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Dr. Raimo Naanda
Welder

FROM ARTISAN TO PHD - DISPELLING THE MYTH OF TECHNICAL TRAINING AS AN ACADEMIC CUL-DE-SAC

Technical and vocational career qualifications are often considered a dead-end street, offering limited prospects for career advancement and growth. Meet Dr. Raimo Naanda, Deputy Executive Director in the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation, whose story dispels this myth. Not many know that this holder of a doctorate degree in Vocational Education and Training Policy from the University of Stellenbosch, started out as just a welder.

EARLY RESPONSIBILITY

Born and raised in Windhoek, Raimo Naanda grew up an active young boy, who loved sports, reading and enjoying the outdoors. An alumnus of Katutura's Mandume Lower Primary and Namutoni Senior Primary schools, he completed his secondary education at the Martin Luther High School at Okombahe, in Erongo.

Life was not easy. As the oldest of ten siblings, responsibility was thrust on his shoulders from a very young age, and he often had to pack shelves at supermarkets over weekends and holidays in order to supplement the family's income. "The odd jobs allowed me to cater for much of my own needs, while assisting my parents in raising my siblings. Thinking back on those formative years, I believe that in as much as the responsibilities came early, it inculcated in me the desire and drive to educate and empower myself to one day support my own family and my parents who sacrificed so much", he narrates.

CHILDHOOD DREAMS

Although his father - a qualified tailor himself - harboured ambitions for his first-born to enter the priesthood, Raimo dreamed of becoming an architect. "I was fascinated by the drawings and sketches in the windows of an architecture firm in the building where my father worked. I could look for hours at the high-rise building sketches; trying to make sense of how sketches would eventually transform into finished buildings", he shares.

The education realities of pre-independent Namibia, however, shattered this dream. In Grade 11, Raimo had to opt for a more social science subject orientation; and when he matriculated, his applications for bursaries to pursue university studies were all turned down. The future looked bleak.

APPRENTICESHIP JOURNEY

While pondering on his options, a telegram came which required him to report for a welder apprenticeship interview. "Luckily I applied for some apprenticeship opportunities in my final school year. Without hesitation, I proceeded to Otjiwarongo where I was interviewed, and not long thereafter, a follow-up telegram came which read that Consolidated Diamond Mines accepted me as a Fitter and Turner apprentice. My parents, although they knew that my dream of qualifying as an architect went up in smoke, were over the moon that I managed to get an opportunity to further my studies", he explains.

However, only three months into his apprenticeship at Oranjemund, Raimo requested the mine management for his apprenticeship to be changed that of a welder/boilermaker. "It's not that I disliked Fitting and Turning. I just took a liking to welding and developed this fascination with fabricating and fusing metal parts together", he shares.

Experiencing the change the apprenticeship brought to his own life, his time at CDM opened the young Raimo's eyes to the self-empowering potential of technical and vocational training in improving the lives of individuals for the better. Recognising the passion he had developed in mentoring some of his peers and for imparting his technical knowledge to others, he completed his apprenticeship and worked as a Boilermaker at CDM's 2 Plant until September 1987, when he returned to the capital, for a short stint at the Windhoek Machinen Fabrik.

TRAINING OTHERS

While working at the WMF, a friend told Raimo about a new vocational training centre to be opened by the Otto Benecke Foundation and that they were looking for qualified artisans to be employed as instructors. "Without hesitation, I submitted an application and subsequently landed a job as an Instructor in the Metal Workshop at the Vocational Training Centre Namibia, which was later renamed Windhoek Vocational Training Centre".

Despite only having a N4 Certificate, Raimo's passion and diligence soon landed him a promotion to Head of Training of the centre, overseeing the implementation of the training curriculum in line with quality and industry standards. Driven by the desire to strengthen the centre's programmes, while at the same time appreciating that he still had a lot to learn about vocational education and training and the effective management thereof, Raimo returned to his books. "I enrolled at the then Polytechnic of Namibia

for my N5-N6 certificates, and subsequently, the National Technical Diploma. It was a tough journey, but I pulled through because I had the support of my family", he reminisces.

