



Closing Function Address – 29 September 2011 – Paul Cassar

Mr Klopper, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Closing Function is always so formal. I am not sure whether it's Mrs Karin Kok and her team's detailed planning, the sense of theatre with beautiful flowers, gleaming trophies or the academic atmosphere, but I'd like to lighten it up a little with a lovely story. My mother and I speak to each other in a sort of broken Italian which I resurrect from my childhood. But she is the genuine Italian mother. She hasn't been well recently. She was widowed at 37 with 5 children, this handsome specimen being the eldest. She had to go out to work and spent nearly 30 years as a headmaster's secretary.

It also makes me think of your mother, Mr Chairman, Ouma Skat, who is a family matriarch. Or yours, Mr Stonie Steenkamp, who was a mother to so many of our girls. Or to our Guest of Honour, Mrs Maureen Botha, who has been my Eunice mother.

My daughter sent me this lovely story about an Italian mother: Mommy went to her son Tony's flat to cook for



him and his flatmate. But it was the first time Mommy had met the flatmate and she was far too beautiful for her liking. Tony could see what she was thinking so he said: Mom, I promise you, Maria is just a flatmate." Mommy cooked a beautiful macaroni and off she went.

A few days later Maria approached Tony. "Ever since your mother was here, the silver sugarbowl has gone missing. I'm telling you Tony, your mother stole the sugarbowl." "Don't be ridiculous", replied Tony, "my mom's got plenty of sugar bowls. She wouldn't steal ours."

But to be sure, he emailed his mom:

Dear mom, I'm not saying you stole the silver sugarbowl. I'm not saying you didn't steal it. But ever since you were here it's gone missing. What's the story?

Mommy waited for a few days and replied:

Dear Tony. I'm not saying you're sleeping with that girl. I'm not saying you're not sleeping with her. But, if she were sleeping in her own bed, she would have found the sugar bowl!

Next week I'll start my 100th term as Eunice's principal. I think I deserve a silver sugar bowl. You may think it is a long time but, matrics, it will be your 20th, and, from Grade 1, your 48th! It's obvious that school is such a big part of your life and the quality of that school plays a major role in the quality of one's life. At Eunice we don't just go from term to term, each has its own

character which is no accident. Detailed planning based on a key set of principles gives each term its temperature both within and beyond our classrooms. Our terms contain the 'rituals and routines' which Prof Jansen claims are the basic difference between South Africa's top performing and failing schools.

My theme this evening is that short and sharp word EDGE- I want to look at those 'rituals and routines' which give our school its edge and which give our girls that necessary edge to lead "lives of significance in the 21st century". I borrowed that from Rodean in Johannesburg.

One of my Microsoft connections is Shafeen Charania and I follow his blog – a Times magazine award winning one. He says the goal of education, that edge we want and which the world needs is to prepare students to succeed in life. He says that employers are looking for broad, creative thinkers who can work in varied settings and in teams to solve multidisciplinary problems. In other words people who know how to learn and have the confidence and the skills to get things done in ambiguous and unpredictable settings. If we look at the world economy or the Arab Spring or the war against terror or South African politics or education it's clear that traditional approaches are failing. We need radical solutions, we need radical thinkers to take our century and our country forward. And today, more than ever it's the power of the individual, the man in the street, that is making the difference.

I can't think of an image to illustrate that EDGE better than South Africa's controversial blade runner Oscar Pistorius. His are long and sharp edges. He's been a cult figure in South Africa for years. After qualifying for the Olympics in Italy last month; no not the Paralympics, he is fast becoming one of the richest and most recognizable athletes in the world and I think he will be the face of London 2012.

I use him not only because I'm inspired by how he sees disability and advantage as opportunity, ingenuity and challenge but also because Oscar has a Mommy too, who has been reported as having comforted him again and again with words which I urge all our girls to listen to: "A loser isn't the one who comes last; it's the one who sits and watches". Don't watch others, ladies. Commit, work, serve, swim, play, sing, perform. You're learning every day, ladies, for a life which has challenges every day and to succeed like Oscar, you need to make the most of your opportunities. Mothers go out of their way to give their daughters that edge in order to prepare them for a future they know is so full of challenges.

