

PROGRAM DATE: 2016-05-26

PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MS ELANA MEYER

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 from Cape Town is Elana Meyer, who holds numerous awards as a long distance runner. Her most recognized accolade was winning the silver medal for South Africa at the 1992 Summer Olympics in the 10 000 meter event. As an athlete she has competed internationally across the globe in Tokyo, San Francisco, Stockholm, Barcelona – to name a few. Following her retirement from professional athletics, she co-founded the JAG Sports and Education Foundation which takes sports and education programs into underprivileged schools in South Africa. Additionally she co-founded Endurocad a sports academy which is dedicated to developing young South African talent into elite global endurance athletes. On the academic front, Elana holds a BCom degree and Higher Education diploma from the University of Stellenbosch.
DR. MALKA	Welcome to the show.
MS ELANA MEYER	Hi Thank you so much it's such a great honour to join you today.
DR. MALKA	Starting off, in your former career you were a professional long distance runner – long distance running is definitely an individual and often lonely sport that requires certain key elements in order to attain success such as sacrifice, perseverance and single minded focus. Can you please share with us a few of the land marks in your career and when you understood that long distance running would be a big part of your destiny?
MS ELANA MEYER	You know maybe I can just take you back to where it all started. You know I come from a very small town Albertinia you know and the first sort of memory of you know a great sporting event I had, was you know when the great Nadia Comaneci achieved the perfect ten, you know. And I was only nine years old at that stage but that really captured my imagination you know and my first dreams were really around become a gymnast but you know growing up in a very small town you know and in a very small school, you know gymnastics was just never really an opportunity. We did not have any gymnastics coaches or really the equipment you know. So when they announced at our school that I had a fun run you know, I think my initial attraction was more to the fun side than the run side but you know I decided you know to take up this challenge and you know to start running and get ready for this fun run, you know. Everything went really well but you know what I discovered in the sort of lead up, I was just – I grew up on a farm, I was going out for some runs and from the start I set up little challenges and little goals for myself you know to run from the farm you know which is 5 kilometres outside of the town Albertinia to run all the way - it's something that I initially didn't do and you every time I had to stop you know before I ultimately managed to achieve that and I can just

	<p>remember you now when I achieved that I felt really chuffed and it felt like I have achieved something. You know I think that was really when I discovered the love and the passion for running you know I fell in love with it instantly you know I love the fact that it was something that I could own, it was something that you know I could decide how fast I want to run, I could decide how far I want to run, you know I could explore I could have fun. So really from the start it was falling in love with something so I had a great passion for running from the start and then you know also end up you know doing pretty well in it, so I think the initial, my initial realization was the fact- it was more around the fact that I loved it you know, it was a great passion and then also something that I did pretty well in.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>What do you like about it so much? Because as you were growing up it almost seems as though you were targeting and setting yourself these little challenges and each time you achieved one of those challenges you pushed yourself further and further.</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>You know absolutely, you know so I think sort of the real realization came you when I you know sort of by I was convinced by our next door neighbour that you know there's a nice run in Bredasdorp which is the foot of Africa you now so as a 13 year old I entered a half marathon and ended up winning that you know. Even though it wasn't an appropriate distance for such a young girl, you know the fact that I you know I started the run you know, I managed to win it you know and I think there I realized that I also do have some talent but I think the initial realization was through the passion and I loved the fact that you know I could own it, you know it's not – I did not have to rely on a lot of equipment, a team – you know it was something that I could do and I think that's you know even though sort of running is seen as a lonely sport, you know I throughout my whole career you know I have run with great friends, training partners and have never experienced it as you know as a lonely sport.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And it's fantastic that you found your passion so early on in life, I mean I think a lot of us spend our time looking for that key ingredient and to find it at 13 and to focus on</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>Yes you know and I think you know always when people ask me you know to be I think to be great in anything, you know you really have to have a very strong inner desire to do it you know. And it can't be owned by somebody outside you, you know, so individuals, youngsters, you know need to find that burning – that burning desire within themselves, you know and everybody has that but you know you need to find it and I think you know then working hard is a lot easier because you know that's where your passion are or where your passions are you know, or where you naturally enjoying spending time at.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And remaining on the track as a figure of speech, your training with some of the most successful athletes in your field and competing at the forefront of international competition has given you unparalleled insight into what it takes to get to the top and more importantly how to stay there. Do you think that some of the principles that you discovered in your training relate and apply to business and life in general?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>I think absolutely. You know I think from a running perspective you know I have always you know, I always wanted to be one of the best athletes in the world. I wanted to break world records, you know and to achieve that I knew I needed a world class coach you know so I have always tried to work with the best people in the field and to realize it really is a team effort you</p>

