

# STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTITIONERS: AT THE HEART OF LEARNING IN A TRANSMUTING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE?



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CONFERENCE PRESENTATION  
SOUTHERN AFRICAN FEDERATION OF  
STUDENT AFFAIRS AND SERVICES  
(SAFSAS)

PRESENTER: LAETITIA PERMALL  
INAUGURAL CONFERENCE  
UMHLANGA, DURBAN  
TUESDAY, 5 AUGUST 2014

A place of quality,  
a place to grow, from hope  
to action through knowledge



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## OBJECTIVES

- To provide an overview of the existing debates on transformation in higher education
- To explore the internal and external factors which impact student access and success
- To explore the extent to which these issues are being addressed.
- To reflect collectively on the role of student affairs practitioners within a transmuting higher education landscape



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# TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

1996	Report: National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) entitled “A framework for the transformation of Higher Education.”
1997	White Paper 3 on Higher Education entitled: “A programme for the transformation of Higher Education.”
1997	Higher Education Act
1997	Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) - research
1998	Council for Higher Education (CHE) & HEQC
1999	National Commission on Higher Education
1999	National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)
2001	National Plan for Education
2005	Higher Education South Africa (HESA)
2009	Department of Higher Education and Training



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- “...tertiary institutions should produce graduates with the knowledge, competence, and emotional intelligence to cope with the changing needs of society, thereby equipping them to be participatory citizens in our modern society” (National Plan for Higher Education, 2001)



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# ACCESS FOR SUCCESS?

## ACADEMIC ACCESS:

- Under-preparedness (academic and lack of career guidance)
- Language – role of indigenous knowledge systems (constitutional right?)
- Space limitation vs knowledge divide

## • PSYCHO-SOCIAL & SOCIO-ECONOMIC

- Accommodation (National Housing Commission Report: “shortage of 207 800 beds in SA in 2013)
- NSFAS funding but...
- Food insecurity
- Adjustment
- Anxiety & Depression





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*Learning Reconsidered* (2004) defines learning as “a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates **academic learning and student development**”.

“Learning is a complex, holistic, multi-centric activity that occurs throughout and across the college experience. Student development, and the adaptation of learning to students’ lives and needs, is fundamental parts of engaged learning and liberal education”. (Keeling, 2004)



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## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & SUCCESS

- There is **reciprocity** between student success and student engagement (Dunn, 2012)
- What students **do** during college counts more for what they learn and whether they will persist in college than who they are or even where they go to college (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt ,2010)
- The time and energy students devote to **educationally purposeful activities** is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development (Kuh, 2006)



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## STUDENT AFFAIRS AS A PROFESSION

- “..(t)he foundation of any profession is formed from a **shared philosophy** about what needs to be done, a **shared understanding** of the theoretical constructs that inform the practice of the profession, the **application** of the accumulated knowledge of the members to the tasks that need to be accomplished, and **the ability** of the practitioners of the profession **to effectively link their theoretical knowledge, practical wisdom, and skills to larger organizations and society**” (Sandeem & Barr in MacMaster, 2014)