When we South Africans see Oscar Pistorius we don't see him as a white man with a disability, but rather as the reflections of a National Spirit. Let's hope the Bokke are as motivated as Oscar tomorrow

I had the chance this year of joining 5 000 other Free Staters to witness Oprah being honoured by Free State University although it was more about Oprah herself

acknowledging Jonathan Jansen as a champion leader. But it was one single image which Oprah shared which struck me that day and I share it with you because it is all about giving ourselves that personal and powerful, decisive, life-changing edge. She recalled how as a child she would churn the butter in the front yard of their Mississippi home in the company of her grandmother who, every Thursday would boil the clothes on an open fire. One morning Grandmother turned to Oprah and urged her to carefully take note of the basic clothes' washing process because, as she was getting older, this would become Oprah's main responsibility. And Oprah told us, that right there and then, she felt herself stiffen in resolve and she significantly thought to herself: "Not a damn!" It's that drive that fired her determination in difficult circumstances with lots of hard work and even more good fortune to become a media icon who, incidentally, has helped to build 60 schools in the US.

In Canada last month I came across a useful piece of Tom Peters' wisdom. He makes the point that successful businesses or schools or hospitals do not need to be a 1000 % better than their competitors. Not even 100 % better. He says rather they should be 1 % better in a 100 or 1000 different ways. That struck a chord with me. I bought a book in Canada called The Happiness Project by Gretchen Rubin. It's not your usual self-help book, as she looks at her own weaknesses first and embarks on a year's journey tackling the little things day by day. I loved her insight on procrastination. She made the point that we should train ourselves never to

procrastinate things which only take one minute to do. How simple and powerful is that. I had to go to Canada to learn something my wife has been telling me for 33 years. Those are two tiny, uncomplicated but telling points, 1 % better and just 1 minute. Little things. I am a great believer in the little things. Little things like that lovely quad fountain, like polished shoes, sincere greetings, standing out of respect. I always say: look after the little things; and the big things will look after themselves.

I think it's the little things that make Eunice. Let me share with you some of those little things:

- Nothing brightens up my day more before school than Reggie's warm greeting. He's the Traffic Officer in Jock Meiring Street. If we all did our jobs the way he does his, we'd be a winning nation.
- He's not the only one. Our girls will tell you that my one percenter is my personal assistant Mrs Liza-Anne Meyer who transforms her tiny office into a helpdesk, a haven and a home for girls and staff who are touched by that kind professionalism every day.
- One of those one percenters is that glassed in office at the entrance to the Eunice House foyer. There Mr Tiger Muller greets parents by name, provides our girls with a little fatherly security and is regarded by Grey and Saints visitors as Eunice's Chuck Norris. By the same token Mr Paul

Mahlokola may be little but he has a heart bigger than a bus.

- Another more than one percenter is Monday night Maths. For some of you it may be Tuesday or Wednesday, but from Grade 11, it is blue Monday. When Monday's finished, half the week is done. When you quantify Monday Maths you'll see that it provides the equivalent of 70 Maths periods which equals an extra term of Grade 11 Mathematics and an extra term of Grade 12 Mathematics. Half a year. Little things add up.
- How about Hostel Week as a one percenter? It takes a school hostel and turns it into a food and fun park. It is a unique pupil driven initiative designed simply to stress that our girls matter. Little things, many calories.
- There's nothing little about the Christmas Market. I think it is the biggest, most creative and stylish school fundraiser in the country. But offering shoppers free coffee, served by our PA, is one of those little one percenters that Mrs Marais uses to give her Market that edge.
- Another often forgotten quality of a school which takes thought, consistency and planning to achieve that one-percent, that edge, is a sense of occasion. Our staff and girls do this well. It's the ability to give an event or a time the character or respect or style or fun or dress or spirit it deserves.

You see it here this evening in abundance, but you see it in our RCLs, in our gala walk-ins, in our boarders returning to hostel on Sunday in school uniform, in our hour and a half in the church with the choir, in our matric crowning in our quad next week, in our girls' own matric promise, in the professionalism of our Leader Project Award Ceremony, in our Matrics' exam mode in the Prep Room, in our Thank You Assembly, in the unique way that we choose our Inter High conductresses in this hall, in our girls' openness and generosity and ability to reach out to the Grannies at Mooihawe, and in our completely over-the-top celebration of the principal's birthday. Even, in the timing of our traditional "How do you feel?" There's a time and a place for everything. How do you feel, ladies? That gives me gees for another half an hour!