	<p>know, even though running is an individual sport you know it was really being surrounded by a team of experts, you know. I had a world class coach, a world class physio so I was really surrounded by a world class team. Throughout my career I have always made sure that I read a lot on the topics you know so that I'm empowered to know the sport to the detail you know and I think you know it's the same in life you know even after sport whatever I wanted to do, you know I made sure I got the best advisors, the best coaches you know to assist me to help me achieve that and I think it's the same in business you know I think if you want to achieve great things surround you with smart people.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>I think that's a fantastic philosophy because ultimately no one knows everything and smart managers are or smart leaders are the ones who do exactly that – surrounding themselves with the correct advisors to leverage their smartness and incorporate that into the business space. When we hear about successful people there's often a tendency to think that their achievements happened overnight but in truth, we are really witnessing the end results of years of hard work and discipline, dedication which they have invested into their chosen path. And additionally behind the scenes as you have just mentioned there is a team of others, this form of support structure who backs the individual. What is your opinion on the role of support systems to contribute to success?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER 10min	<p>Ja I think it's I think first of all you know I am a strong believer there's no elevator to success, you know we all have to take the stair case you now so it wasn't like you know becoming an Olympic medallist you know it took years and years so I started running in the late 70's and fourteen years later you know I had the opportunity to represent South Africa and bring back a silver medal for the country you know. So there is just no instant way of getting there, you know it really is – you need to put it in your 10000 hours plus, you need to surround you with a great team and then you still need some luck you know so I think you know it really is a long term process, you know it is where you need to put building blocks in place year after year after year and in the process there will be disappointments there will be setbacks, you now and true talent you know also has got a robustness around it you know because it is a lot of people that can start something, but there is a selected few that will stick it out till the end. I think often when you look at talent and achieving success, it really is that combination of you know of having you know having a good place to start off from but then to ultimately be able to stick it out you know to be persistent you know and to get through times and not to give up.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>When we talk about success we always focus on the good stuff, but I think what you have mentioned is really important in terms of how you overcome the setbacks, the challenges and that really it took fourteen years to get to the Olympics for you. Can you just share some insight in terms of how you have overcome some of the challenges that you have been confronted with?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>You know absolutely, you know I think you know I grew up in a period in South Africa you know where we were not be able to compete internationally so even though you know the Olympic games was out there, South Africa and we as South African athletes was not able to compete there. So even though I managed to achieve my Springbok colours in 1984-1985 you now I did not have the opportunity to represent South Africa because you know we were not part of the international system you know. So for two Olympic games, I – even though I was good enough to go to the 1984 games in Los Angeles and then again in 1988 – only eight years later I had the chance to represent South Africa you know and a lot of athletes just</p>

	<p>never stuck it out you know. So even though through a period that we were isolated, you know I managed to you know set myself some goals even though I could not compete with the world's best on the track you know I competed against them on paper. I knew exactly what times they were running you know so and in 1991 I ran the fastest time in the world, without having the opportunity to actually race the athletes on the track. And I think you that is just mentioning one example you know so throughout a period of eight years you know, I did not have the opportunity to run outside of South Africa once. But because I put in alternative plans, I put alternative plans into place you know and I raised the bar from trying to be the best athlete in South Africa, running the best times in South Africa you know I stepped up and compare my times to the best athletes in the world. And that gave me the advantage that when we in '92 got accepted back and we could compete in the Olympic games in Barcelona you know I was ready where I think many of the athletes, you know they were – many of the athletes on the same team you know it was such slow short notice that within four months of being accepted back onto the international arena, we competed in the Olympic games. So even though we were ill prepared from an experience perspective, you know I think I had the right mind set and preparation because I you know I already made that step to compete against the best you know during that period of isolation.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>In effect it was almost virtual competition by competing against others on paper and then putting it into play when you are actually officially allowed to re-enter into the games.</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>Yes you know it is absolutely just raising you know, just raising my own game you know and I think it is also relevant to business you know so it's to focus, to not be the fish in the small puddle but to really make sure you are the, becoming the best that you can be you know and focussing rather than comparing yourself with just people around you.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Today we are talking to Elana Meyer, long distance runner and Olympic medallist.</p>
<p>AD BREAK</p>	
DR. MALKA	<p>You are listening to Womanity – Women in Unity on Channel Africa, the Voice of the African Renaissance on frequency 9625 kHz on the 31 meter band, also available on DSTV channel 902. Today we are talking to Elana Meyer long distance runner and Olympic medallist. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter @Womanity Talk. In the previous segment of the show Elana shared the importance of trying to discover your passion of bringing it to the fore and igniting it. She also mentioned the fact that there really is no elevator to success it takes hard work and perseverance and importantly to raise your own game and look to be the best that you can be. Our program Womanity – Women in Unity is all about gender inequality which is increasingly a global focus and as such building female leadership capability is important to the future of women in our country, Africa and across the world. How do you see female leadership in South Africa?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER 17.00	<p>You know I think we have great leaders in South Africa and certainly an opportunity to even do more. You know what I have just found is that you know everybody respects performance and everybody respects competence you know. And often you know women are still expected to prove that they can perform and that they can compete you know where men are expected you know. So it is really all about perceptions and I think now obviously men had decades of building up networks that support the perceptions</p>

