

WENDY LUHABE

STRENGTH. POWER. PRESENCE. GRACE.

A PERSONIFICATION OF EXCELLENCE

Speaking to Wendy Luhabe is like drinking from a sacred well of coveted water – a well that revitalises the soul whilst simultaneously stimulating the mind. Her voice is graceful and calming, with an air of self-assurance that is intimidating in a way that is encouraging and makes you want to be the greatest version of yourself. ▶





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When you ask Wendy how she is, her response is “I am blessed,” which she says with so much conviction and gratitude that you start to feel blessed. She exudes blessing, power, honour, and love. Before a conversation with her starts, you already start to feel empowered, and her presence alone inspires excellence and humility.

In her journey as an economic activist, social entrepreneur, mentor and thought leader, Wendy’s number one priority has been to get people to see and realise their potential. Her work transcends economic empowerment by focusing on getting the individual to a point where they can make a powerful impact on society and leave an indelible mark in every sphere of their influence.

She is the perfect embodiment of excellence, insightful and knowledgeable in ways that many of us dream of. It is through an interaction with her that the excellence within truly beckons. For Wendy, being the best version of yourself not only serves humanity but also honours the Creator. “Over the years, I’ve heard that as human beings we only use five per cent of our potential, so my mission in life has been to increase that because to have so much potential and use so little of it is an insult to our Creator.” This awareness is one of the things that have kept Wendy motivated to offer nothing but the best in all that she does.

Realising your potential is so much deeper than just doing great things; it is about manifesting glory. There is a saying by Les Brown that Wendy often quotes to emphasise the importance of tapping into your potential: “The graveyard is the richest place on earth, because it is here that you will find all the hopes and dreams that were never fulfilled, the books that were never written, the songs that were never sung, the inventions that were never shared, the cures that were never discovered, all because someone was too afraid to take that first step, keep with the problem, or determined to carry out their dream.”

Throughout her career, her efforts have been directed at the participation of women in the economy. Having been exposed to the perniciously exclusionary nature of certain sectors of the economy, Wendy is resolute in her mission to create inclusive spaces for women to thrive. “Women continue to be excluded from meaningful participation in the economy. Only when there’s a decent representation of women in all sectors of the economy, then we will know that our work is done.” ▶

Education plays an important role in equipping individuals to be active participants in economic and social development. This fact is one of the reasons why Wendy values and is passionate about education. At the heart of empowering people to realise their potential is making education easily accessible. Education has the power to not only provide people with the skills they need to make a valuable contribution to the society, but to also change the world; hence Wendy's particular interest in educating young leaders, and her involvement with the African Leadership University (ALU). "The ALU's vision is to identify capable and committed young people who want to change their circumstances – they are committed to becoming ethical and entrepreneurial leaders."

Wendy firmly believes that the ideal leader is one who places high value on ethics and has an entrepreneurial spirit. "These two main pillars [ethics and entrepreneurship] are critical for us to build this continent. We need leaders who are ethical both in business and the public sector. And we need entrepreneurial leaders to facilitate economic growth."

To further elucidate the importance of helping others realise their potential, Wendy often shares the story of Thandi, her helper's daughter. "She used to visit us when she was younger. I used to get her maths and science workbooks to keep her occupied. And to see that this young woman has now gone through to the University of Johannesburg and is qualifying as a mechanical engineer is but one example of what we can do to contribute to the lives of others when we are mindful about paying it forward."

What has kept Wendy steadfast in a world that makes it arduous for women to thrive is her enviable and admirable ability to perceive challenges as opportunities to discover what she is capable of – an attribute that has been inspired by many who have seen the best in her. "I have met people throughout my life who believe in me. My confidence was able to grow through people's generosity of spirit. They just saw something in me and watered it until it blossomed."

One of the projects that Wendy is involved in is a platform called Women in Infrastructural Development and Energy (WINDE). This platform was established to "mobilise meaningful participation of women who are active in the infrastructure and energy industries." ►

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Wendy's beliefs and values exemplify the idea that you can only receive with an open hand; a closed hand that doesn't give can never receive. Paying it forward is what has kept Wendy anchored. "The satisfaction of enabling other people to do something meaningful with their lives has also kept me steadfast. When we pass on what we have, the gifts and the experiences that we've gathered throughout our lives, we are enriched."

It is quite clear that Wendy recognises that she is blessed to be a blessing. And this belief is reflected in the value that she places on mentorship. "Mentorship, for me, is a practical way of paying it forward." Her mentorship is not only limited to young women. As a woman in her early 60s, she has had the privilege of interacting with women from three generations. She mentors whoever has a willingness to learn and grow. "In my particular case, [mentorship] keeps me connected to people from different generations. So I'm drawing from so many generations of experience and I collect that in a bowl of wisdom that I pass on to those I mentor."

Wendy is a very busy woman and one would think that having so many roles to fulfil would bring about the need to create some form of balance so as to not become overwhelmed, but for Wendy, this is not the case. "My roles are not in contradiction, they are part of the same story. I divide my time between a manageable portfolio of interests that I enjoy." Her philosophy is very simple: "I don't do anything I don't enjoy." To keep herself grounded, Wendy starts her mornings with prayers and bible study. She also prioritises time with her grandchildren, who she picks up from school whenever she can.

It is sweet serendipity to have her grace the cover of our spring issue, as it is a season that is of particular significance to her. "Spring is a season of hope and my African name is Nomathemba, which means hope, so it is a season that represents who I am." Her favourite tree is the Baobab tree, which, according to her, is known as the Tree of Life. This tree resonates with her because it is a symbol of strength, power, presence, and grace – which are all characteristics anyone who knows Wendy can associate her with.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT WENDY:

- She is currently learning to play the harp.
- Her favourite travel destinations are New York, Paris, and Cape Town
- She has three grandchildren.

LESSONS SHE'S LEARNT:

- I am responsible for my life.
- Blaming circumstances is not very helpful.
- I don't have to conform to the stereotypes that society hold about women.
- Gratitude is important.
- If we live a life that avoids failure, we will remain small. ☒

HAIR: KUDAKWASHE MAGORA
MAKEUP: PRECIOUS XABA
STYLIST: KUTLWANO MOLETE
PHOTOGRAPHER: STEVEL MARC