

Celebrating South Africa's *real* teachers

 By [Kgotso Schoeman](#)

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In numerous forums, school and department gatherings it has been emphasised that the most important person in the school is the learner and as such, the mechanism (which includes teachers, school staff, parents, department and society) needs to work to provide these learners with quality education.



Yet South Africa's education crisis will not merely be solved through a mechanical process: we need to re-instil values in our schooling system, particularly in attaching a sense of value to the role teachers play in making our system function optimally. Teachers in South Africa have received a lot of flak from parents, communities and the media and this has resulted in very low morale and demotivation. There is no way we can turn around the country's education system when teachers (one of the most important components in the mechanism) lack confidence and motivation.

As with any profession, there are those individuals who seem to have been 'born to do this'; those who still hold on to the values of the profession despite the crushing criticism and lack of support from stakeholders; those who we refer to as the "real teachers".

As matric learners write their final examinations, Kagiso Trust is honing in on the invaluable contribution made by real teachers in the lives of learners, parents, communities and society at large.

Teachers need to value their position and respect their profession. Kagiso Trust has worked, and continues to work, with countless teachers who have retained their integrity and passion through the most trying of times. These teachers are the real teachers. These teachers are not only found in clean, private school classrooms but they exist in abundance in rural mud schools, cramped townships schools and ordinary schools as well. These teachers all share a number of common values: compassion, tough love, profound presence, are team players and committed.

Compassion

Real teachers take a genuine interest in a learner's wellbeing. They are proactive in their caring: some take the time to talk to learners after class to find out how things are at home, others spend their own money and resources to feed children from poor families. Almost every community has stories of such teachers who go beyond their call of duty.

Tough love

Oftentimes, teachers who understand the concept of tough love when working with learners are labelled 'strict' and tough. But these are real teachers; they understand and appreciate that all children need to be loved yet taught to respect others and adhere to authority and rules. Through instilling discipline in learners and setting high standards and expectations, learners learn to trust these teachers' judgment.

Profound presence

Many of us may recall a teacher who possessed profound presence. These teachers need not say a word; their presence is enough. They excite learners with their love and enthusiasm and have the unique character to affirm learners, instilling in them a sense of self-belief. These teachers often become role models and confidants to learners when family and community members are absent.

Team player

The great task of teaching is one that demands working in collaboration for the benefit of the learners. Real teachers know and understand this. They are able to put aside personal differences and prejudices and work together with other teachers, share their knowledge and learn from other teachers.

Commitment

These are teachers who continue to do exceptionally well with very little or no resources and support. These teachers know and understand the responsibility that goes with the profession; they ensure that they do the work which they have been employed to do. Real teachers prepare their lessons before going into class, they ensure they are on time for their classes, they prepare and mark assessment timeously, they give learners and parents feedback on assessment scores and provide remedial intervention to improve learner performance. Real teachers understand that all learners are capable of performing well in school; they do not become discouraged by those who take a bit longer to grasp content. These teachers ensure that they complete their syllabus on time, allowing learners to adequately prepare for exams. Passionate about the profession, these teachers also invest their own resources to improve their teaching methods and master learning content. Although seemingly inconsequential, it takes real teachers to consistently perform these duties.

Our Teachers, Our Future

As a country we have witnessed a steep decline in the number of students applying to become educators, an indication that the profession is no longer held in the high esteem it was 30 years ago. We need to find ways to retain our good teachers and attract new recruits into the profession. One way we can do this is to ensure that we value and show appreciation of real teachers. One of the most important links in attaining a prosperous and successful society is the presence of real teachers.

When we value people, we ensure that we take care of their wellbeing. The space for teachers to off-load and reconnect is a necessity. Teachers deal with immeasurable amounts of stress and oftentimes, their efforts go unnoticed. It is integral that teachers receive this opportunity to tackle and express their issues before they become ticking bombs. Although some may consider a trip to a holiday destination, for instance, as a luxury and unnecessary expense, such environments allow teachers to feel valued and appreciated. Realistically, however, smaller-scale venues such as restaurants, local hotels and parks also provide a sense of escaping the busy, often stressful school environment. These spaces assist the schools to discuss challenging issues openly and can present the opportunity to collectively reflect on the past year and plan for the

coming year. These trips benefit the school holistically and are a great way to show appreciation to the men and women who impart knowledge, self-belief and much more to our children.

To all the real teachers of South Africa, we thank you.

ABOUT KGOTSO SCHOEMAN

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