

A Peripeteia... a sudden change

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In 2009 Phillip Baldwin, Chief Executive of The Hong Kong Institute of Chartered Secretaries, offered a definition of what is meant by a “professional body”. The definition is actually derived from The Analytic Quality Glossary, Quality Research International and reads:

A professional body is a group of people in a learned occupation who are entrusted with maintaining control or oversight of the legitimate practice of the occupation.

In 1995, Professor Lee Harvey and Selena Mason recognised a paradoxical situation in that a professional body is set up to safeguard the public interest.... but also represents its own self interest. Hence it is a controlling body.... but that control may paradoxically be based on self interest.

Perhaps it was a recognition of the implied challenge in that paradox that motivated Maretha Smit, at least in part, to seek appointment as the CEO of our professional body, The South African Dental Association. In January 2011 Maretha assumed the office and brought a perspective that has cast a whole new light on the role of the Association, our responsibilities, our position in society, our need to recognise that the introduction of the principles of corporate governance have in fact become central to the effective management of our professional body.

Whatever the motivation that prompted this elegant lady to take on the multiplicity of roles which must be played by our CEO, then January 2011 was a propitious time for SADA. Elegant is an appropriate description but it belies the brave determination and commitment which has enabled Maretha with her previous business experience to safely guide the Association into becoming a professional body effectively satisfying the required principles of the Companies Act. Corporate governance is recognised today as central to the proper management of ... companies, yes,but equally applicable to a no profit association trying to balance that combination of social and self interests.

After some five and a half years of decisive and incisive leadership, Maretha is to depart from the Association, and indeed from South Africa, to take up a position in New Zealand. That news burst upon the Association with tsunamic force. So much has been achieved.... and the Association was indeed looking forward to continued progress and further innovative enhancement of its activities. Dr Yvette Solomons, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Association, has listed some of the achievements of the last few years...

- Formulating and implementing SADA' s governance model in line with the new Companies Act.
- Formulating and implementing SADA's Transformation Programme,
- Formalising annual business planning and budgeting processes,
- Establishing the Young Dentists' Council,

- Formulating a framework for the SADA Leadership Academy,
- Formulating strategies for SADA as a Private Higher Education Institution,
- Formulating strategies for SADA as a Financial Services Provider.

Services Provider.

Many members may have been blissfully unaware of the King Reports, I, II and III. Under the astute chairmanship of Mervyn King, these Reports have placed South Africa in a world leading position regarding policies on Corporate Governance. It has been Maretha who has championed the awakening of the Association to the need to move ahead and to accept the triple objectives of governance under the King principles, the economic, the environmental and the social aspects of the activities of any institution. An inclusive approach should replace an exclusive approach. The King Committee comments, (with slight modifications) : Boards must apply the test of fairness, accountability, responsibility and transparency to all acts or omissions and be accountable to, but also responsive and responsible towards, the stakeholders.

Maretha Smit has brought that focus and that challenge to the Association. The Association has matured and advanced under her leadership. The monumental tasks could not have been managed without an impressive work ethic, without a total dedication and without enormous patience. But there has always been the warm person behind the driving initiatives, the genuine smile of welcome no matter the pressures, the preparedness to listen and to cogitate and to debate the issues, all with gracious forbearance. Maretha respects and acknowledges those with whom she works... an indispensable characteristic of the successful CEO.

This Communique bears then the sad news of the departure of Maretha Smit from our Head Office and from RSA..... BUT it also carries the appreciation and the accolades of the Association to a CEO who has met the challenges and set a new path and done this with dedication and resolve.

Thank you, Maretha for kindness, empathy, patience.... And for determination and commitment. You have graced the office of CEO. The news has indeed been a peripeteia ... but you have made a courageous decision and you carry with you every best wish from the Association for your new

