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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MS WENDY ACKERMAN

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA (INTRODUCTION)	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity – Women in unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA (GUEST SYNOPSIS)	Joining us on the line today is Mrs Wendy Ackerman, Co-Founder and Honorary Life President of Pick n Pay stores, together with her husband Raymond she helped build one of South Africa's pre-eminent FMCG retailers consisting of over 1250 stores in Southern Africa. Operations are in food, clothing and general merchandise sectors as well as financial services and the company employs approximately 60 000 people. Welcome to the show.
MS. ACKERMAN	Thank you.
DR. MALKA	Throughout your professional career you've demonstrated your commitment to your employee's benefits and their welfare and here we talking about 60 000 people. You've taken active steps in promoting further education amongst the needy and underprivileged of South Africa, offering support and encouragement to anyone around you in that regard. Can you share with us some of the reasons that move you and stand behind the extents of charity work and foundations that you are involved with?
MS. ACKERMAN	Well, that's quite a difficult question but I will try and simplify it, as a child I was very privileged, and I had very well educated parents who saw to it that I had a broad education and when I was lucky enough to go to university, the first thing I noticed when I got there was a little booth which said, Night Schools and I went up to Night Schools and asked them what they were about and they were teaching illiterate, semi-illiterate people in the townships and I immediately signed up for that and that's where I met my husband because he was a principal of the Night School that I worked at. So I had always had a social conscience, I don't know, I was probably born with it and education was always terribly important to me. I loved reading and I have, I suppose a very eclectic interest in life, I'm interested in just about everything and my father was like that as well so that is where I inherited it from but also I was always also very conscious of the underdog, very conscious of the people who were less fortunate than myself. And when I came, in fact, it became my mission statement in life that I stood against any kind of discrimination so virtually all my life I've been fighting discrimination.
DR. MALKA	If I 'm not mistaken when you went to university that was round about the sixties, would that be right?
MS. ACKERMAN	Well, I started university in the middle fifties and having had children in between, I went back and back, yes.

DR. MALKA	Because as you mentioned, in terms of being involved in teaching at the Night School during your student years, those were probably very difficult times in South Africa's history. Can you share with us some of the memories that you have of those particular years?
MS. ACKERMAN	When I was teaching at Night School we went down to very impoverished areas where we taught in, very inadequate classrooms, cold, leaking, rain and winter and so on. I never received anything but warmth and friendliness and encouragement from the students. And when I was teaching with the English Academy when we lived in Johannesburg and I used to go down two or three times a week to Soweto with the English Academy and teach English in various schools, never once in all the years that I taught did I have any incident whatsoever, just warmth, friendliness and a welcome, in fact, one of the students in the Diepkloof High School that I happened to teach English to, told me that he was one of my students, he joined Pick n Pay as a trolley pusher and landed up in Pick n Pay as our Director of Human Resources, going right through UNISA and doing all his law degrees part-time and he told me that when he first went to school he hated whites but he soon learnt, that we weren't the horrors that he had been told and obviously his opinion changed over the years.
DR. MALKA	That's a beautiful story of success and something I think you may feel proud of having a direct hand in that of touching someone at the beginning of his education and then coming right the way through almost a full circle in his career to be employed by Pick n Pay and rising up to the level of Director.
MS. ACKERMAN	Yes, and you won't believe, well I found it hard to believe, he's just retired but he still stays on with some of our boards and our foundation and is still very involved with our Industrial Relations. So I think, I've had, dare I say, a forty year association.
DR. MALKA	Just talking from the education point of view, you've exhibited, your strength, your vigour, in terms of promoting education and you know that education is a vital tool to empower individuals as well as societies, even basic levels of literacy and numeracy have had profound effects on the wellbeing of women in particular and those range from greater control over fertility rates, a reduction in child mortality, improved health management and according to UNESCO, an additional year of schooling, yields a 10% increase in earnings. In your opinion do you think we're doing enough to ensure that knowledge like this, not necessarily classroom knowledge is preached in every forum possible and passed from mothers to daughters, particularly in underprivileged communities?
MS. ACKERMAN	You know, if you read the newspapers, you only get the bad news, you see schools being burnt down, you see gangs vandalising schools and so on but you know there are a number of NGOs out there who are doing the most amazing work in education. I know that we, ourselves in our company and ourselves, the family personally are involved in several academies where we bring young people in after school and tutor them, give them life skills, feed them and help them with their homework and we've had the most enormous success with their matric results and in fact one of our academies, at the end of last year, they had a 100% pass rate and I think there were nine or ten young people and I think five or six of them have been accepted into university. Their marks were good enough to go to university and we had distinctions among those young people who came

