

PROGRAM DATE: 2017-07-27

PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: PROFESSOR DEBORAH MEYER – EXECUTIVE DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF SCIENCE – UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

| SPEAKER | TRANSCRIPTION |
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| DR. MALKA | 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 | Joining us in studio today is Professor Deborah Meyer who is the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of Johannesburg. Welcome to the show! |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Thank you, thank you for having me. |
| DR. MALKA | Prof Meyer in 2014 you were nominated for the position of Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of Johannesburg; can you please share with us some of the work that you do and the responsibilities that are attached to holding this position? |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | I think I want to start by just mentioning it's not so much a nomination as an appointment. So you go through the whole process of interviews presenting your mission and vision to the faculty in advance, then you're interviewed by a very elaborate panel and afterwards management and council decides whether you're suitable for the post and so council appointed me in this post starting 2015.... |
| DR. MALKA | ...and ultimately it's about setting the new direction for the department for the next X period of time... |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Ja, so it's leading the faculty in whatever the plans and strategies of the university is, making sure that the faculty contributes as much as possible and you know basically assisting the institution in reaching its goals and what my job entails is I provide strategic leadership and management to thirteen departments, we also have an analytical facility and then two workshops. The staff I oversee are academic staff members, we also have admin staff, technical staff and instrument scientists and then of course we are responsible for training science students so the students that take our degree programmes as well as students registered in other faculties but who require some of the courses that we offer for their training. So it's basically a responsibility for the entire faculty, our research programmes as well as teaching and learning and making sure that we also contribute to community engagement. |
| DR. MALKA | I recently came across some work that the World Economic Forum are doing and ultimately they're saying I think it's approximately 80% of the jobs that we require in the future will be stem led positions.... |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | ...exactly... |
| DR. MALKA | ...so that holds a significant weight on not just about contributing to a faculty and developing our new wave of graduates, but it's about investing into the economy and the world per se. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Exactly so people need to understand that without science a country's development is very limited and so science and technology actually forms the basis of a number of things that humanity requires for quality of life so I'll give you a few examples. By training our biochemists and my research |

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| | <p>involved medical biochemistry, but biochemists can also work on agriculture, you know, improving food quality, how long you can keep food on the shelf, things that you've grown, how long you can make sure that it stays on the shelf and so that gives you just one discipline having an impact in what we eat as well as how healthy we are, whether we survive microorganism infections or not, it's scientists who do these things. Science contributes to making medicine for all kinds of things. We make sure that food is okay, some scientific disciplines are involved in looking for another planet if this one should, you know, stop being suitable to for us survive it's scientists that will figure out where else we could go. So what I am responsible for carries a lot of weight and it has extreme value to society and so I'm very proud of what we do but I do not take it lightly, I know it's a heavy responsibility but the good news is if you can convince everybody involved in the sciences, in the University of Johannesburg in particular, to make their contributions then we achieve what we set out to achieve and it actually makes the burden much lighter if everybody that should contribute, contributes.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>You've touched base in terms of some of the functional components and the structure of what you do, are there any particular milestones that you want to achieve in this term?</p> |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>Ja I think some of it has already started coming to fruition so I'm very proud of the fact that our faculty contributes a substantial number of research units for the institution and why that's important is we have a subsidy from government for research produced so we bring in a subsidy to the institution but besides that we also become more noticeable to the rest of the world because what we publish is actually 98% international so that means not only do we bring in a subsidy for the institution, we're also putting UJ on the map, we're making sure other people see what we do and in that way you invite collaboration, you invite other people to come and work with you or challenge you to go to higher heights, so as far as research is concerned I want to make sure that we continue contributing amongst the highest percentages of research output for the institution and that it continues to be valid internationally meaning visible internationally but that it be relevant locally. So we've already started achieving that and of course once you've achieved one thing you always expand and want to do more. So in addition to making sure that our research quality and quantity continues increasing I also want to make sure personally that we get more women into science, but not just as students, into the higher levels of appointment and then of course the South African priorities, I want to make sure that my faculty is more representative of what our country's population grouping is.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>On that point about encouraging more women into science and not just on the student level but really building them up through the faculty, it's a question that I often encounter on all the dialogues that I have, irrespective of industry, what type of interventions have you got that helps achieve that, that motivates women or encourages the faculty or institution rather to bring women into the mix?</p> |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>So I think the institution does very well; we have one programme in particular that we're seeing some progress with and we call it Accelerated Academic Mentorship is the programme. So we feel that increasing the numbers of young scientists into higher levels, making sure they excel, making sure they figure out how to deal with the stresses surrounding the type of performance that is required, if they have mentors that he helps a lot 'cause it requires somebody who's been successful to just take a little bit of their time and talk to someone else, give advice, telling them what kinds</p> |