	<p>around their performance and their competence where we as women are only moving into that phase now you know. So I believe women and network of a woman you know is really important in the way moving forward you know. Because we have got amazing women in South Africa you know but we are at the disadvantage where men have been doing that for generations and generations and kept tapping into networks and networks you know to move up the ladders of performance.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And I also think within the network context that often from a female point of view we tend to be very good in terms of social networks but now it's a case of looking more towards establishing those professional networks and having that type of dynamic and relationship that is about moving ahead and getting those professional gains.</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>Yes you know I absolutely agree I think you know from a social perspective you know, I think we as women are doing a great job but I think from business and you know networking opportunities, I think we still really need to you know to grow into that phase where the strength of networks give women the opportunity to achieve what they can achieve.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And whilst we are on the topic of leadership, how do you think we can build this capability further and mentor our future women leaders?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>You now I think it obviously starts with individuals you know. If I look back in my life, certainly my mother played a big role where she just gave me the belief that anything is possible and I think if we can raise young girls with the belief that anything is really possible you know with hard work, persistence you know a robustness around it you know that is the – and often young girls are not raised with the belief system that they are able to achieve anything you know. So for me it starts with giving women giving females the belief system that anything is really possible and sport obviously gave it to me you know in a very significant way you know. I set out big goals for myself and managed to achieve it because there was a belief that you know that anything is possible.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And do you also think that within the sporting space from a gender point of view that there is an element of protection because women are competing against women, men are competing against men. So you are allowed to go all the way to the top, you have to get to the top?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>You know I think you know obviously you know in sport and you now growing great talent you know into great senior sports, sportswomen you know women are facing different challenges you know and often the transitional phases in life you know going from high school you know to post-school to pursue a career often still impact more women than men. I think often you know it really is ensuring that you know that talented women, talented young girls don't get lost to the system you know. When making the transition from being a really talented high school promising athlete into maturing as a world class senior woman.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And the other challenge I think that happens when we are looking at those life stages is that women often have to make a conscious choice in terms of when they choose to have a family because that can be a significant disruptor, particularly in the sporting career.</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>Ja. Yes you know absolutely I think you know in sport there has been you know there has been great cases that showcase young women starting with a family and then come back even stronger you know and then you know like myself I had my kids in my forties, you know after I finished my</p>