	<p>from, if I say, the poorest area I don't know if your listeners know about, Masipa Malela and Ocean View, who are really, really little and more squatter camps. So you know as I said, I'm a great believer in education and education at all levels, in our company, or at least ten years ago, if not longer we started adult based education training and in fact, next week we have one of our graduations where young, where our staff have gone right through to matric, from being illiterate, some of them and some of the innumerate and we have a proper graduation ceremony. We've taken the Great Hall at Wits, we've taken next week's graduation is at University Great Hall and we've been to UNISA. It's been one of the most moving and rewarding exercises that our company has done.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>I don't think there's anything more empowering than education because it just gives individuals that lift up the opportunity, the possibility of going beyond the current horizon that they have that they aware of to expose them to more things.</p>
MS. ACKERMAN	<p>Yes, absolutely. You are so right. May I tell you a really very very sweet and rather moving story. We had a graduation in the UNISA hall in Pretoria and one of the class got up, as a representative of the class to say how she felt about education and what it meant to her having started, I think she probably could barely read and write and now she had her matric and she got up on the stage and made the most amazing speech and she said among other things, how much it meant to her to be able to help her children with their homework, to be able to read to her children, but she said, I couldn't have achieved anything without my husband. He is not their biological father but he helped them, he helped take them to school and he has been the strength behind me. And this was a lady from Mamelodi and she got up and she said, Jannie you're a star and at that point, Jannie who was an Afrikaans farmer jumped up went onto the stage with a large bouquet of flowers and embraced her and the entire hall stood up cheering.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>That's a beautiful story. Thanks for sharing. I'm getting in a wonderful picture in my mind of him on stage with that bouquet.</p>
MS. ACKERMAN	<p>It was really a very very moving moment.</p>
<p>AD BREAK</p>	
DR. MALKA	<p>In our previous segment, Mrs Ackerman shared her passion for education and relayed some of the stories, in terms of the progress that education has done not only for herself but also for the many individuals that she's managed to touch through various academies and foundations set up through Pick n Pay reaching out to young individuals as well as adults to improve their life to give them skills in numeracy as well as literacy. Mrs. Ackerman this programme, Womanity - Woman in Unity is all about gender equality which is increasingly a global focus and as such building female leadership capacity is important for the future of Women in Africa and around the rest of the world. How do you see female leadership?</p>