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| | <p>of pitfalls you have to look out for. But of course in anything where you want to excel you need money so this programme also have earmarked funds that if somebody wants international exposure there's some money where we can send them somewhere, provided they have decent programme, they have to have a plan, we're not just sending people for the fun of it you have to have a plan of how an international experience will accelerate your progress as a scientist. We also have funds available; some of it can be acquired through government programmes as well, its funds for teaching relief. So every academic knows that you have to teach, you have to do research and you have to contribute to society through community engagement programmes and it can be a bit much especially if you're new and you haven't figured out yet how to make things balance so sometimes` giving somebody teaching relief, giving them a little bit of a break from teaching so that they can finalise a few things in their research, that helps and this programme I am telling you about makes opportunities available that somebody can ask for it. What is very important though is we want to make sure people are also very verbal early on, you have to talk about what you need; you cannot just sit in your corner and hope for somebody else to notice. Now of course it's the job of the Dean of the faculty of science to try and notice when somebody needs additional support but it makes my job easier if somebody can also just speak up and say this is what I need, so we do require that people first of all agree to be part of the programme and then participate in what the programme provides. There's all kinds of soft skills training provided as well and as I've told you there's access to earmarked funds for different things but you have to have a plan and even if you need help with developing the plan, if you speak up we can then make sure that somebody assists with that.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>That's a great programme that takes into account not just the structural elements but looking at the softer issues because the reality is this is a mix and you need to have all of those skills to lead a fulfilled life and not be struggling in one area. You mentioned that at the beginning of your academic career your focus was in the biochemistry space and I'm going to share with our audience a little bit of that history. You completed a Biological Science degree at the Rand Afrikaans University as well as an Honours and Master's degrees in Biochemistry; before travelling to the USA on a Fulbright Scholarship to complete a PhD in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of California. Thereafter there were two post doctoral research projects where you worked on Porcine Circoviruses and then you worked on DNA based detection mechanisms for HIV. Later you were involved in the development and pre-clinical testing of a vaccine for HIV and in developing HIV vaccine components to improve on existing HIV/AIDS treatments as well as methods for monitoring disease progression using a multidisciplinary approach and you were supported by sabbatical collaborations with scientists at both Harvard and UCSF. Can you share with us some of the significant learnings that came out of (a) the journey; how it mapped out your career and (b) in terms of those practical applications with HIV?</p> |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>Ja. So I can tell you I started in HIV research you know sort of relatively early when especially in South Africa, if there were people working on it it was a very small group. I think South Africa's focus in the say late 1980's/early 1990's was more in solving our political issues around apartheid so very little was done on HIV, so it's not nothing but was not as much as we can find now so there's larger groups of people doing research now but at that time period there wasn't really that much going on in South Africa. In addition to that in the US they had the advantage of being considered one of the places in which HIV was discovered and identified so</p> |

