

Conquering your own Everest means never lose focus of what you want to achieve

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Sibusiso Vilane

'First attempts do not always succeed.' 'Do not let obstacles get you down.' 'Focus on your goal, have patience, avoid distractions and apply self-discipline.' These are some of the lessons of the guest-presentation given by Sibusiso Vilane, the first black African to reach the summit of Mount Everest, at the Faculty of Veterinary Science's second VetEd Symposium on 22 July. The symposium is an initiative by the Faculty's Director: Teaching and Learning, Prof Linda van Ryneveld.

In welcoming attendees to the symposium, the Dean, Prof Darrell Abernethy said that the Faculty of Veterinary Science is one of the leaders in using blended online teaching methods, but that it will always be a challenge to maintain this position. The Faculty fully subscribes to the notion that the University of Pretoria needs to intensify valuable research outputs and attract high-quality postgraduate students. In this regard the VetEd Symposium serves as the exemplar of innovative teaching and is instrumental in assisting its students to meet these challenges.

The Symposium covered a wide range of topics. Among these were a presentation on the use of video in nursing education by Dr Marthinus Hartman, one on using ClickUP creatively to enhance critical thinking by Dr Quixi Sonntag, and one by Dr Martina Crole entitled 'The kidney: collaborative class compendium, colour, questions and clickers.' Dr Henry Annandale, Director: Clinical Services at the OVAH, introduced the concept of *Vetbox*, and Dr Vanessa McClure enlightened the attendees with her message that you are never too old to learn through play. Dr Annett Annandale, Manager of the Faculty's Skills Laboratory, and her colleague Dr Elrien Scheepers gave an overview of the Lab three months after it was opened.

One of the most interesting presentations was that of Mr Isak van der Walt from the Department of Library Services, introducing MakerSpace and giving a veterinary perspective on 3D modelling. MakerSpace is a

creative laboratory where people with ideas can get together with people who have the technical ability to make those ideas become reality. The 'Robobeast' is a unique 3D machine located in the MakerSpace lab. It is very user-friendly and has unique features like the ability to print on plastic and silicone, and to facilitate designing and rendering of models. The machine is situated in the Merensky 2 Library on the Hatfield Campus. A very interesting demonstration of the 'Robobeast' rounded off the presentation.

The highlight of the symposium however, was the guest-presentation by Sibusiso Vilane. Sibusiso related a remarkable story of courage, determination and enthusiasm. His story served as an inspiration to all present and provided some philosophical benchmarks that could be applied to teaching and learning activities. In January 2015, he accepted an invitation from Mr Craig Murdoch, a pharmacist in the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital (OVAH), to go on a three-week expedition to climb Mount Aconcagua near the Argentinean–Chilean border. Mount Aconcagua is the second-highest of the highest peaks on each continent, after Mount Everest. They and two other members of the nine-member team reached the summit on 20 January 2015.

During the expedition the two became good friends and Craig learnt what an exceptional person Sibusiso is. Craig encouraged Sibusiso to share the story of his humble beginnings as a sheep herder, and of the time he spent working as a game ranger. And what an exceptional story it is:

Sibusiso, now well-known for his appearance in the Windhoek Lager advertisement ('even if I climbed Everest, I can't swim...'), not only reached the summit of Mount Everest, he also climbed the six other highest summits in the world, walked unaided to the North and South Poles, and completed a Duzi canoe marathon. He is also the author of the book *To the top from nowhere*. As well as being an adventurer, marathon runner, motivational speaker, mountaineer and expedition leader, Sibusiso is also the Chief Scout of Scouts South Africa. In 2006 he was awarded the Order of Ikhamanga (Bronze) by President Thabo Mbeki.

In 1999 he summited *Mount Kilimanjaro* and in 2002 he went to the Himalayas, successfully climbing Pokalde, Lobujé and Island Peak, all of which are over 6 000 metres high. In March 2003 he set off again for the Himalayas with the goal of becoming the first black African to summit earth's highest mountain. He reached Everest's summit on 26 May 2003 from the south side. In 2005 he did it again from the north side together with Sir Ranulph Fiennes and Alex Harris, accessing the peak from the North Ridge. It is more difficult to reach the summit from the north side and climbers are statistically less likely to succeed. This achievement secured his place in history as first black African to climb the world's highest peak twice and by two different routes.

His remarkable journey to 'the top of the world' was literally and symbolically completed when he arrived at the geographic North Pole on 12 April 2012. This was the final hurdle to becoming the first black person to complete the Three Poles Challenge. This expedition was dubbed *The Goliath Challenge*. By

completing the Three Poles Challenge and the Seven Summits, Sibusiso has also become the first African to have accomplished the Explorers Grand Slam, an elite title earned only by a handful around the world.

Ironically, Sibusiso never wanted to climb mountains when he was growing up. He started school at the age of 11 and obtained his O-levels at the Mater Dolorosa School in Swaziland. In the early years of his life he worked as goat herder, a gardener and for two-and-a-half years as a construction worker. Through all this, he remained ambitious and continually searched for something more to achieve. Drawing on his experience as a goat herder, he began a career as a game ranger in 1993 at Malolotja Nature Reserve in Swaziland. In 1996 Sibusiso met John Doble who became his friend and benefactor, and was instrumental in finding the necessary sponsorship for his Mount Everest summit expedition.

The answer to the question of why he wanted to do this lies in the fact that he is from Africa. He wanted to do it for Africa and for its children. He wanted to tell the world that Africans can achieve great things. Since 2006, Sibusiso has been one of several African ambassadors for Lifeline Energy (formerly the Free Play Foundation). He dedicated the 1 113 kilometres he trekked to the South Pole to the children of South Africa. In May 2008, as a result of this feat and thanks to the support of hundreds of sponsors, Lifeline Energy was able to provide 300 Lifeline radios to children from the Nkomazi district where Sibusiso was born. Three children's charities benefited from his last climb to the summit of Mount Everest in 2005: The Birth to Twenty Research Programme at Wits University, the Africa Foundation and the SOS Children's Village in Swaziland.



Prof Linda van Ryneveld, Sibusiso Vilane and Craig Murdoch after Sibusiso's presentation

One of Sibusiso's best-known quotes is: 'The future depends entirely on the education of children – their access to information to broaden their thinking and understanding of the ever-changing and challenging world'. It could not have been more fitting, therefore, that he was invited to be a guest speaker at the Faculty of Veterinary Science's VetEd symposium, where teaching and learning was under the spotlight. His message is simple: Whether you are prepared for it or not, it is there – your own Everest, challenging you to reach the top. And if he could achieve what he did in the most dangerous and hostile of conditions and against all the odds, so, he suggests, can others.

According to Sibusiso there will always be challenges, but they are only insurmountable if you perceive them to be. It is therefore important to stay focussed and take one step at a time. Strive for excellence and you will achieve great heights. Do not lose hope or lose sight of what you want to achieve. Taken into account the various challenges that Sibusiso had to endure and overcome during his journeys – dangerous terrain, extreme weather patterns, cold temperatures and avalanches – he emphasises that self-confidence and motivation, teamwork and an awareness of the unexpected have to be key to achieving success. The higher you aim the bigger the challenge will be. However, it is in meeting that challenge that you overcome your own personal Everest.

- Author CvB