MS. ACKERMAN	<p>Well, I came into the workplace, according to my children, very early and it was a very hard fight to get acknowledged as a person in my own right. People talk about glass ceiling today but when I first came in it was a glass cube, but I really feel very strongly about gender equality. When I started to work for my husband and when our company was very new he would give me jobs to do. I'd walk into his office and say to him, what would you like me to do and he'd say, I've just had problems with the cashiers, go and see what's wrong and one of the cashiers had come in with a teaspoon complaining that they, meaning the men, came into their canteen and took their teaspoons and that was the beginning of our Human Resources Department. We didn't have one when we first started. I mean we had four little stores but over the years we had to bring in, it was a fight to get black cashiers into the stores and when we got the men, I remember being in one of the stores in Boksburg when there were black cashiers and white cashiers and there were very few white cashiers and the black cashiers were standing doing nothing and there was a long queue in front of the white cashiers and I'd go up to them and say, look this till is free, why wait in the queue. I won't have them taking them taking my food, you know, it shocked and stunned me, but that was the attitude and then as far as women's advancement was concerned, I had a few meetings in our office, where I called the women office workers together and I chatted to them and I said to them, I understand perfectly, having four children of my own, what it's like to have to care for your children, care for the house, put a meal on the table and go to work because you have to help with the household budget. But if any of you are interested in having a career not a job, please come and see me and we'll see what we can do. Well the majority of the women were not able to take the career path, they had to, you know, stick to the nine to five job or the eight to five whatever but a handful of women came forward and we were able to give them extra training and so on and most of them have done extremely well, some of them have reached general managers status. We have top women accountants in the company today who with the financial director who have been very flexible. I've always worked flexitime and because so much is computerised today, a number of these female IT people and accountants are able to work from home and work flexitime when they have young children. I also was able together with our Human Resource Department get nine months maternity leave for our staff with 75% of their salary plus guarantee that when they came back to work they would have a job.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>That is a remarkable achievement. So to re-iterate, nine months of maternity leave, 75% of their salary and when they return after nine months they guaranteed to have their position.</p>
MS. ACKERMAN	<p>Yes, yes, we'd do that and we've done that for a great many years because, well, I was able to influence one or two people along the way, let me put it another way, in the early days, the men would say, oh, you can't, you can't promote a woman, as soon as they get to a decent position, they go off and have a baby or they too emotional. Well, I was able to counter that in those days by saying, it's no different from the men, the moment you get a man in a decent position, they have to go off and do three months army service every year and that's very disruptive and as for emotional women, well there I was really lucky, one of our general managers, well he was</p>

	very good, but highly emotional and every time you talk to him, out came the handkerchief and he cried.
DR. MALKA	Gosh, that is emotional.
MS. ACKERMAN	And I could say to my husband, don't talk about emotional women, there's nobody in the whole company who's more emotional than this general manager. So I tried to throw back at them what they threw at us. We also had problems promoting women to managers in stores because in those days, everyone had to start in the fruit and veg department and they had to unload the lorries and it's very difficult for a woman to unload bags of potatoes and big bags of sugar, so again I said to the executive, this can't happen, how can you judge a person's capacity as a manager by whether they can lift a bag of sugar or a bag of potatoes, that is rubbish and irrelevant and so I was able to, over the years, kind of break a few of those glass walls that surrounded us.
DR. MALKA	Do you think it's, a lot has to do because you were a co-founder? You were very hands-on and you experienced everything that women experience from looking after four children, ensuring that the household is running and going through to work but because of your position you were able to direct and nullify, these almost excuses that were put in place on why women can't be promoted at as you've indicated, you have men who were going off on annual leave for three months to do army services so do you think that your direct involvement was a key contributor to Pick n Pay's pursuing gender equality?
MS. ACKERMAN	I had to fight for my position. It didn't come just because I was the boss's wife. I used to sit in on all the board meetings but I had no title and I took no salary, by the way because I said to them I work flexi-time, I take off time during the school holidays to be with the children. I don't think it's fair that you pay me a salary but one day I said to my husband, you know, I think it's time that I was recognized in the company, it's all very well I'm the Chairman's wife, but you know what, I'm a person in my own right and I don't want to stand in your shadow all the time. So I fought for my position and over the years I'd had to talk to women's groups over and over again and I said to them, you've got to be assertive, there's a difference between assertiveness and aggression and I showed them the hand gesture. You know if you have your hands on your hips and you frown, that is being aggressive, but if you hold your one hand out and smile, that is being assertive and you can do it the nice way and not belittle them and the women all liked that and they've used it over and over again. I think my daughter who today, is a Director of the company as well and a very very useful person in society, she still feels that women have a long way to go to get advancement because she is our Director of Transformation, but I'm coming from a different perspective, I'd seen how far women have come. I just spoke to women, yesterday, I said you mustn't stand like that, stand up straight, be proud and you are on a level with a man, it's a lot to do with body language, if you're subservient you kept in a subservient position. Pick a bully and they collapse.
DR. MALKA	I read an article the other day by a researcher and she talks about various poses and postures, that if you exercise them, a change is not just the way that you're perceived by others, there is some adjustments in terms of your chemistry and how you then come across to be more assertive, to have people listen to you and respond to you in the way that you want them to, so physical presence I