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| | <p>I decided that I would go there because I wanted to study HIV in particular. So I made sure I got some funds because my parents couldn't afford to pay for me and I was lucky enough that I had done extremely well in university up to that point that I got a number of scholarships that enabled me to go and study overseas. I chose the University of California Davis in particular because they also contributed funds to my studying there, I was again lucky enough to be accepted by I think five universities. The people I worked with were very dedicated scientists so I started out on a project for an HIV vaccine, but, if you know how vaccines work; once you have one you have to be able to test it and nobody was going to allow us to test something in people, right....</p> |
| DR. MALKA | ...no human Guinea pigs.... |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>...exactly so what I did then is I worked on SIV that's the Simian Immunodeficiency Virus and that one you could test in animals so we could start with mice and then with rabbits and eventually we tested them in monkeys and I was allowed to work with twelve monkeys, all of them did extremely well, they survived but the vaccine ended up not being the best one but we learned a lot from there that we could publish and other people expanded on HIV viruses directly.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | And vaccine development in my understanding is it's a long period of time. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>It's a very long period and so what's very important is you read in my...the little piece of my CV that I did pre-clinical testing, so if you test it in animals it's pre-clinical, if you want to test in humans that's clinical and to get to that point is very difficult you have several phases of clinical trials, you have to prove a number of things in test tubes first, which we call In Vitro, then you would be allowed to test something in smaller animals before you'd then be allowed to test larger animals and then in people, smaller groups of people until you eventually get to larger groups of people so it takes time. What has definitely bought time for vaccine development for HIV is the fact that we now have drugs that work so you have to remember that while we were working on vaccines other people were working on drugs. The drugs are not perfect but they definitely prolong lives so I think one of the main criticisms you'll hear about the drugs that are being used in HIV treatment at the moment is that it is toxic but I would like to invite people to tell me which drugs are not toxic. Anything that is chemical that we take into our bodies could probably be described as being toxic. The issue is of course is you try and decrease the toxicity and make sure you come up with a drug that targets the problem you have and so all drugs for all kinds of ailments we deal with is actually toxic for us, but if it addresses the problem and it does it with the least amount of side effects nobody complains. So as far as I see it is that because the treatment is working so well we've bought ourselves time so that we can develop the ultimate solution which would be a vaccine and I'm grateful for the contribution I made, as I told you I worked on SIV in particular and it's really rewarding for me when I notice that people who now work on HIV reference my work, they refer to what we've done, so we've laid some of the groundwork and I have high hopes that very soon we'll have a group of scientists announcing a workable vaccine. Why I say workable is I doubt that we'd immediately have the best thing but we would have something that we can work with and improve as we go along.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>One of the things that I've picked up from conversation is that science is all about progression and we do our work, we put it out there and knowing that somebody else is going to pick up where we left off and take it further onto the next level or feed other environments which in essence it's part of the legacy</p> |

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| | that you leave behind. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Exactly and I think you know some people will ask well scientists are usually we are, if you think about it, the most educated in that we have to study so long to be qualified but then we don't get the kind of payment that you'd expect for that amount of time and effort that you've put in and so people will sometimes ask why would you choose that as a career, well there's other benefits you get, one of them being that you discover something that nobody else discovered and for as long as that work is relevant everybody who does that work will have to refer to what you've done, right, so you become known in ways that people don't see in everyday life but for us it's...for me in particular it's extremely valuable knowing that I produced a piece of work that other intellectuals, other academics find valuable and can refer to. The other benefit that you get out of being a scientist is you train other people, you know, you train younger minds to do what you've done and I was asked recently to check on it and I was really impressed when I noticed that I actually trained 28 students, not only for South Africa 'cause some of them were international. |
| DR. MALKA | I think that's a wonderful achievement. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Thank you. |
| DR. MALKA | Now our programme "Womanity – Women in Unity" is all about gender equality and as such during our conversation today I think it's important to highlight pertinent issues relating to this topic, so one question that I'd like to ask you is about your perspectives regarding women empowerment and gender equality legislation, particularly in terms of how it relates to closing some of the gender gaps so whether that is in terms of pay, promotion, position? |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Okay so interestingly enough I think if you look at South African legislation and you can go very specific into gender or you can go wider, even our constitution covers everything. On paper we have everything that sounds right, our problem is implementation. In my view we have all the legislation needed, what we lack is implementation so one of the things that stands out I think especially because women's month is coming up is the fact that if you look at the numbers of women in South Africa being killed by their partners, the numbers of women being raped and not even feeling like it's worth it to go and report it, that tells you we have created, somehow in our society, the feeling that you know if I say anything nothing's going to happen so why even waste my time, I'd rather spend my time trying to recover from whatever damage has been done and so I think our politicians and our people responsible for implementing legislation have to ask themselves what exactly is the point if we have all these pieces of paper and people don't implement it and people get away with not doing their job. We've heard numerous stories of women going to police stations to report something having been done to them and the men there showing a lack of interest or you know trying to describe and explain it away so that the woman ends up leaving and I think that we then create the culture where women feel in particular that it's not worth doing anything because nobody's going to be on my side. In my environment I ask people in my environment I ask people to let me know where it is that they feel in particular as a woman they're being victimised and I will take action, whatever action I can and I have to tell you thus far we've been able to move things, I've not noticed in our institution a deliberate tendency to not listen to women, to not try and change their environment so I am comfortable to say that at the University of Johannesburg we try and address issues if we know about them and the problem has been getting |

