivered a variety of papers on this subject at conferences and workshops.

He has produced five books on Ubuntu.