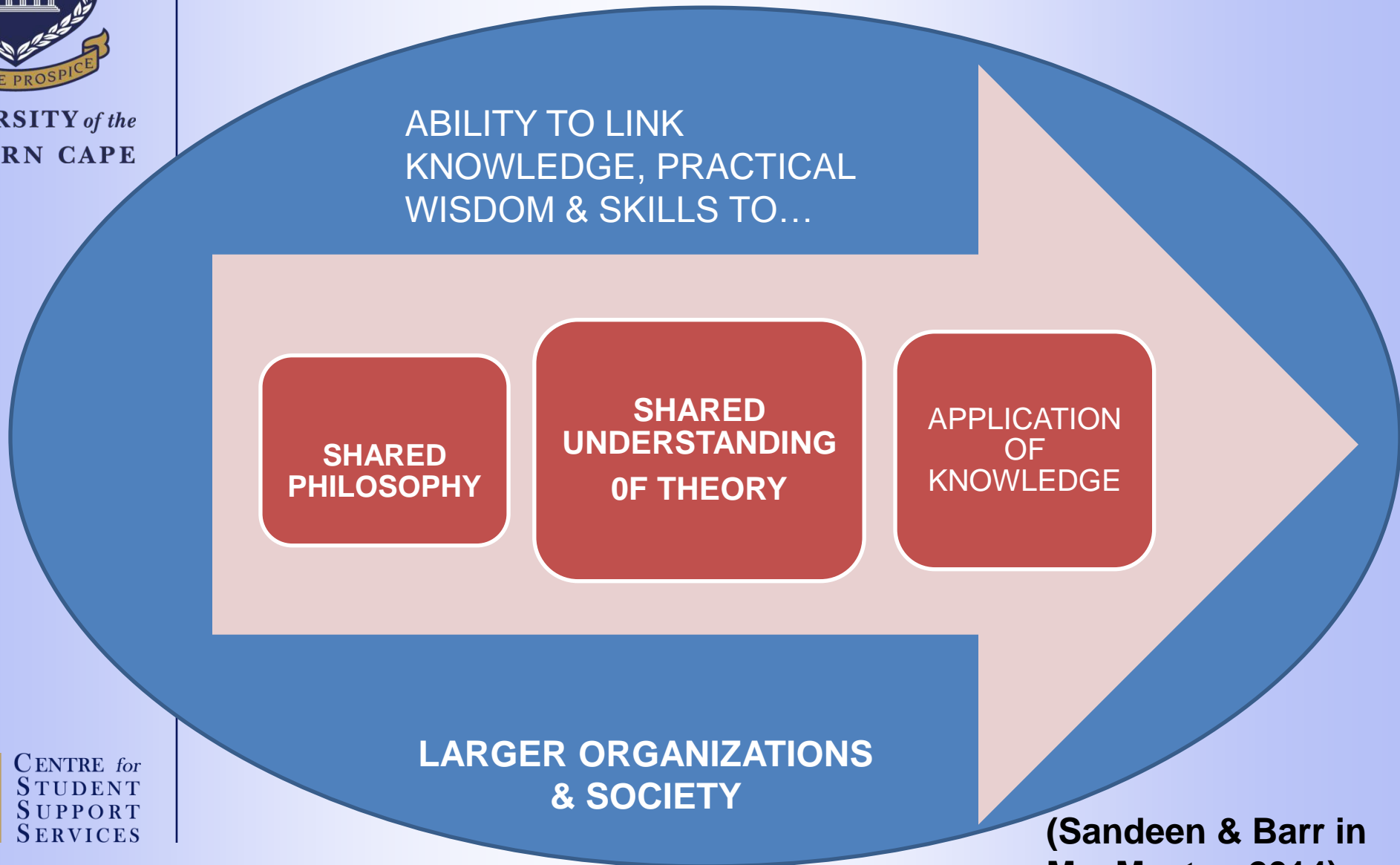
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# STUDENT AFFAIRS AS A PROFESSION...



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(Sandeem & Barr in  
MacMaster, 2014)



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## STUDENT AFFAIRS : AT THE HEART?

- Student Affairs has gone through phases namely ‘the parenting phase’, ‘the student development phase’ and the ‘integrated support phase” (Van der Berg, 2004)
- Knowledge creation is collaborative and students are considered partners
- There is a disjuncture between **policy and practice** (Ministerial Report, 2008)
- A need for a **clear conceptual framework** for Student Affairs (Student Development and Support) in SA (Lange, 2010)
- Lack of **clarity around scope, role and function** as well as issues around the lack of **theoretical grounding** and the paucity in **local theory development** (Schreiber, 2012)



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## STUDENT AFFAIRS...AT THE HEART...?

- “It is not where you are placed on the organizational chart, but **how effective its leadership is** on campus.”
- Any discussion of South Africa’s education system has tended to be dominated by the word “**transformation**”
- Transformation vs **transmutation**
- Move away from Darwinistic approach of individualism, “survival of the fittest’ towards a **more humanistic approach**



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## 20 TOP DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) Colleges: WHAT DO THEY HAVE IN COMMON?

These twenty institutions share six features that foster student engagement and persistence:

- a) **A “living” mission and “lived” educational philosophy;**
- b) An unshakeable **focus on student learning;**
- c) **Environments** adapted for educational enrichment;
- d) Clearly marked **pathways** to student success;
- e) An improvement oriented **ethos;**
- f) **Shared responsibility** for educational quality and student success.



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## TAKING AGENCY...