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| | <p>people to speak up. So one of the things I would like to encourage women to do is to not sit quietly and to not accept that for the most part you're not going to get help and support outside, try and insist on it because if we're going to make a difference for the women who come after us it's because we are going to insist that we are being listened to and that the kinds of legislation that exists is actually implemented to our benefit.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>Two things that you said; one that within the reporting environment that if women are reporting things to men that the men are trying to play it down and women are not feeling heard, they are not feeling that their case is going to see the light of day. The second point for me was the fact that by having women such as yourself in key positions you provide a space which is safe, which is receptive, which is saying come and report it to us and we will action on your behalf....</p> |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>...ja...</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>...which is almost saying that civil society is taking greater action than just going through on a political level...</p> |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>Exactly and I think you know in a way, whether you like it or not, but if you're a woman in power you have a responsibility to try and make sure that other women feel comfortable to tell you things, to ask for advice and to make suggestions on how things could be done better. A lot of times it's tough, I wouldn't want to act as if it's easy because you know your job description is already large enough, you already have a number of things on your plate and now women come and they add things to your it. I try to make room for it because I feel that other women did something, this is why I am where I am and where we are in South Africa at the moment is by no means perfect but we've made progress. We have more women in parliament, we have more women in business in positions power and I think there was legislation that actually paved the way for it and to an extent that was implemented, this is why we are where we are, but now people are trying to calm things down with a...almost a belief like you know we have a few of you there so it's okay and you should now relax and I disagree. I think until it's 50/50 a few is not enough and those of us who got into positions of power need to make sure that in addition to doing our job so that we can you know get the recognition for doing our job, we need to whenever possible make sure you fight the battle for women and you know women and men we are different biologically, I understand it sort of better than most people perhaps because of my training but that's the only difference, there's nothing else. In the same way that black people are not inferior to white people, women are not inferior to men and we actually need a little bit more from society and this is for women raising other women to make sure they tell their young girls that you are not inferior, you can achieve whatever you want to achieve, we need the dads to be doing the same thing. This tendency in some cultures to just say you know what only this level is okay for women and after that you need to raise children, that is unacceptable. You can raise children and you can still lead a company, you can raise children and still run a country if you want to. We are not inferior, we actually have a special gift, a special ability to support life that biology and God has given us, it doesn't mean that's where our value ends, we can do a lot more than simply that.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>I agree with you a hundred percent and the fact that we have to strive for other women who are coming up through the ranks that there cannot be a state of apathy that sets in and also as nurturers of both genders that we are teaching the right principles to both our boys as well as our girls.</p> |

