

## THINKPIECE - PRESENTATION OF IDEAS, OPINIONS, DISCUSSION & FACTS

### “World Café”: Mkombozi reflects on what it wants from its leadership

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#### INTRODUCTION:

In November 2006, all Mkombozi staff came together in a “World Café” to ask the question: “What do we want from our leaders?” World Café is a “simple, yet powerful conversational process for fostering constructive dialogue, accessing collective intelligence, and creating innovative possibilities for action” (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 3). World Café Conversations are an intentional way to create a living network of conversation around questions that matter. A Café Conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action in groups of all sizes. In effect, the World Café context helps us appreciate the importance and connectedness of informal webs of conversation and social learning through which we:

- discover shared meaning
- access collective intelligence
- bring forth the future

Between individuals and within organisations, we generate meaning as a result of the quality of the conversations in which we participate. In fact, we create our world and its future by connecting with each other, sharing knowledge and know-how, and building relationships - all through the process of collaborative conversation.

Consider for a moment the importance of conversation... Virtually every action we take is predicated on a conversation. It is so much a part of our experience that we are rarely aware of its importance. In organisations, conversation is the medium through which we structure and coordinate our activities. The conversations, whereby we engage in our organisations and in our lives in general, we produce patterns of behaviour that may be either stable and long-lasting or unique and short-lived. Learning to attend more consciously to our conversations can bring about a greater degree of coherence between what we intend to have happen and what actually occurs as a result of our intentions.

#### Café Etiquette:

- Focus on what matters
- Contribute your thinking
- Speak your mind and heart
- Listen to understand
- Link and connect ideas
- Listen together for insights
- Listen for deeper questions
- Play, doodle, draw
- Have fun!

#### MKOMBOZI'S PERSPECTIVE ON LEADERSHIP:

“Leadership is authentic self expression that creates value” (Cashman, 1998, p. 20). It is not a function of people's positions within organisations / groups. Thus, we can all be leaders at Mkombozi; bringing ourselves with all our enthusiasm, skills and experiences to our work.

However, Mkombozi is also in a position whereby the Management team is accountable to the Board of Trustees for delivering on Mkombozi's mission. To achieve this, they are responsible for attracting, communicating, educating and supporting (Benefiel, 2005) individuals at Mkombozi to practice our values and to remove misalignments between our values and our day-to-day practices. Their role is to sustain and build our organisational culture of reflection, inquiry and personal transformation.

As such, leadership at Mkombozi should be spiritually grounded. Benefiel says that “soul is how the human spirit, fully engaged is realised in the real world” (Benefiel, 2005, p. 10). We want leaders at Mkombozi who are caring, compassionate and who model the values and behaviours that we claim in our values. We believe that successful leadership rests on the quality of relationships within Mkombozi, with the consistent practice of self-understanding, empathy for others and a clear sense of purpose and vision.

Within the Management team, we are only as strong as our weakest link; therefore, we must strive to ensure that all managers and (ideally) all staff at Mkombozi meet the following:

- We want leaders who consult us and trust us, who listen to ideas, are approachable and help us.
- We want leaders who are visionary and focus-oriented, who inspire us and encourage our growth and thinking.
- We want leaders who behave with integrity and practice the values that Mkombozi espouses.
- We want leaders who behave consistently and always treat people with dignity.
- We want leaders who will build bridges and cohesion within the organisation, who value and promote harmony.

- We want leaders who are creative, risk-takers, but who are also balanced.
- We want leaders who are at peace with themselves and others.
- We want leaders who bring a sense of calm, fun, happiness and laughter.
- We want leaders who are our friend.
- We want leaders who will appreciate us, who are caring and supportive.
- We want leaders who are empathetic and good listeners.
- We want leaders who can build a just, innovative and affirming organisation.
- We want leaders who are accountable both to their followers and to their employers.

### CONCLUSION:

To strengthen our leadership at Mkombozi we should be developing succession leaders; operational staff that could with support and skill development move into the management team. We should be investing in the coaching and feedback to our leaders and in supporting their own development and self-understanding. When recruiting new leaders we should involve more of our staff and constituents in the selection process. We should also consider using a longer probationary period for leaders and actively headhunting leaders from other organisations.

Mkombozi wants to become the NGO most known for changing people's perceptions of street children where everyone within Mkombozi is a leader and where our people flourish and make a difference to the world everyday and in every way. To do this we need to invest in leadership development - we need to support our leaders to undertake the responsibility and make the most of opportunities that leadership at Mkombozi entails.

### REFERENCES:

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