

Sphetho Siyengo

40th Birthday Speech – by Arthur Mashiatshidi

5th November 2011

Honourable director of proceedings, dignitaries, distinguished guests, the Siyengo family – gentlemen and ladies – may I wish you a very good evening.

Today, my knowledge of Speedo/Spheto has been made complete from these testimonies of friends and family. I used to know Sphetho only professionally, today – I know him more as a family person.

What a great day this is! The occasion I speak of is this - Sphetho's fortieth birthday, and what a wonderful occasion it is -- because Sphetho is a wonderful person, a great student and protégé, a superb businessman, an imparter of knowledge and an all-around fantastic person. And this day is wonderful, not the least – because Sphetho has anticipated this day with Great Expectations. Sphetho, I sincerely hope that your expectations have been and will continue to be sustained on this day and for ever hereafter.

Thanks to the master of ceremonies – may I say sir – your reputation precedes you, for I had the owner to be acquainted with you (or rather your reputation) by virtue of some passengers that I travelled with from Johannesburg on this trip.

A slight correction in pronunciation, my name is Arthur Mashiatshidi; I am an independent businessman based in Bryanston, Johannesburg. I think it is also proper to underline my credentials as an independent businessman and therefore I promise that I will not use this speech for my own charitable endeavours.



I have done many things in my life – many of which I consider to be great – but I derive maximum pleasure from the recognition that I receive from people whose lives I have touched – in a positive way. And Sphetho is one among few such persons... Which, I would like to believe, is the primary reason, why he has granted me this honour – to address this gathering on this very important occasion in his life. For that, I thank him and feel eternally grateful.

I met Sphetho back in 2002 - when I was recommended by Dr Wilfred Lombe to serve as a member of a trouble shooting team for Sphetho's Company, the government's NRF. Sphetho was in charge of the affairs of the NRF – in this role, his responsibilities included the sourcing of commercial experts to assist the organisation to achieve its commercial objectives in executing its strategy. Somehow, Sphetho and I - managed to connect and we became friends at a personal level. Back then, I wasn't great at socialising, - *in fact someone told me that I was an economic giant, but a social dwarf* – therefore I can say without contradicting myself that the foundation of our relationship is tribute to Sphetho's outstanding social skills.

We have remained friends since then – in fact Sphetho adopted me as his mentor – and, what an inspiring and successful protégé he has turned out to be. I would venture to say that even though I am moderately aggressively ambitious – I more than sense these qualities in higher doses in Sphetho. Perhaps these common traits have helped Sphetho and I to forge a special bond between us. For that, I am grateful to Sphetho.

But whatever the reason for our friendship, the fact remains that I consider Sphetho a sincere, wonderful, bright, intelligent and well balanced person - and I'm glad to have his acquaintance in my life.



Sphetho's successes make me proud of him as a person and as a protégé – in that order. I believe that Sphetho will achieve great success at anything that he chooses to do in and with his life. Be assured that we will all be here to cheer-lead you on in all your endeavours.

I suppose that it would be unfair, if I reduce my tributes to Sphetho's success to a mere theoretical discourse. Let me give – but one practical example:

Back in 2002, when I met Sphetho, I was in the properties business – courtesy of one Robert Kiyosaki – who wrote the seminal book on Financial Freedom titled - “Poor Dad, Rich Dad”. I had followed Kiyosaki's advice and had started a successful properties portfolio of my own. Naturally, I liberally dispense the Kiyosaki wisdom to many young people... I hope that I am not saying the obvious when I say that Sphetho is one of those rare young people – he heeded my advice without reserve – he took to my advice - like a duck to water. Sphetho reminded me recently that he bought the book - “Rich Dad, Poor Dad” immediately after my advice. In a short space of time, Sphetho built his own successful portfolio of investment properties. That is the kind of person – that Sphetho is – a go getter, an executor and results driven.

Someone else would have been content with the string of qualifications under his belt - BSc, HDE, BEd, HDip – but not Sphetho. He was not content with this... he decided to abandon a very respectable employment situation so as to pursue his Master's in Business Administration back here in Cape Town. True to form, his performance was nothing but exceptional. He started his present company “Buyolo Consulting Services” while he was still studying for



the MBA. Buyolo offers services ranging for Enterprise Development to Strategy Development and Execution. You will find Case Studies which attest to Buyolo's success at the Company's website. Sphetho, I salute your successes – they should be an inspiration us and those who follow your foot-steps.

Back then when I met him, Sphetho was just entering his thirties... Today, on this day of celebration; we are here to honour you on this special day in your life... as you enter the glorious age of wisdom, we join friends and family to celebrate your life and reminisce with you - on the journey that is life and how you have travelled that life. That is very important... human beings should traverse life differently from other creatures. I am told by those in the know – that whales and dolphins have intelligence that rival that of human beings. I seriously contend that it is only human beings that are capable of consciously contemplating and influencing their futures, the futures of their off-spring and the futures of other creatures on this planet. So – in my own humble opinion, a successful man (human being) is he that has employed his human-ness to positively influence society and the environment for the greater and common good for those who live on this planet.

I am convinced and quite happy that Sphetho has developed the Fundamentals that are required to achieve human greatness. So, as you march into your 40s – I encourage you to do so boldly; I encourage you to do so with contemplated conviction - of being able to achieve greatness beyond the ordinary. Let your vision be big and bold.

Lest my advice be considered as an incitement for conceit to the younger men and women – our future leaders – let me therefore temper my advice with the following story about seasons which goes thus:



There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn not to judge things too quickly. So he sent them each on a quest, in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away. The first son he sent in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the fall.

When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen. The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted. The second son said no--it was covered with green buds and full of promise. The third son disagreed, he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful, it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen. The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfillment.

The man then explained to his sons that they were all quite correct - because they had each seen but ONLY one season in the tree's life. He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season, and that is the essence of who you are--and the pleasure, joy, and love that come from that life--can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons are up.

If you give up when it's winter, you will miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer, fulfillment of your fall. Don't let the pain of one season destroy the joy of all the rest. Don't judge life by one difficult season¹.

So – to the younger generation, I command and exhort you to take your cue from the shining example of what Sphetho has demonstrated and achieved without bitterness or rancour. In you - reside the hopes for the success of our communities and the nation; let your hopes and aspirations – be guiding beacons for those who come after you. Then we shall be a prosperous nation.

Remember that there are two barriers that often prevent communication between the young and their elders. The first is middle-aged forgetfulness of the fact that they



themselves are no longer young. The second is youthful ignorance of the fact that the middle aged are still aliveⁱⁱ.

We ought to thank the elderly; to them we are grateful for the wisdom of ages... that wisdom has shaped our character and paved the ways that we have traversed. And for that – we are grateful.

Sphetho, you have been given and you have accepted the gifts from the gods and our ancestors – therefore I exhort you to use those gifts in all the four seasons of your life. There is a lot of life ahead of you. Let your life shine for the benefit of humankind.

So on this day, your 40th birthday, Sphetho, I want you to know that I feel lucky and happy -- to say the LEAST -- to have you as a special friend, a business associate and most important, you are a wonderful person, and you make it easy for others to follow your footsteps... that is the hallmark of leadership. Your first forty years have been, by all measures - remarkable. I predict that the next forty years - and beyond - will be even more astounding.

To you, Sphetho, on this day, and every day, my best wishes, my utter joy at knowing you, my happiness in knowing that our friendship continues to grow, and my hopes that your long life is forever filled with joy, peace, satisfaction, success, and all the best things in life. It's only natural...because YOU are the best.

ⁱ Anonymous

ⁱⁱ [Jessamyn West](#)

