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Craig Levieux

Partner to Milton Seopa

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Partners for Possibility (PfP) is a creative solution to South Africa's education crisis - it is a co-action, co-learning partnership between School Principals and Business Leaders, enabling social cohesion through partnerships, and empowering Principals to become change leaders in their schools and communities.

The PfP Programme facilitates cross-sectoral reciprocal partnerships between Business, Government and the Social Sector. The PfP initiative speaks to the idea that enhancing the quality of education, improving the school environment and encouraging engagement between parents and teachers are meaningful and attainable goals.

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“What a joyous journey! And we have only just started!”

So says principal Milton Seopa, principal of Waverley Girls High School in Johannesburg about his partnership with business leader Craig Levieux. Craig, a senior executive in Dimension Data, joined Milton in the 10th Johannesburg Leadership.

Milton and Craig partnered in the Partners for Possibility (PfP) programme to develop their leadership skills and work together to lead positive change at the school. Situated opposite Saint Mary's private boarding school for girls, Waverley Girls finds itself in an affluent area, but it caters to a large number of poor or jobless households from Johannesburg.

“We quickly identified that the biggest problem was parental engagement. Many parents simply could not support the school or participate in parental programmes, while others transferred all responsibility for the upbringing of their daughters to the school and teachers,” says Craig.

Before Craig and Milton started addressing this and other issues, they first worked on their relationship by spending time together and attending three training courses facilitated by PfP specifically to support their work at the school.

“I particularly enjoyed the courses as they gave me a lot to think about. One of the most important things that I learned – from the course by Nancy Kline called Time to Think – was to see parents and teachers as stakeholders in the success of the school and to engage with them as such,” says Milton.

Once the partnership had completed their part-time courses, they started working on the challenges that they had identified. In this process they were coached by a Learning Process Facilitator (LPF). They were also grouped with other PfP participants into a Leadership Circle that acted as a solutions incubator where they shared their ideas, challenges and plans on a regular basis.

With several challenges identified and plans made, Milton and Craig spent the remainder of their formal PfP programme year working at these problems and coming up with solutions. These were reported on regularly and their work together continues.

Amongst the school-specific solutions that Craig and Milton created was a special Parents Charter that explained parents’ co-responsibility in the education of their children. Learners were encouraged to take these home and have them signed. Parents were also invited to join a special Culture and Sport festival that was held over two days.

Another unique solution was to invite unemployed parents who could not pay their school fees to pay in kind, but mowing school lawns or painting classrooms. This, explains Milton, gave these parents an equal stake in the success of the school and the education of their daughters to those who paid school fees.

“One of the most powerful elements of the PfP programme is the fact that each partnership

identifies the issues that are specifically hampering their school. There is no one-size-fits-all approach,” says Dr Louise van Rhyen, founder and CEO of PfP.

“Often, the most important thing that a business leader can do is to act as a thinking partner to the already capable teacher. This form of support and appreciation has often delivered the most transformative results,” says Van Rhyen.

“Craig was like a mirror for my leadership style. He would listen to my ideas and challenges without judging them and offer insightful questions and suggestions to help. It has been one of the most wonderful experiences to be in partnership with him.”

Principal, Milton Seopa

Over the course of their partnership Milton and Craig have seen parental participation increase dramatically and they have continued to work together to find other solutions and opportunities to improve the school.

“We are engaged for the long term and I look forward to spending many more years with Milton at Waverley Girls High,” says Craig.

