



# Dr Tessie Herbst

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*It is not only an education, position, title or salary that motivates people to make a difference. It is the certainty that there is someone who believes in them more than what they believe in themselves,* says Dr Tessie, as she is fondly known at TUT.

Stereotypes have it that psychologists are listeners and that educators are talkers. Though this might be true, one's destiny, such as that of Dr Tessie, is often determined by a single decision or act, never realised at that stage.

"I started my career in 1990 as a Management Consultant at Transnet's Management School. My first project was to train all SAA managers in performance management - a frightening experience for a psychologist who was trained to be a much better listener than talker," Dr Tessie recalls. "With no experience, I was not really qualified for the position, but the manager of the school *believed* in me. That opportunity positioned my career within the field of management development and prepared me for what I am doing today."

Her career at TUT started in October 1999 as a Learning and Development Practitioner at the former Centre for Continuing Professional Development.

"Looking back on many years of staff development, with much more successes than failures, one needs to admit that it is the good AND the bad that contribute to personal development and job satisfaction. Let me explain this better with a personal example: often topics listed when job satisfaction is discussed, include good management, leadership and governance. My greatest personal growth happened when I was part of a team with a very oppressive leader. Although painful and unpleasant at times, I am very grateful for this experience, because it forced me to face my fears, insecurities and co-dependencies, and stand up for what I believe in. The first thing I had to do was to let go of my victim mind-set, set healthy boundaries, and accept responsibility for the choices I make. It is still work in progress, but, as the saying goes, life is a journey, not a destination."

"Another stereotype that might discourage women from taking on leadership positions is the notion that we live in a man's world and that to wear pink, for instance, might be to one's detriment

as it can make you look weak. By accepting this, we unknowingly conform to and reinforce the stereotype that 'maleness' equals leadership and strength, and 'femaleness' not. It's time to be brave and daring and lead like a woman. We need female role models who are not trying to emulate men, but who embrace their unique, brilliant, feminine skills and capabilities. The younger generation of female leaders need to do that. Most women operate from a place of compassion, empathy and intuition. The most successful leaders of the future will be those who take the time and effort to make people feel emotionally safe and valued. Any leader can do that but most female leaders just already do it more naturally. Therefore, I believe that, in many instances, the increased participation of women in leadership positions, especially at TUT, could have a positive impact on the culture of the University. Society does not need more of the same. We have enough excellent male leaders. To be truly transformational as women leaders, we need to contribute something different which only women can bring to the table."

"So, if pink is your colour, wear it. If being compassionate, kind and caring is who you are, be it when it is appropriate. Show the world that femininity equals strength, not weakness," she stresses.

What is the one aspect of leadership development she enjoys most? "It is witnessing the infinite potential of people for growth and development, and enabling leaders to

liberate this talent in their teams by the way they provide leadership. That is the great thing about doing leadership development - the whole University benefits! I can honestly say I enjoy my work and regard it as a privilege to work with a remarkable group of leaders."

Dr Tessie summarises personal and leadership development as a constant reminder that three steps forward and two steps back is still progress. Fortunately, to make a difference, you do not have to be brilliant or perfect. You just have to care enough and to connect with your God-given purpose."