The Head of Training position was a management position and without any management qualification, Raimo enrolled at the Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) for the National Higher Education Diploma in School Management, a qualification he completed after two years of study. The decision to further his studies proved wise. Soon opportunity knocked again when the vacancy of institution principal arose. Raimo's application was successful and he became the principal of the Windhoek Vocational Training Centre.



LIFELONG LEARNER

Despite the demands of managing an institution of this nature, which left little time for further studies, Raimo's thirst for learning could not be quenched. Having completed his National Higher Education Diploma at the Technikon Southern Africa (TSA), he first enrolled and completed his B-Tech degree, and then his Masters degree, specialising in Educational Management, at the same institution.

"Our education and training system was undergoing intensive reforms at the time and I grasped the opportunity to use my dissertation to explore policy options for the technical and vocational training sector. I received the Rector's Medal for an outstanding research paper", Raimo shares. "The award did little but to motivate me more. I realised that I had much more to offer and challenged myself to enroll towards a PhD qualification with the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. I received my doctorate in 2010", he adds.

Despite his groundbreaking academic accomplishments and impressive CV - which includes a stint at the Roads Contractor Company as its Corporate Services Manager; and Telecom Namibia, where he served for thirteen years as Senior Manager: Training and Development - Dr. Raimo Naanda remains a humble artisan at heart. The establishment of the Namibia Training Authority was one of the recommendations of his Master's degree dissertation. Today, he also serves on the Namibia Training Authority's Board of Directors.

ARTISAN AMBASSADOR

Having devoted the greatest part of his career to the Windhoek VTC, Dr. Naanda - when his busy schedule allows - makes the effort to call on his colleagues at this leading training institution, especially during the national assessment rounds. "A big part of my life was in service of this institution and its trainees. It was here where I could play a part in training young men and women, many of whom are today, successful entrepreneurs and employers. It is institutions such as WVTC and the important work they do that give me hope that Namibia can achieve more and become an industrialised nation", Dr. Naanda emphasises.

Visits to the WVTC not only offer an opportunity to polish his trade and take up the welding rods again, but engage with trainees and to offer them encouragement. "The negative societal perceptions around technical and vocational career paths are deeply entrenched. The sad part is that so many talented young people are discouraged from taking up such options and end up in jobs that they are not suited for. Whenever, wherever I can, I do my part in sharing my experience and to give hope to technically-inclined youth that their dreams are indeed worth pursuing. I am proof that technical and vocational jobs are worthwhile and rewarding", Dr. Naanda shares.

SERVANT LEADER

Under the 'servant leadership' doctrine, a servant leader is defined as someone who enriches the lives of others, builds better institutions and ultimately creates a more just and caring world. Dr. Raimo Naanda is such a leader. Someone, who despite his academic accomplishments, remains a humble welder at heart. And although he has traded in his overalls and protective gear, he continues his dream for the vocational and technical training sector.

In his current capacity as Deputy Executive Director in the Higher Education Ministry, he is well positioned to continue his immense contribution. Supporting the Executive Director who is the Ministry's Accounting Officer, he adds value to the sector's sustainable growth and management. "It's an exciting space, but one I believe my unique journey - from artisan, to instructor, to education manager - has prepared me for. But, I still learn and keep up to date with contemporary issues in the sector by reading various journals and media updates", he stresses.

Away from the demands of work, Dr. Naanda appreciates the company of his close-knit family. An avid reader, he grabs the opportunity to unwind by immersing himself in the day's newspapers, or a good book, or two. "I've been blessed with a very good and strong support system. I am still fortunate that my parents are still alive, and whenever I need advice, they are always available. I have a very close-knit extended family and we use this blessing to support each other in so many ways. My siblings and children inspire me and I trust that they also draw inspiration from my journey and example", he concludes.



Dr. Raimo Naanda, accomplished, but humble; proficient, but unassuming. With his eyes on the stars, but his feet firmly on the ground, his story teaches us that great leaders are not necessarily the ones who do great things, but those who know the way, go the way and show the way. His contribution speaks for itself. He is living his passion!

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