The possibilities and extent of transformation in HE will be shaped by conditions in and the nature, trajectory, and pace of change in the political economy, as well as by the **character of human agency** outside and especially within higher education and institutions (Badat, 2007)

Education is an activity directed at self-empowerment whereby persons are equipped for the task of living meaningfully, and guided in their aims and actions by their experience of ***human agency as a matter of personal engagement***. (Higgs, 2008)

(Griesel & Parker, 2009) companies report that one of the greatest challenges in the transition between university and the world of work is “the lack of sense of self in relationship to others”



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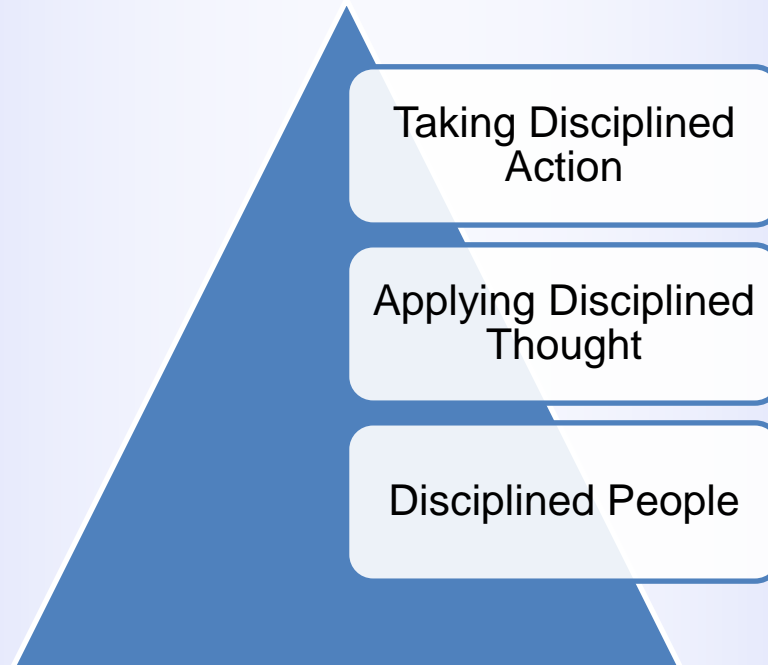




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# GOOD TO GREAT

- *“For, in the end, it is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful life. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful work.”*



Jim Collins, 2001, Good to Great



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## SOME ACHIEVEMENTS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS IN SOUTH AFRICA

- Masters and Doctoral programme in Student Affairs at UWC (collaboration with University of Fullerton, California)
- The Student Housing Training Institute (an ACUHO-i-SAC initiative in collaboration with ACUHO-I)
- Affiliation to the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS)
- Book publication (2012) 'Student Counselling and Development – Contemporary issues in the Southern African Context' (SAACDHE)
- SAACDHE Quality Assurance Document (revised 2013)
- SAACDHE Code of Ethics for Student Development and Support Practitioners (revised 2013)
- Journal of Student Development and Affairs in Southern Africa
- Journal of Student Affairs in Africa
- Mentoring and training support to SADC countries by SAACDHE
- An increasing number of PhD dissertations in Student Affairs (Schreiber, 2012;



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# STUDENT SUCCESS...NOW WHAT?

- Institutional culture should focus on **recognising, respecting and responding to the individual needs** of the ever-changing student population (Chickering, 1998)
- To effectively undertake its diverse educational and social purposes, a university must have **a commitment “to the spirit of truth”** (Graham, in Badat, 2010)
- Student Affairs in South Africa **need leaders who are ‘champions’ for SAP’s** within HE executive. Leaders who will advocate as well as hold universities accountable for the role of SA services within the institution
- Should continue to advocate **a holistic integrated** development and support system
- Use the existing platforms to **benchmark** the work that is being done
- Associations should identify members as contributors to **enhance policy and practice**
- **Collaboration with DHET** to be enhanced
- ‘Student affairs can and should play an essential role by ‘creating and maintaining **a learning environment** that fosters and maximises **student learning**’ (Hamrick, Evan & Shuh, in MacMaster, 2014)
- Develop a Student Affairs model which is **contextually relevant** and which speaks to the diverse and unique needs of students and staff within the Higher Education context



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# WHY DOES IT WORK?

