

Our president needs media training

 By [Peter Mann](#)

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As President Jacob Zuma surveys the rash of headlines and news stories today lampooning him for blaming apartheid's long-deceased architect, Hendrik Verwoerd, for the current crisis in education in Limpopo; he has only himself to blame. His Verwoerd gaffe on Redi Tlhabi's show destroys his credibility.

The sad truth is that Zuma could do with media training, because he disobeyed one of the first, immutable laws of media interviews - never repeat what the interviewer is saying.



(Image: GCIS)

If you listened carefully it was interviewer Redi Tlhabi, not Zuma, who introduced Verwoerd's name into the conversation.

She remarked: "It's the black child who is being disadvantaged again."

President Zuma: "Exactly"

Redi Tlhabi: "Verwoerd is smiling in his grave ...because of your government"

President Zuma: "No, no, no what has happened today is because of what Verwoerd did."

Redi Tlhabi: "But which part of the problem belongs to you?"

President Zuma: "Dr Verwoerd in particular singled out education as an instrument to put back centuries of black children..."

Redi Tlhabi: "You are just continuing his work by not giving children textbooks..."

President Zuma: "It can't be true. We have prioritised education in every respect. You are dealing here even with a teacher... with a teacher who comes from the Verwoerdian system, which even his or her attitude towards education still needs to be worked on. So we are not dealing with a problem of today. We are solving the problem of centuries that has affected us."

Some good points, but...

Earlier President Zuma had made some remarkably good points - probably the ones he had rehearsed - about education.

He said it has the single biggest budget of all Government departments; he has appointed two full Ministers in his Cabinet to deal with education; and that the Limpopo Provincial Government has been under Section 100 (b) administration since the beginning of the year because of its dysfunctionality.

He even hinted that he might yet fire Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga, but that he first had to find out the root cause of the problem and who was to blame for it.

So why does he get headlines for his remarks about Verwoerd, rather than those salient points? Media Training 101 warns that you *never* repeat a phrase, particularly a negative one, offered to you by the interviewer. Sometimes they are doing it to trap you, sometimes it is ineptitude; but you *never, ever* simply repeat what is said to you - or worse pick up on and develop the theme, as President Zuma did.

Inexperienced, or ill-prepared

To media training professionals it shows that he is inexperienced or was ill-prepared for the interview. It was a racing

certainly that he would face a question on the Limpopo textbook mess. Having conveyed his messages, he fell right into the trap and let Redi Tlhabi lead him by the nose.

Really professional people in the public eye - in business, politics, sport and our artistic and cultural life - prepare very carefully for interviews, using professional trainers. You have to predict what questions you are going to be asked and how you are going to answer them. You have to give the answers that you want and then shut up. Friendly as they may be, journalists in interviews are not your friends.

President Zuma should have learned a hard lesson. Instead of being praised for the undoubted efforts he is putting into fixing education, he is harshly criticised for blaming the present problems on the past.

He is made to look a fool with at least one political analyst pointing out that it took Verwoerd only seven years to damage education after the National Party came to power in 1948 and the ANC has been unable to fix it in the 18 years they have been in power.

An yet another radio host/political commentator was last night bemoaning the fact that droves of young black people were phoning his show to say that Verwoerdian education was better than the brand being offered by the ANC.

ABOUT PETER MANN

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