

**ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO, AMBASSADOR
CHUPU MATHABATHA ON THE OCCASION OF THE
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS FORUM,
HELD AT THOHOYANDOU.**

Programme Director;

Our esteemed Government Communicators;

Invited guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning!

I hope that it will not be viewed as strange that I have elected to start my speech with a Biblical quote.

Mathew 7 verse 12 says:

In everything, then, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the essence of the Law and the prophets.

Paraphrasing this important Biblical injunction, Aaron Goldman says:

"Communicate unto the other person that which you would want him to communicates unto you if your positions were reversed."

I think this for me summarises how as government communicators you should view your job. Always remember that you are communicating to empower.

Without information which you are supposed to communicate, our people will be poorer without even the ability to exercise their constitutional rights.

I am sure that we all are aware of the fact that our constitution demands that we build and foster a nation that is premised on amongst others, the principles of openness and transparency.

Being aware of this fact means therefore that, you should be prepared to effectively and timeously, communicate and explain to the public the decisions of government in a manner that does not raise but closes questions.

Effective government communication is at the heart of a functioning democracy. Your task as government communicators is to ensure that our democracy is based on informed citizenry.

Providing citizens with adequate information on priorities, programs and activities of government help to build trust relationship between government and the people.

Enhancing trust relationship between government and the people will bring to end avoidable tensions.

Programme Director;

As part of the government's human resource development strategy, we are prepared to invest in you so that you can be better capacitated to do your job.

We want you to regularly have your skills enhanced so as to be able to serve our people better. You should not be denied reasonable opportunity to enhance your skills to serve our people if resources and circumstances allow.

Part of this personal development requires you to learn on your own.

I honestly cannot imagine a government communicator, or any communicator for that matter, who is not glued-up with contemporary developments, both within and outside of his department.

You also must be alive to government policies and decisions.

I cannot imagine someone who has never interacted with the NDP or LDP speaking for a provincial department, a parastatal, or municipality.

It is unimaginable that person who has never read the RDP document can communicate on behalf of this government.

It is not unreasonable that we expect you to know all this; including the core values that underpin our constitution; Batho Pele Principles; so-on-and so-forth.

You simply cannot afford to be a pedestrian on matters of government policy and decisions.

As a communicator, you must have interest of anything that takes place within your department. Without knowledge you can't communicate or you will communicate your wishes and common sense.

When a government Spokesperson goes to Radio and he is not prepared we all get embarrassed because we can tell that this one is just talking because he can't keep quite.

You must always be prepared if you are to speak on behalf of government.

Part of these preparations is to prepare your political principals such as Mayors, MECs and the Premier whenever they are scheduled to conduct interviews.

Your principal must never conduct interviews without any knowledge of information that you have.

Related to this is the need to give government communication the respect that it deserves. The start of this is to ensure that we employ relevant people, with relevant communication qualifications to do communication job.

I know of the concerns that exist amongst you – part of it is that communication is being treated as some sort of a landfill site, where those who are not effective in other divisions are dumped.

I am on record to have said that this situation must come to an end.

We need people to do what they qualified and trained to do. The days of having HR and Supply Chain Officers working as supply Communicators must and will come to an end.

I am saying this because I agree with your concerns that this practice erodes the efficiency and effectiveness of government communication.

I know that speaking with you is like preaching to the converted. But I want to remind you that communication should always be proactive and not reactive.

You are not supposed to behave like fire-extinguishers; instead, you must be like fire detectors.

You must be proactive and decentralise government information. Government services and programmes must not only be known but those who are privileged to be next to government offices.

Even those who are in the most remote of our rural areas are entitled to government information.

This speaks to the communication platforms we use and prefer as government. It also speaks to a relationship we must foster with various stakeholders.

For an example, in rural areas Traditional Councils are very effective centres of information dissemination. In this regard, a working relationship with Magoshi is necessary.

Our children should not have to travel hundreds of kilometres to Polokwane just to access a government circular about jobs. We

can simply make this available at a local post office or traditional council offices.

Always remember to communicate unto the other person that which you would want him to communicates unto you if your positions were reversed.

Put yourself in the position of a Matriculant in Mutale who has no knowledge or any information about the National Students Financial Aid Scheme.

Put yourself in the position of that jobseeker who is unable to access a job circular or advertisement from government.

Put yourself in the position of a community that is being mobilised to occupy a land which is not suitable for residential purposes and is a potential health hazard.

Put yourself in their shoes and then remember that it is through access to information that their situation could be turned around for the better.

That is how powerful and important your work is. You change people's lives.

Programme Director;

As I conclude I wish to remind all of you of the important work that you are doing for our government.

I am confident that you will re-commit yourselves to communicating even better for this government. You must be aware that if you don't communicate, opposing forces will dominate the public agenda.

We are not calling on you to be like Hitler's Joseph Goebbels who used government communication for propaganda, we want you to use your skills and knowledge to propagate accurate information effectively, and timeously.

Always remember to communicate unto the other person that which you would want him to communicate unto you if your positions were reversed.

I thank you!