- **We follow those who lead, not for them, but for ourselves. And it's those who start with 'Why' that have the ability to inspire those around them or find others who inspire them"**

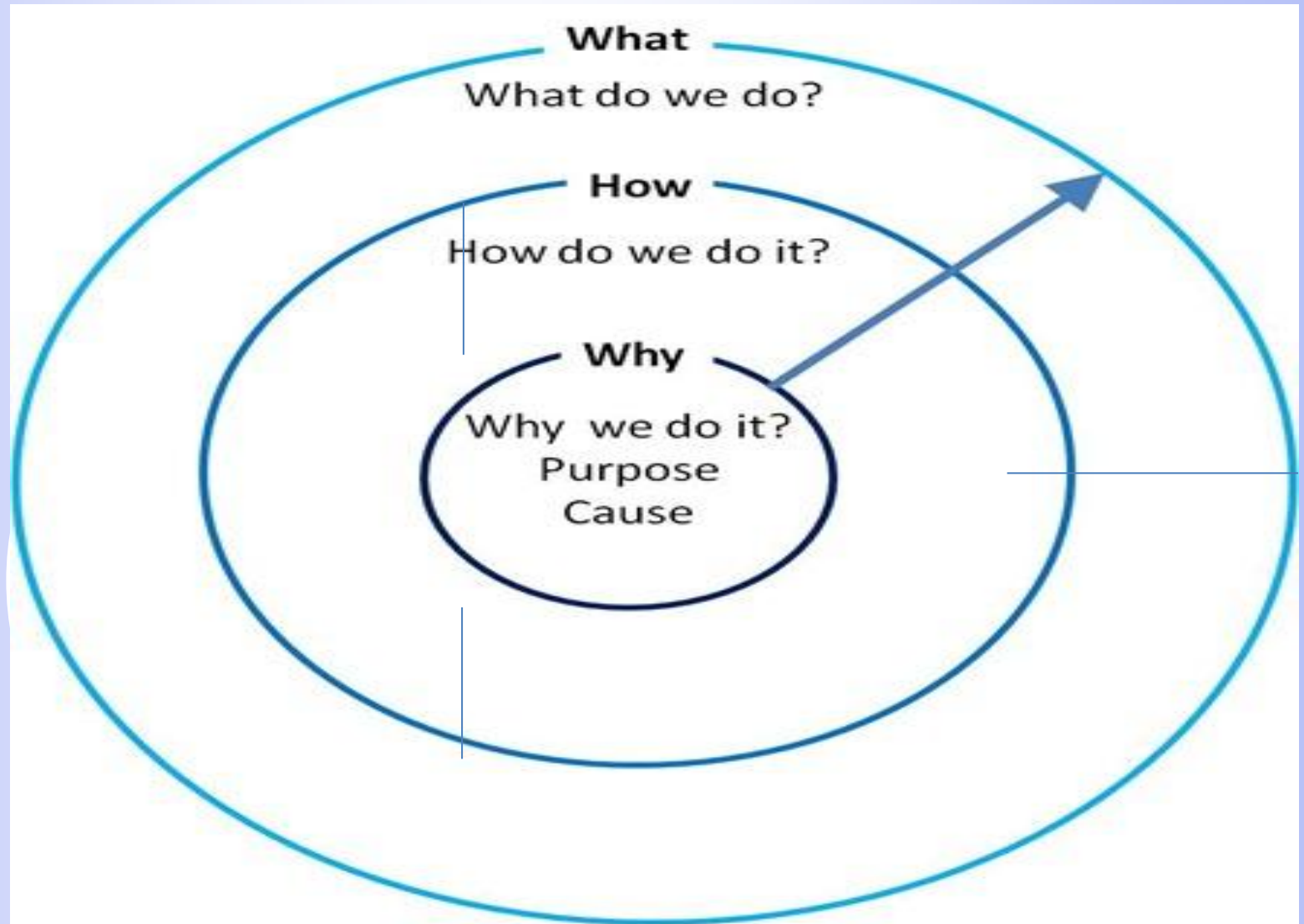
Simon Sinek





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# SIMON SINEK: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE



