

TUT keynote address 12 May 2014 graduation ceremony - by Pieter J Mathews.

The Chancellor, Mr Isaac Tlhabadira, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Stanley Mukhola, the Registrar, Professor Matoane Mothata, the Executive Dean of the faculty and his assistants, members of the academic and support staff, parents, friends and families, the main guests of the day, the graduates.

I would like to thank you for this invitation to deliver a keynote address in a ceremony that would stand out as a highlight in your career. Be assured that I am honoured. The title of my talk is - what I did **not** learn in Architecture school.

I have found that it is the small things that can make a difference in your career and assist you on your journey into this challenging but fulfilling industry.

I would like to share twelve ideas with you that you can take with you on your road ahead; ideas that might help you achieve a fulfilling future in this constantly changing world.

1. Technology – the good and the bad.

Understand the spirit of our time and its fluxes in which you have to operate. Be aware of its opportunities and its advantages, but more so the disadvantages.

Everything is instant, intangible and virtual these days, in contrast the building process is a physical and tacit discipline and you need to get your hands dirty to understand materiality. It is these two forces that are at play, the virtual and the physical which we need to learn how to mediate between.

The upside of this era and its technological advancement are unprecedented, new concepts like three dimensional parametric computer design software, email, Facebook, LinkedIn, apps, the cloud, and the convenience of having access to instant unlimited precedents and research information readily available on Google searches. The modern world with its ubiquitous tsunami of information overload has become our way of life and we would not be able to turn back the clock - but learn not to drown in this overload of information.

Practice the skill of first grasping and understanding the bigger picture and then distilling the essence from the sea of information to recognise the most important and relevant information from the sea of data.

In my second year of varsity Prof Satori from Chile told me a very simple lesson which I remember and practice to this day. His advice: " first Xmas tree and then decoration".

According to Marcus Holmes a possible reason why this generation struggles with the bigger picture is because when you design on a computer the screen scale is infinitely variable and has no relationship with the whole. The screen view can become similar to a portal moving around on the design and it can be easy to be side tracked and drawn into a section of a design, forgetting how design decisions relate to the whole. In contrast, in the past, when drawing on a drawing board you would constantly see the whole picture with all the components in relation to each other and even though you were focussing on a specific part of the design your brain would subconsciously always relate it to the whole.

Remember to look around with your own eyes wide open; don't just be seduced or mesmerized by your smart phone's screen, observe and learn from nature and its solutions. This term is called bio mimicry. Everything that you see on your phone or computer has already been done, while nature is still full of original ideas.

Although the pin point accuracy of technology is impressive, never underestimate the value of developing a 'gut feel' intuition understanding of your topic. With new software being released which constantly promises greater speed and accuracy our clients nowadays are expecting more in less time. But having less time to

produce results also exposes us to potential human error, and trusting the computer screen blindly without having any intuition of what you expect the correct answer to be can have catastrophic consequences.

Do proper, in-depth research: Utilize new technology but do not depend on it for a value judgement. Although the internet is full of useful information, a large proportion of this information consists of unsolicited opinions and articles which lack any form of verification or referencing. Trust but verify.

2. Connect with people - build networks.

Utilize and optimize the collective. According to the Huffington post, you are the most connected and engaged generation in history.

Marissa Meyer CEO of Yahoo summed it up by stating that:

"You can help others find things. Be an information fountain. Power comes from sharing information. Sharing leads to connection, connection leads to collaboration, collaboration leads to creativity and innovation."

Surround yourself with the right real people. Architects and architecture students tend to clique together, not one of them is going to give you a job one day, widen your circle of friends to include Quantity surveyors and other building discipline students and even artists and friends from non related disciplines. The more perspectives you get on life, the more qualitative and multidimensional your network, the more you can learn and gain.

Today we can all expand our networks through numerous sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook, but although these are valuable networking tools it is essential to also remember that the cyberspace world is one of impersonal encounters and a face to face meeting will always ensure better trust, understanding and communication for a more successful longer lasting relationship.

3. Dream and Believe in yourself.

An individual can make a difference. The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy was one of the first to observe that history should more accurately be considered to consist of the combined effect of the many small things that ordinary individuals do every day: 'an infinitely large amount of infinitesimally small actions.' *How to change the World*. John -Paul Flintoff 2012 Pan Macmillan Publishers London pg 8, " , the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible." — T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*. Never stop dreaming, have the end goal in mind. This would not only motivate you but give you a place and vision you can escape to and work from.

4. Create your own opportunities- The DIY approach

Politicians and bureaucrats are letting citizens down around the world. If there are no opportunities, create your own. Build a portfolio with creative community based small interventions or projects. A humble poster can make a difference. A poster in Venice triggered our own biennale.

This is the reason that we created the Cool Capital 2014 biennale - to give you all a platform to get involved, an opportunity to show what you can do outside of any syllabus, an excuse to be visibly creative to the outside world. Consider how impressed a prospective employer would be if you show him some creative initiative that you undertook yourself from outside of the syllabus - people who can get imaginative things done themselves are vastly more employable than those who need to be spoon-fed.