As governors, principals and staff we strive to give our school an edge, too. You don't want to be at a school which doesn't continually strive to be the best it can be. I can't deny that one of the key factors attracting me to the teaching profession as a teenager was the thrill of team sport. Leading a school is so much like leading a team. I read recently that Sir Clive Woodward, coach of the 2003 England Rugby World Cup Team and now Director of Sport for the British 2012 London Olympic team, has drawn up a list of standards for the 550 British athletes who will compete next year. He has come up with 5 key words which provide the framework around which any team is built:

PERFORMANCE, RESPONSIBILITY, UNITY, PRIDE and RESPECT. I used this olympic story earlier this year in building our staff team. Last week I looked up the original article in the Guardian and there Woodward elaborates on those 5 words and, coincidentally, says: "These are all the one percenters, the small things that make a difference to a high performance team." As a school, as teachers, as girls, it's all about performance, about developing responsibility and accountability, about working together, about taking pride in everything we do and about respect. My 2009 speech was just about that one word, respect. I would like to pay tribute to the teachers of the Free State's best school. Our teachers have an edge, a unique Eunice work ethic which is all about a personal desire to continually improve knowledge, techniques and collaboration.

It's been a significant year with successes in various fields. We're far more than just an academic school but it's our academics which sets us apart, which gives us the edge. Our 2010 matric results were in a class of their own, but it's difficult to get that message across. All principals are proud of their pupils and you get principals like me who are too proud and pupils whose 60 % average represents a brilliant set of results which will take them on to university and to very successful and significant lives. The best way I can get that Eunice edge across is to compare our results with our statistical neighbours. Nothing confirms that edge more than the scarce skills subjects: Mathematics and Physical Science. In both subjects our girls scored more



distinctions not only than Oranje, Sentraal, Jim Fouche – the three top Afrikaans schools but than Oranje, Sentraal, and Jim Fouche put together. And most of our girls are taught in their second language. That's serious quality and you can see it across a range of subjects at Eunice. Not just two convenient marketing ones. Our teachers and our girls together achieve something of real value in giving themselves that edge.

But 2011 has been a good year in leadership, sport, culture and service. You will hear the school's and the girls' achievements in detail this evening. At a provincial level our hockey girls won the Free State Cup, our Netball girls came fifth, not in Bloemfontein but in the province, our squash girls represented the province at Top Schools', our drama girls won a provincial competition, our top dog debaters were winners and runners up this term. Our choir earned both provincial and national gold medals. Our hockey girls won a national tournament, too, and 6 of our girls earned national selection. Our Leader Projects included every single one of our matrices this year.

We've given our school its edge by connecting classrooms to the internet, by installing wi-fi hotspots, by connecting teachers not only to each other but to professional learning communities, by providing 22 Smart interactive boards which have the potential to take teaching and learning to a world class standard. Here we acknowledge the massive contribution of the Anglo Chairman's Fund, the Epoch and Optima Trusts, Standard Bank and Microsoft Partners in Learning.



I always love to share with you one or two of the year's lighter moments.

- Chatting to Chanté Taljaard in Grade 11 I was discussing her English, her only subject under 80 and, as I often do, I suggested she choose rather an English boyfriend to improve her marks. "You don't understand, Sir," she said, " with my mark I need 4!"
- Mr van Rensburg and I left our Canadian Hotel and walked right into the biggest Gay Pride all day march in North America. We made a very odd couple. I tried to hold his hand for moral support but he changed suddenly from a tame shark into a raging bull.
- I thank the Dad who phoned last night to thank Eunice for the 9 years his girls were here and to ask me what he had to do to get his son into Eunice. I told him to work on his short corners.