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| PROFESSOR MEYER | Exactly. |
| DR. MALKA | You are listening to “Womanity – Women in Unity” on Channel Africa, the African perspective on frequency 9625 KHz on the 31 meter band, also available on DSTV, channel 802. Today we’re talking to Professor Deborah Meyer who is the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of Johannesburg. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk. |
| DR. MALKA | Prof Meyer earlier you were speaking about gender equality in relation to almost the political effects in getting progression of girls and women into society and being economically empowered, one of the questions that I’d like to ask you having been an academic for many years and this is your career path is what have been some of the changes that you’ve witnessed in terms of gender progression from you first started to where we are today? |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Look I think in the past and you can read it in history books, women were not allowed at university and so the thing that changed is that we were allowed on campus and I think a lot of times people will not admit it, there was quotas but in South Africa of course it would have been for black people and then of course for women as well, that eventually fell away and this tendency of allowing people to compete on merit, that I think is what allowed someone like me to get in. You’ve mentioned earlier that I had a scholarship to study overseas, again the same thing, the scholarships were evaluated on what you delivered as a student, what your marks were and the moment you’re compared on that basis I think women can compete and so what we’re noticing now is more women on campus and of course more women in the sciences. I can give you a personal example as a student I think in the undergraduate levels there were always more men than women in the class and this is black and white and now you can see very closer to 50/50 so I think that’s one of the big changes is there are more women making themselves available and then excelling so that they end up getting better scholarships and staying the course much longer. One thing I’m particularly proud of if people ask me what’s my contribution to training women is again at postgraduate level I trained, as I’ve mentioned to you, about 29 students and only 4 of them were men. Now this was not by design it just turned out that black women would see another woman scientist and they’d feel more comfortable with me as the possible supervisor who would get them to where they wanted to be. |
| DR. MALKA | Role modelling, mentorship.... |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | ...exactly.... |
| DR. MALKA | But do you not also think and I’d say science is not exempt from this, it seems to be a trend that’s going through, that women have realised that by having the education you become empowered, you’ve got greater opportunities to do more and that’s partly why we’re seeing more and more numbers of women coming through the ranks. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Ja but I think you know this is where one thing you’ve mentioned the legislation, there’s no longer legislation as there was previously probably in the 60’s and earlier.... |
| DR. MALKA | ...so negative legislation.... |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | ...exactly that prevented women from getting in and once that was open the women started coming and I think once they see other women succeed then you have more women coming in. But I think one of the bigger things perhaps is also a change in the mindset. I think women realise now that economic empowerment means you’re not limited to certain careers, you’re |

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| | <p>not limited to a certain lifestyle and you can also be responsible for what your children achieve and I think if you want to reach a woman with children is if you can show her that by improving herself she would be improving the lives of her children, that is the kind of message that always works well so I think the realisation among women that if you succeed a lot more people succeed along with you. I think that is bringing more of them in to academia and then to different career levels as well.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>And it echo's that cliché of if you educate a woman you educate a village.</p> |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>Exactly.</p> |
| DR.MALKA | <p>Now turning more towards a personal point of view, you are the second eldest of ten children and I read that you attribute your achievements to the uniquely joyful home life which was created by your parents as well as your siblings during your formative years; based on this what would be your advice to all the young women who find themselves torn between traditional and cultural expectations of them being women, of being mothers and their own personal needs like attaining an academic education and building a professional career?</p> |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>It might sound a bit repetitive but as I've said before women can do everything and anything they want. If you want to be a mother, no problem, but a mother with an income would mean much more for the quality of life of that child, so I would think women should not limit themselves to one thing, they can have everything and anything they want to achieve and actually this applies to anybody, any human being, if you are willing to work for something you can get it so for me it's always been a matter of the amount of effort you're willing to put in. One thing I have to say though of course women have children and who have more than one will sacrifice more, your achievements sometimes end up being sacrificed so that your children can achieve. So you know because of the time period we grew up in my mother and father was very heavily criticised for having ten children and probably they could have had a higher quality of life if they did not have ten children but I can tell you having grown up as one of ten made me a better human being so I'm extremely appreciative of the fact that my parents were willing to sacrifice a number of things they could have had so that their children could succeed. They raised ten children and every single one with a tertiary qualification, that's impressive and they were poor, they were not rich, right, so you have to ask yourself how do people who were making really the minimum, how did they manage to train an executive dean of science so for me yes I'm proud of my achievements in my own right but I can tell you now I would not have achieved this without my parents and without my siblings because that is where my backup came from. If I wanted to do something, if I told my family this is what I wanted to do they would immediately say there's no way you're not going to succeed, the support and you know the backup, the ability to tell me try everything and as long as you put your all in we cannot see that you're not going to succeed. Now imagine having those cheerleaders behind you, how can you not excel? So I think one piece of advice to women is first decide what you want but then understand that as long as you're willing to put in the time and the energy you can achieve it and so you can be a mother and you can still run a company, you do not have to limit yourself but you have to have a plan for how you're going to achieve it and you need to make the sacrifices that needs to be made.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>Can you share with us some of the pivotal moments in your life when you were growing up, I'd imagine it must have been incredible by having ten siblings in a household?</p> |