There are many opportunities, just look for them. This generation should take responsibility and ownership of where they live. You have the advantage, because of your industry and training that you can make a tangible difference.

Stop waiting for politicians and bureaucrats to solve our problems and bring joy to our world- let's do it ourselves.

5. Make a plan be innovative.

Take chances - especially when you are young. This point is complementary to the previous one. When we started our practice, we borrowed a boardroom, had meetings in coffee shops. Our first piece of equipment was a redundant photocopy machine we traded for a six pack of beers. A half equipped office was better than no office. What you see today did not just appear without lots of sweat, creativity, taking chances and facing many, many rejections. Which bring me to my next point, persevere.

6. Perseverance

My school coat of arms stated "aanhouer wen", and this mantra has served me well throughout my life. As Churchill also said when asked to give a speech at Harrow: "never ever, never ever give up".

Architecture is an old man's game; most architects and firms only get recognition later in life after a lifetime of perseverance. Architects do not retire, they die, so be patient.

When you start your new business, remember the old Jewish proverb - a business is not a business until it has survived 1000 days. Therefore only if it has survived for 3 years can you call it a business.

Never lose your vision, if you under promise and over perform you will have time to do a proper job and will also usually deliver before time. In this day and age of the instant, 'press of a button' service this advice may seem contrary to our age but if clients know what to expect from the start quality will always be the preferred lasting impression.

7. Learn how to handle rejection.

The Chinese word for disaster is the same as that of opportunity.

There are going to be many rejections, see these as a part of life. Part of perseverance is learning how to handle rejections, be objective and distance yourself to get perspective.

I was rejected many, many times by all the publishing houses when I tried to publish my first book, in SA a nonfiction book like my first book 'Architexture' seldom sells more than 2000 copies at most. Left with no alternative I then self-published Architexture and sold 5000 copies. I still treasure these rejection letters as a proud part of my portfolio.

8. Make yourself indispensable.

Interns that take initiative - from checking and ordering office supplies, organising the sample cupboard and the office library to washing dishes when the tea lady is not in - not only demonstrate that they are prepared to walk the extra mile but it is testimony of someone prepared to get their hands dirty. Never think you are too smart or too important. I usually remember the small things done outside of normal duty.

In your new job make yourself indispensable. Learn new skills and software programs, volunteer and show initiative, this is not high school where 'suck ups' are frowned upon. Remember that the small things distinguish you from the crowd one day when staff cuts might become necessary.

7. Communicate.

Be proactive, pick up the phone and keep clients informed early when things go off track. The building industry consists of problems which need to be solved on a daily basis. Distinguish between that which you can have an effect on and that which you can't. A client's expectations should be pulled in line with what is realistic at an early stage. Rather be the villain at the beginning and hero at the end than vice versa and

rather give the news over the phone than an impersonal email, clients will appreciate it and in the end they will respect you for it.

10. Respect your qualification.

Do not give work out for free. Nobody respects a service or anything they get for free. Even prostitutes and sex workers charge. If architects, quantity surveyors and building professionals start to understand this simple statement the face of our industry would change completely. It would also be easier to strive for excellence, this would be beneficial to the entire built environment.

I remember when a corporate client tried to squeeze a sculptor on price for a commission, she replied: "do you respect my training, my institution and its staff?" After answering yes of course they do, she replied. "Then why are you not prepared to pay a fitting price", needless to say the deal was signed. Strengthen our profession by demanding what is due to you. We are the only professionals being bullied into doing risk work.

Refuse risk work; take on fewer but paid work. Than the illusion of being busy which you are in any case not going to be paid for. By only focusing on paid up clients, you can do better work for them with free time to enjoy, resulting in a more balanced lifestyle. This will result to fewer outcomes of better quality and better financial reward. Try it, it works.

11. Give back.

It is the small projects that you do for non profit organizations that make the difference. It is these precious jewellery-like social projects that give dimension to your portfolio and make our training worthwhile. When you are paid in satisfaction at least you know from the outset what reward to expect: You can set the rules to make sure you enjoy it.

It is said, if you have arrived you need to send the lift down to the ground floor. So when you have arrived always remember the generation after you.

The Pritzker prize winner of 2014, Shigeru Ban won this prestigious award because of all his social projects such as the temporary cardboard cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Ban said the architectural profession is splitting and diverging with some gravitating to extremely commercial projects and others to more social smaller projects such as his office. I also think that the middle ground is eroding.

You can make a difference, the concept of the architect as a social worker is not that farfetched any more. When you give back you are in a position where you can deliver tangible outcomes and achieve a sense of accomplishment and purpose.

In the balance of karma, these are also usually the projects that get published in magazines, often attracting attention, bringing your firm recognition and sometimes even sparking future successful projects.

12. Be more you and don't live in the eyes of others.

The world does not need another Zaha Hadid.

13. and always use sunscreen...

Conclusion

Congratulations, you have graduated and are now being sent into the future, the world is your oyster with many South Africans making it on the international front, so look beyond your immediate world and I hope that some of these points might help with your journey ahead.