	think is as important as what an individual has to say. From where you sit what do you think it will take for women to have significantly greater participation on corporate boards and top management than what they have today?
MS. ACKERMAN	Judging by my experience of speaking to a large group of women it's up to the women themselves. A woman can't sit back and say, well I'm a woman and I'll never get on, that's rubbish, you've just got to, as we said, be assertive and be positive and being positive can get you a long way. I think too many women accept an inferior role. You know next week, I'm hosting a lunch for a thousand women to stand against abuse against women and children and I know how many of these abused women are in a very bullying situation and abusive situation, not only physical but mental and emotional which can be as bad as a physical relationship and I, you know I feel if women stand up to the men they can get ahead, I always feel, I'm nothing special if I could do it, anybody could do it.
DR. MALKA	Do you think though that sometimes it's also a case of when women have reached a position of prominence that they practically try and bring other women up with them and at the same time changing the scenario behaviour of men by permitting women to come into those roles and I don't mean permitting in terms of a literal sense but just to be receptive to open those opportunities and allow them the space to enter into positions of prominence?
MS. ACKERMAN	I have heard some women stand in the way of other women and there is a lot of rivalry and so on in the workplace. I personally haven't come across it but maybe I'm in a special position. I had always gone ahead and done my job and done it to the best of my ability and tried not to get involved at all in company politics and jockeying for positions. I haven't come across it, personally.
DR. MALKA	Well, I think that you've made remarkable inroads in terms of bettering the opportunity space for women in Pick n Pay. And I'm sure that other corporates particularly in the retail sector look towards some of the activities that you've initiated and I hope they imitate.
AD BREAK	
DR. MALKA	In the previous conversation, Mrs Ackerman spoke about, in her time growing up in the corporate space rather than the glass ceiling that we're confronted with now that she was faced with the glass cube and some of the interventions that she took in terms of cracking the glass cube to allow more opportunities for women, enabling factors through flexitime, maternity package of nine months maternity leave at 75% the salary and a guarantee that when those women came back from their maternity leave that their position would still be waiting for them. We also spoke about the importance of being assertive and physical posture, in terms of how women are perceived. Mrs. Ackerman, this programme aims to celebrate prominent and ordinary African woman's milestone achievements and their struggles for liberation, human rights, democracy, socio-economic class division and gender based violence. In your opinion, how well have we done regarding those particular issues in the last few decades, more importantly, what do you think women should do as a group to bring about positive change, in terms of equality?
MS. ACKERMAN	That's a very difficult question. During the political struggle, we were very active, trying to break down apartheid and trying to get an equal, to equalise society and we broke the laws and were taken to task. My

	<p>husband landed in the State President's office several times being hauled over the coals for breaking the laws. Both of us felt very very strongly about discrimination, whether it was political discrimination, discrimination by colour, discrimination by sex or discrimination by religion and we have tried in the best way we've possibly been able to, to keep this kind of discrimination out of our company. Unfortunately, we had other huge problems in the country to deal with, health issues and particularly issues of abuse and rape and it doesn't stop with rape it goes on to rape and mutilation and abduction and this is top most in my mind and I started having a lunch for a thousand women, eleven years ago. We're about to have our eleventh one, next on Thursday and we encourage groups of women to get together to support each other, to come out and tell people when they're raped and I know how ashamed it is, I know and understand how dehumanising the whole offence is, we come out with a series of photographs. You know you hear statistics and statistics shock you for ten minutes, you walk into a room as I did last week where there were twenty or thirty women who had all been raped and each and every one had a horrendous story to tell, in fact one of the women who was there, each woman was there to be photographed, to say, I survived. One of the women couldn't come because that morning her daughter was raped so needless to say, by her stepfather and that kind of shocking confrontation is far more effective than all the talk and all the statistics that come out. We put up a little website, where we talk about this and we show photographs of these women, how beautiful they are and that their beauty shines through the appalling traumas they've been through.</p>
DR. MALKA	And do you have the website address with you?
MS. ACKERMAN	<p>Yes, it's www.1000women.co.za and we've put this website up and we are also sharing photographs of these women and then we haven't, this is going up this week. There's a very short one minute video of some of these women that we photographed and we asked them, can you talk abo it and the look on their faces, I warn you to have a box of tissues right at hand, it is really really shocking. And that is why I, you say, what can the ordinary woman do, the ordinary woman can go and help her next door neighbour. I lived in Johannesburg, next door to a gynaecologist and his wife and a couple of times she had black eyes and I said to her, why have you got, oh my husband hit me, I didn't believe her until she landed up concussed in hospital and then she divorced him. One finds it hard to believe but it happens in all stratats of society, from the highest to the lowest and I think it can only, we can only break it if women teach their sons to respect other women, to respect their mothers and not to behave in a brutal way towards women. It's got to come from the cradle.</p>
DR. MALKA	And for women to be more conscious and empathetic towards each other. and I think that's what you're right in saying, you don't have to do big things, it's just being more aware and reaching out to our neighbours.
MS. ACKERMAN	Yes. Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	We are, unfortunately, coming to the end of the show and there are two more questions that I'd like to ask you, one is about the opinion, your opinion in