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| <p>PROFESSOR MEYER</p> | <p>Ja, ja no and you know I'm second eldest so my older sister and I also had some responsibilities in helping raise the others. My parents had to work, you know, you can't have ten kids and raise them and not both parents working and so they were very good at delegation. The older five needed to take care of some of the things for the younger five but I would say something I can consider pivotal is the realisation in how much my family believed in me. My father for example built a shed because we have ten kids, we have a very small house and I want to always be studying, the others want to watch TV and have fun and so on, so I was a bit of a problem because I always want to read or I want quiet and my dad used his abilities and built a shed outside so I could have the privacy I needed so I could work towards my goals, so I found that impressive because you know if I spoke to my friends they would say my parents would say there's no room, so look at the different ways a parent can approach it, my dad said there's no room but I will try something so he built something outside. When it became winter the shed was not warm enough, they then negotiated with the primary school close by so that they would allow me to study at night and again an initiative that came from my parents but what was interesting that fact that the school would agree to it, you know, they could see the potential of someone and wanting to support it. So what's pivotal, for me anyway is understanding that if you ask and if you demonstrate to people your commitment other people will help. The other thing that was major for me is just how much love you kind find in your family, it's actually unconditional, they don't expect anything from me, my family even now extremely proud of my achievements but my knowing that they would have loved me the same whether I achieved or not, I think that also boost and give you strength.</p> |
| <p>DR. MALKA</p> | <p>Those are very special factors. Can you tell us who have been some of the strong women in your life?</p> |
| <p>PROFESSOR MEYER</p> | <p>I would start with my mother. I think my mother is one of the strongest women I know and I'll give a few examples of why I say this is when we were now grown up and we've already achieved some level of success my mom once told me a story that you know when she was younger, she was very young when my sister and I were born and she said she was very worried about me 'cause she thought there was something wrong with me 'cause I would always do my own thing, she would try to teach us things, simple things. I would not want to put my shoes on, you know if it was shoes with buckles I would swap them so the buckles are next to one another and she said she could not understand how I couldn't figure out that it's not comfortable to walk that way and she had to find a way of solving this so what she did was buy me shoes with laces, now I didn't know where the buckles were so I had to wear the shoes properly and if you think about it this is someone who's all of a sudden confronted with kids and I think before her thirties she had five kids and she had to figure out ways of making them make sense and you know supporting them so that they can succeed and imagine in that environment she thought that you know maybe my daughters not all there, but she still took me to school with this concern in her mind. So later on when she realised my strange behaviour ended up actually being something different, it's a curiosity that meant I would achieve a little bit more than the average individual but what I find impressive is that even with this lack of understanding of what's happening here, she felt there's nothing wrong with my child, she's fine you know and everybody has to accept her this way and for her not being worried and not being afraid and making a wrong decision, for example like not sending me to school, would have been a disaster and for each one of her ten kids she</p> |

