

Keynote Address for the Botho University Virtual Graduation, 10th July 2020

Vice Chancellor, Botho University

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Hello Everyone!

First of all, a huge congratulations to Botho University class of 2019 on your graduation! This is indeed your celebration of your success – nothing can take that away from you – definitely not even this tiny little virus that is wreaking havoc across the globe.

I am indeed excited that we are doing this virtual graduation – while yes there is a special warmth to a physical ceremony - the virtual ceremony has advantages too – a broader audience – imagine all your family and friends and future employers can view this and also an amazing permanent digital memory to store!

I must thank our Minister, (Hon.) Dr. Douglas Letsholathebe for officiating at the graduation.

Before I move any further, I must thank Botho University, Faculty of Computing student Keemanao Mosedame for having developed this virtual graduation portal – well done! I also thank every single person at Botho who has made this virtual ceremony a reality!

Well! What can I say about your graduating in the middle of this pandemic? Honestly – I tried to put myself in your shoes to understand what graduating amidst this crisis means to you. Globally the pandemic has impacted 1.6 billion students and in Africa alone over 11 million University students are affected. Globally all students graduating this year walk out into a new world of work very different

from what they imagined. You know you can see a half glass of water as half empty or a half full! If anything – I sincerely believe you are indeed better geared to deal with change than the older generation - with your technology capabilities and ability to multitask you are more change ready!

What is being change ready! It means having a bigger bag of tricks! It means having an open mind and a wider repertoire of skills – and a willingness to change track if required!

When there is so much uncertainty around you and you are not sure what the future holds for you – in fact none of us knows what the future holds for us. In such a situation instead of stressing yourself out – the best thing that you can do is strengthen yourself both physically, mentally and intellectually. While we understand physical fitness – more exercise and a stronger body – Mental strength is having a more balanced view of the world accepting of the change and building more tolerance and compassion for not only your family and friends but also people of other cultures - Intellectual strength is to continue learning more skills. During the lock down Botho University has signed up for 5000 Coursera registrations that we offered to all staff, students and you or graduates and alumni. Our graduates and our alumni took up nearly 1000 courses on Coursera – upskilling themselves – I am indeed so happy with this enthusiasm to learn.

At a time like this – we need to start having a completely different conversation about jobs. At a time like this mind set matters most – a **‘can do’ attitude** that moves away from an entitlement mentality is critical – no point waiting for someone to drop something in our laps - if we don’t help ourselves no one can! Even as we feel nervous and sometimes afraid, we just have to trust ourselves and build upon our strengths.

While the virus has been destructive – it is also disruptive - changing the way, we work – changing the way organisations function. Botho University is a special community - a community that has this strong

CAN DO attitude – when the universities shut down and the world went into a lockdown all teaching and learning came to a grinding halt in the middle of the semester – Botho University is among the few universities in Africa that leveraged on the technology investments we have and well trained staff and students – so that we switched overnight seamlessly to teaching online – I am so proud of all our lecturers and nonacademic staff across four Southern African countries who embraced technology and worked twice as hard to keep learning ongoing and students engaged– I am also so very proud of all our students who despite the huge challenges they faced found ingenious ways to keep learning - net result we finished the semester successfully in time with almost all students participating – we have a few who were extremely challenged and could not participate but are being assisted to complete their semester.

Not only with continuing teaching – our staff particularly from the blended and distance learning teams conducted numerous webinars to train teachers and students to teach and learn online – this was at the height of the lockdowns and we had thousands of teachers and students attending these webinars across Africa and even beyond Africa.

Botho University labs and facilities and support was made available to our alumnus an entrepreneur who made hand sanitisers and soaps – during the lock down. If you see her brand Didintle in any shop buy it – she is one of us! This is the kind of attitude that employers are looking for - a “Die Hard – Yes we can” approach – employers are not interested in those who are trying to justify their inability to do things.

Let us take a step back and ask ourselves What kind of jobs are out there during this time and into a future post-Covid world?

The beauty of businesses going online is that this ‘job market in the cloud’ is now suddenly accessible – no need to get on a plane! This Global job market however needs not only an online job seeking skill

but also a strong ability to work with people of other cultures - it has become more important than ever that we put aside the baggage and prejudices we carry about people of another culture – open your mind and learn from people of another culture at the same time ground yourself and strengthen the values that your own culture provides – the global job market also Demands a high level of skills – so keep refining what you know. While your degree – the certificate and your transcript are important for credibility - what you know and what all you can do is important – at Botho our efforts have been to provide you with a strong interdisciplinary knowledge in many programmes – that is invaluable in this job climate.

While yes conventional jobs may vanish – nothing stops you from Volunteering to work without salaries – pl don't chase the money please chase the experience during this early part of your career – yes! we all hoped our degrees will open doors but its different now sadly! Take the Tourism and hospitality industry here in Botswana and all over the world – the pandemic has completely crippled this industry – what can you our fresh Hospitality graduates do? The industry will see a slow opening soon – your degree is one of the most holistic and practical qualifications modelled on European hospitality degrees – go to these hospitality establishments – offer your services for nothing – volunteer and in return gain valuable experience as a first step – don't be paralysed – energise your thinking!

The other area where jobs are always there are in People related – community related fields – the pandemic has exposed immense social inequities and gaps – so many things need to be done in our communities – while Government will do more – there can be many self-help initiatives that can be done – Social Entrepreneurship is the future of entrepreneurship – not conventional entrepreneurship. Go back to your roots – to see what you can contribute!

I urge all stop thinking of ourselves as victims of this heath crisis that is also a socio-economic scourge - instead please see yourself as

empowered educated people who can make a change. Mindset and attitude are the key.

You are special people – you are Botho University Graduates – the value of Botho is the answer to all our questions currently. You are Tech Savvy – Change Ready and empowered - never forget that – keep your spirits high and build your strengths. We will come out of this – stronger and better!

Stay close to us – register as an Alumni and we will carry on supporting you!

Once again Congratulations! To you and your families on your success and I wish you well for your future!

Thank you.