At the edge of our school is another school which houses our girls' brothers and others. Together we provide families with world class public schooling which offers teenagers a valuable sense of belonging, a value - driven school way of life based on simple non-negotiables such as integrity, respect, compassion and commitment. Today I would like to pay tribute to Mr Johan Volsteedt who retires as headmaster in April 2012. Johan, it has been such a privilege working

closely with you these last 25 years. I have such high regard for the standard you set, without rules; a standard based on a shared vision on what it means to be passionate about Grey. You have devoted your life to your Alma Mater. To me, you are Grey and not just 'Grey up here'. I don't think there is a man that can replace you. I think they should seriously consider a woman for Grey. What makes more sense than Lady Grey? Come on, Mrs Marais, I dare you....

Next term will be Mrs Maureen Botha's last at Eunice. Her whole life has been dominated not only by this school but by the key values of sincerity, compassion, loyalty, forthrightness, refinement and that critical sense of occasion. She was my wife, Moira's Latin teacher (do you know how long ago that was?) and she was my Eunice teacher and right hand. Always calm under pressure, Mrs Botha can take a staff team with her as she gets things done with direction and style. She has that edge and she has 27 Eunice magazines and 40 Quid Novis and major birthdays and banquets, many shows and service and fundraising initiatives, even a museum and literally hundreds of high quality school functions to verify the commitment of a team which she played a major role in leading always adding colour and character to those key 'rituals and routines.' We'll miss you Mrs B.

I've said it's been a good year in terms of leadership. I thanked our four headgirls in this hall recently. Tonight I'd like to highlight our two headgirls Suné and Hannah. You will go down in this school's tradition as among the

great headgirls. You've earned your photo on the wall and you've given so much of yourself in the process. Congratulations on serving with so much sincerity, integrity and character till the last moment. Suné, you have been a great headgirl. In thanking the leadership I'd like to thank Mrs June Norval who devotes all her energy to our girls term after term, function after function, dance after dance.

My thanks to our PA, under the leadership of Mr Marius Whitehead. They put all their money and effort these last two years into creating a professional environment for our teachers. Mr Chairman, I thank you for your positive and supportive leadership, your insight into our finances and into Eunice's vision and direction and for your friendship. My thanks to all our governors, especially Mr Kotie van Tonder, our Grounds Chairman and Mr Dale Adam, our Eunice House Chairman. Thanks to Mr Danie van der Merwe, Mr Tobie Wiese and Dr Don Paine for our grounds, too.

Mrs Dale thank you for giving us such a great intake of girls each year and thank you to your teachers, even to your sexy Grade 00 teacher, whose classrooms are characterized by discipline, care and that all important decent work ethic.

Mrs Noleen Uys and I work hard to keep Mr Pat Uys hearty, hale and healthy because his passion for this school, its progress, its people, its players and its future is just so inspiringly valuable. We may replace Mr Volsteedt with a lady but no one is going to replace Mr



Uys. Thank you, Pat, for 25 years of friendship and joint leadership of Eunice. Keep him going, Mrs Uys. Thanks, too, to all the ladies in our offices from Myra to Mary, Elmarie and Pamela, Nelia and Adri and Evelyn.

I thank those closest to my daily challenge, especially my two deputies: Mr Leon van Rensburg who bears the brunt of running this busy school smoothly, guiding those few high maintenance pupils and managing its teams with such organizational consistency and attention to detail; and Mrs Mag Marais who runs a series of business units from her office with the mind of a creative artist, the heart of an entrepreneur and the soul of a teacher who sets standards which set us apart. I thank all the members of our management team who, without exception, go the extra mile with that lovely smile.

Almost done, ladies.

Adding an extra page to a newsletter is easy but adding an extra page to this speech will get me fired by these girls over here.

Finally, I suppose I should consider giving myself an edge. You may think it's a bit late in the day for that but the point is that leading a school in the 21st century requires that I be the leading learner and a great deal of my time is spent collaborating with top education experts within our own school and far beyond. My most reliable expert whose principled advice to the

principal is short and sharp like that word edge is my best friend who happens to be my wife, too.

But I still struggle to keep my desk clear. My good friend Neels Howard tried to make office management easy for me with his simple system of the 3Ds: Do it or Delegate it or Destroy it. That doesn't apply to matric study I'm afraid. But I prefer the beautiful Garfield comic strip advice. It's Garfield's 3Ds of business management. Daag op, Delegeer en Disappear. It's time for me to disappear.