	terms of the key drivers to your success? What would you say they've been?
MS. ACKERMAN	What have been the key drivers to my success, an optimistic approach to life and never turning down a challenge. Never say, oh, I can't do that, oh, I'm not educated to do that, oh my husband has given me the most incredibly varied tasks to do over the years and other people have come to me and said, please can you do this and that, and I've never said no. I've never said no, I've never said I don't know how, I've never said I can't do it, I've just gone ahead and done it to the best of my ability. I don't know if that's the key to success but being positive and not taking nonsense from everybody around.
DR. MALKA	And can you share some of the pivotal moments in your life growing up. What influenced you in those years?
MS. ACKERMAN	What influenced me, I suppose, you know, we're a Jewish family and I grew up during the war and I was at a convent, the only Jewish girl at a convent and I was very small child for my age, very small and I remember having to be boarded because my father was in the army. And one day, one of these big farm girls, and when you're very small a great big girl in Standard 9, Grade 11 is really big and she was sitting on a bench with a whole lot of other people and I came towards them to ask one of the girls something and this big horrible farm girl looked at me and said, get away you dirty little Jew. And what I was six, seven, eight years old and that kind of marked my soul, that kind of marked my soul. I had done nothing to her at all. We lived in the same house, we ate at the same table and that came out of nowhere and that, I think my husband also had a very nasty incident when he was at school and he said that when he was a lot older, he was about seventeen and he said that changed his life and after that he fought discrimination on every level and I think that I did that as a very small child, that also changed my life.
DR. MALKA	So that was a key turning point, not a turning point, but just a conscious, an awareness of.
MS. ACKERMAN	A wake-up call, yes.
DR. MALKA	And what would you say has had the biggest impact to make you the person you are, today?
MS. ACKERMAN	I think my marriage to my husband, because he's a different sort of person and he thinks in different directions, he's a lateral thinker and he advised and guided me over the years. I told you, I was very young when I got married and having a sort of semi-educated mind when I got married, I was receptive to his advice and guidance. I mean, he's five years older than me, he's not all that much older but he's a wise man, he's a wise soul and as I say, he thinks in different directions and he's had a huge influence on my life and taught me not to be petty and not to let the little bugs get at me.
DR. MALKA	And lastly, in closing our discussion today can you please share a few words of inspiration which you'd like to pass on to women in Africa who are listening to us today?

MS. ACKERMAN	Africa is the most wonderful continent. We have got so much to be thankful for living here, we must just learn tolerance and understanding, compassion and love for each other and we can only grow from strength to strength.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for that wonderful message. It's been such a pleasure and a privilege to talk to you today, for you to share with us your memories and words of wisdom for our future upcoming young ladies who can take advantage of your learnings and experience.
MS. ACKERMAN	Thank you.
END PROGRAM	