	professional career you know. So those choices certainly play a role but I do not believe that, that should be a challenge for athletes to reach their potential.
DR. MALKA	It's part of life, it's not an obstruction.
MS ELANA MEYER	Yes and it is you know you have to plan it in a way you know that is good for your career you know and is good for your life you know it is not two separate things, you know. Your running is part of a bigger life and you know and it's all part of planning.
DR. MALKA	I think that's the key word, the planning part. From where you sit today, being a top athlete gave you a unique perspective on things. What would you say you have learnt about your own endurance, your personal limits?
MS ELANA MEYER	You know I always say you know I had the opportunity to you know go to university and got my BCom degree, did my Honours, got my HED but the greatest teacher in my life was still my sport you know. Because that is really where I learnt to you know to push the limits a little bit and you can't improve if you are not trying to get better than you were yesterday you know. So sport has been an unbelievable teacher in my life, most things I have learnt and I still use every day you know, are those lessons from the sport you know. I have learnt about working hard, I have learnt to set really high goals, I learnt how to come back from really bad setbacks and you know that is all proof for life in the bigger and you know those examples in sport also gave me the tools you know to go into – it doesn't matter what it was you know, I approached it exactly as the same way as I approach my sporting career you know. When there's an obstacle you know you have to reassess you know, check what went wrong you know, readjust your goals, put a plan in place, work hard every day and you know if it is in sport or in life, it really is exactly following the same steps to get to the results you want to have.
DR. MALKA	And I think that's a great analytical view in terms of reapplying and translating the lessons that you have learned within the sporting track and taking it beyond into say the corporate world. In terms of some of those values, what do you think it would take for women to have greater participation on corporate boards and top management than they have today?
MS ELANA MEYER	You know I think it really is you know I think using the networks and I think often the boards it's still mostly a male dominated area you know but when women come in, when you come in with competence and you come in with excellence you know you can over step the challenges and you know I think often there is not the confidence that women is strong enough to be there and I think you know in many ways sport you know, sport gave me the confidence that when you work hard and you perform and you know, deliver excellence – people respect you know and I think it's the same you know. So confidence is such an important quality to have you know and often you know women are still feeling overwhelmed when they walk into an area that's dominated by males.
DR. MALKA	Today we are talking to Elana Meyer, long distance runner and Olympic medallist.
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	<p>comments on Twitter @Womanity Talk. In the previous segment we spoke about encouraging female leadership, addressing components of socialization at a young age. Having strong beliefs systems and as we move on through life starting to develop and incorporate professional networks and aspiring to have skills, attitudes of competence, excellence and confidence. Elana one of the questions I ask my guests on this program who have all made tremendous achievements in their respective fields of expertise, is about the factors that contributed to their success. Some talk about the hard work that they put in, others speak about perseverance. What in your opinion have been the key drivers to your success?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>You know I still think that you know that it all starts with passion from me you know. The fact that I – it is something, my sport was something I was really passionate about you know. So training hard never really felt like punishment for me, where for most other people it seems like impossible. So I had a very strong inner desire and inner drive to you know to be an athlete and to become the best athlete that I could be. So that made the hard work a lot easier you know and I think you know to be able to be consistent you know year after year after year, so like really being able to put in the building blocks you know to almost have that robustness around it you know because often you know athletes get injured, they get sick, they lose interest you know but to move from one level to another, you do need a bit of a robustness around it. And I think you know I was blessed with you know with very good talent but a very big passion for this sport you know and a big robustness.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And I think a solid work ethic too, because it does require work.</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>Yes absolutely I think that’s the one thing that you will you know, you will never be able to have a long successful career in sport if you cannot put the like the work, the workload in to achieve that.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Can you share with us some of the pivotal moments in your life growing up in terms of what influenced you in those years?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>I think as mentioned earlier in the show, you know certainly the belief that my mother gave me that anything is really possible you know and just her unbelievable positive outlook on life and not to be deterred from that very easily I think so that certainly – you know my mom gave me a great kick-start to life you know and still today do. So I have got a strong belief you know that I can achieve anything I want to and that certainly put me on the path to achieving a lot of my dreams.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And what would you say had the biggest impact on you to make you the person that you are today?</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>You know I don’t think it is necessarily what she said, I think it you know it really is you know that the life that she lived, the example that she was you know my mom was a school teacher you know, she could just do anything from fixing a car’s wheel and you know and nothing was ever a problem but always an opportunity and I think you know the combination of you know it was not about you know saying things, but it was really about the example that she gave me and I think we as women also have the responsibility to be great examples to you know to the young girls growing up today.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Yes that’s a tangible part – so it’s not about – it’s almost as though your mom said there are no limitations and I’m going to show you exactly how it’s done.</p>
MS ELANA MEYER	<p>Yes, you know living life but have no limitations.</p>

DR. MALKA	And I was going to ask you which women would you say have been the strongest or significant role models or influences in your life, but clearly your mom is one of them.
MS ELANA MEYER	You know absolutely and I think then also in my sports you know I had you know real specific role models growing up and it was the pioneers of distance running you know it was the Ingrid Kristiansen, Joan Benoit, Grete Waitz you know great international athletes you know that you know were the pioneers. With Joan Benoit winning the first Olympic marathon in 1984 you know but also then you know the South African leaders. You know when I growing up it was Serina Cronje that you know was a leading South African distance runner and you know even though Zola Budd is my peer you know Zola was a world class athlete at a very young age you know. So Zola was also a great inspiration you know throughout my life because when we started off you know, she was so far in front of me but you know I kept on focussing on achieving my personal best that I managed to close the gap and pass her.
DR. MALKA	But you know role models are – they are the visible component they show you what is possible what you can aspire to become and like you said overcome to do better than they do and I think that is a really important facet in terms of women growing up and looking for those role models in their particular industry.
MS ELANA MEYER	Yes you know I am a strong believer in you know in having role models, I think you know and having you know the right role models. I think youngsters growing up now, there's such an overload of information that you know youngsters get lost you know between that you know and if you could provide guidance through people that has walked the road that has achieved success, that's learnt through experience you know, we can only assist youngsters you know in the road forward.
DR. MALKA	And building on what's been built before.
MS ELANA MEYER	Absolutely
DR. MALKA	We are unfortunately coming to the end of the show. Can I ask you in closing the conversation today to please share a few words of inspiration which you would like to impart to women in the continent that are listening to us today?
MS ELANA MEYER	You know I think it would be the message of you know don't limit yourself, you know anything is possible you know be the person that you were meant to be, work hard, be persistent you know, be robust you know in becoming the woman that you want to be.
DR. MALKA	Thank you very much for those words of inspiration and for sharing your experiences with us today and how the learnings from the running field have applied to the rest of your life.
MS ELANA MEYER	Thank you so much.
DR. MALKA	You have been listening to Womanity – Women in Unity on Channel Africa the Voice of the African Renaissance and we have been talking to Elana Meyer long distance runner and Olympic medallist.
END OF PROGRAM	