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| | <p>could figure out exactly what our strong points are, what it is that we needed to succeed and she'd make sure she creates an environment where this is okay. You know when I started really doing extremely well and wanting to go to university she went out of her way to now try and understand where you get money for this. She would go and talk to different companies and societies to say that this is how good my daughter is doing, she wants to go to university, we're not going to be able to afford it, what do I do to try and prepare for that and so really, and herself she was not very highly educated I think she did the first two years of high school and unfortunately was asked by our family to stop so that she could help support the family financially and imagine with that background and you have ten kids and you're struggling she could have done the same to my older sister and me, she could have insisted that we go and work as well and instead her motto was "all my children would study" and she made sure of it, so...</p> |
| DR. MALKA | ...and not just study, everyone went through to tertiary level. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>Exactly and so you know for poor people, from a very poor background to have that kind of record I think it's impressive and so for me my mom stands out as one of the very first people I have to mention if I'm asked to mention strong women. Then next to that I'd have to say my five sisters, I see the kinds of challenges they take on everyday and how they do it, how they manoeuvre through things to get what they want, so the idea that I mentioned earlier on of get a plan for yourself, decide how you're going to get to where you want to go, manoeuvre around, plan effectively and make the sacrifices that need to be made if you want to achieve something.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | And there are no barriers. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>Exactly and then I think if I have to...if people would say well go outside the family I would say teachers. The teachers I had in school, primary school and high school there are people who stand out for noticing an ability and then making sure they provide the support or you know the advice to get you to the next level, so I had teachers in primary school and in high school that I feel were amazing and I don't know if they would listen and hear this but I would like to use the opportunity to mention them by name simply because if they do hear it they would know that I appreciate their contribution to my success. So in primary school it was Mrs. Polyandie, Candice Polyandie was the teacher in primary school that stood out for me, in high school it's Mrs. Crowidge and then Dorethea Thorn. I know they are still around, two of them are around the Jo'burg area, one is in the Cape and if they do hear this message from my side I appreciate your contributions because I think your advice, your support and your belief in me is what helped me achieve what I achieved along with you know the support from my family.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>Thank you for the shout out and for sharing those examples of women who've contributed to your life and to the lives of other women. Now lastly as we close out today's show can I ask you to share a few words of inspiration which you'd like to share with young women who are listening to us today?</p> |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | <p>Yes I would, you know, if I could give any young woman advice I would say take a little bit of time, you know, sit down and write down what it is that you do well and what it is that you think you could improve on and then find ways in doing those exact things, right, so a lot of my students always ask me is what do I think is one of the things I don't do well and what is it that the one thing that I do extremely well. I think my desire to learn is one of the things I would credit as something I do well, I'll make the effort of finding the information if I want to learn something new. One thing I don't</p> |

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| | <p>do well I would think is I have a horrendous temper, I get angry very quickly and so it's being aware of it and then you know making sure that I try and find ways of dealing with it, so having a lot of nieces and nephews, I have nineteen of them, it challenges me in many ways that you cannot believe, I have rules for how my house should look and they destroy it and the fact that I am now managing it and dealing with it and I haven't choked anyone tells you that I've managed to figure out a way of dealing with my anger and understanding that sometimes the minor little things that's important to me is not important to everyone and I think those are things in which I'm trying to get myself to see the other side of things. So advice for people is figure out what it is that you do well, what it is that you need to address and then try and work on both. Whatever it is that you do well develop it into something that takes you to the next level. As I've mentioned I like to learn and that has brought me to where I am in my career and if you wrote that down early on in your teens it might not have sounded like something that you could develop a career out of but I managed to do it because by knowing that I want to learn I made sure I'm always in an environment where there's a lot of books, there's a lot of material that I could study something new but you had to..you know I had to figure out that this is what I like and then I build my career around that but more than anything else is do not give up. If you've decided there's something you want make sure you go for it but please do not think for one second that you are just going to be handed things without people expecting something back. People will be willing to give you a scholarship and what you would give back is your ability to succeed, getting the kinds of marks that makes it easy for the companies to keep funding you, so you have to put in an effort into something. The last piece of advice is I've been writing lists since I've been you know in my teens, writing down what I want to achieve and what I want to do by the end of the year. Sometimes it's a mental list, sometimes it's a physical list but I can tell you if you write something down at the beginning of the year and you check near the end of the year it helps you stay focused and it helps you figure out where you lost the plot. I wrote down very simple things to start off with, one of the things that my siblings remind me of is I used to always say "one day I'll fly away" when I saw an aeroplane and this is being extremely poor in Eldorado Park Township, I would say this and now I fly so much that you know I could now take a break but it's something that simple of I want to get on a plane is what the initial thing was, having that kind of plan you start working towards achieving that, so if nothing else stays in your mind from listening to me today I think the one thing I would like for you to keep with you is make some sort of a mental plan, make a list, have a goal, put it down somewhere and then work towards that.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | I think those are all incredibly important messages, having that vision, having the plan, looking for reciprocity in terms of what you're doing and how you're going to achieve it and excelling at your strengths and managing your weaknesses. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Exactly. |
| DR. MALKA | Thank you so much for joining us today. |
| PROFESSOR MEYER | Thank very much for having me. |
| | PROGRAMME END |