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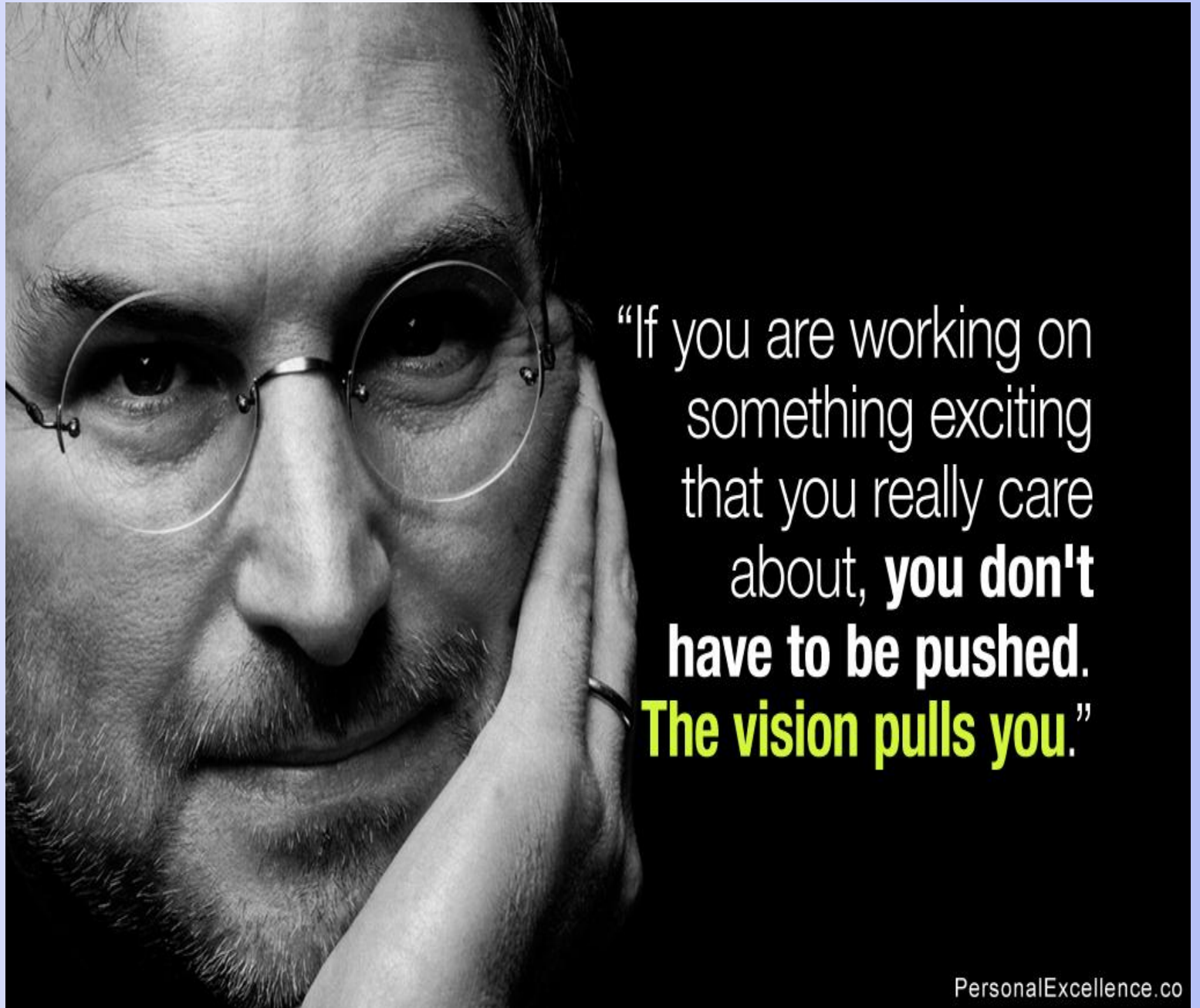




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“If you are working on something exciting that you really care about, **you don't have to be pushed.** **The vision pulls you.**”

PersonalExcellence.co



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	PRACTITIONER	DEPARTMENT / INSTITUTION
<b>RECOGNIZE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What we bring what our potential/capabilities are</li> <li>• Your are accountable to yourself, the students and the institution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rich, unique culture with this field</li> <li>• The unique contributions that Student Affairs practitioners bring, what their professional competency strengths and gaps are</li> <li>• Opportunities for growth</li> </ul>
<b>RESPECT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yourself and the people you engage with daily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who they are</li> <li>• The opinions they have and the critical voice they bring</li> </ul>
<b>RESPOND</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the gaps in our professional and personal development and set goals and take action towards narrowing these gaps (Take responsibility for our own development – lifelong learning)</li> <li>• Access training and development to enhance the skills which are necessary to have evidence-based practices</li> <li>• Become active agents of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create critical engagement spaces within department and institution</li> <li>• Engage in reflective practice so that our own feedback loop enhances our growth</li> <li>• Provide a environment of care and support</li> </ul>



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## CONCLUSION

- The heart of the matter is:
  - The essence of who we are as humans – connected and trusting, should be rekindled within the education arena
  - Compassionate communication and an Ethics of Care should be the culture amongst all staff and students
  - Ethical leadership
  - The student affairs environment should become a trusting, caring and ethical community of practice
  - You cannot give what you don't have!



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LET'S GET BACK TO BASICS  
AND FOCUS ON THE HEART  
OF STUDENT AFFAIRS -  
**PURPOSE & PASSION**



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# THANK YOU!

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