

'Collective consciousness'

I grew up in Soweto and started primary school there. I then went to Pax College, a Roman Catholic missionary school, in Pietersburg for four years. As I am a Roman Catholic, I went to that school. I was able to study at Pax because of the support and guidance of my parents. They have passed away now.

Schooling in the North

I enjoyed Pax very much, because we were only boys. We did things collectively. We believed in collective consciousness, meaning we worked together. No person worked alone. We played soccer, tennis and other sports together. I even did karate and boxing. There was so much interesting life at Pax.

When I was studying in Pietersburg, we started experiencing problems during the 1976 Soweto uprisings. We did not have much information about what was taking place there. However, we heard some information. I only started grappling with politics and the struggle in the tertiary institution.

I started working in RAU's security department in 1993. I am now employed in the postal division, which is part of central administration.

Life beyond work

As a human, most of my time is spent at work. I enjoy most of my work, but I spend less time with my family, than in the

Marcelle Dawson and William Matlala speak to Lazarus Maleka, NEHAWU shopsteward at the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU).

workplace. I have two kids, a girl and a boy. I love both equally, but their mother comes first. My wife is self-employed. It's not difficult to divide my love between the two kids, because I know them. They differ and I know how to treat each according to their behaviour.

After work I assist in the house, maybe helping my children with their assignments or homework. If my children are having any problems we will discuss it. For fun, I play table tennis. I enjoy it. I regard myself as playing well when I beat my opponent. I also accept losses. If my opponent is my friend, I will teach him. Even if he then beats me, I will be happy because I know I'm teaching him well. He will then be more interested in table tennis.

I also watch TV, especially soccer and tennis, my favourite sports. My favourite soccer team is Orlando Pirates and my favourite player is Benedict Vilakazi. He's young, skilful and determined to work hard.

My favourite meal is pap and meat. My wife cooks it really well.

Regarding my studies, I did a certificate in Personnel Management. I am presently studying a BA degree in Humanities, with Development Studies and Industrial Psychology as my majors. This is my last year. I intend doing a diploma in corporate law when I finish my degree. One of my friends is an advocate. He did his Masters degree in Law at RAU. We are also reading partners. I regard my friends as my role models.

Joining NEHAWU

My colleague in the postal division, Richard Rikhotso, influenced me to become involved in NEHAWU. I joined the union, because I know his problems also affect me. Seven of my colleagues in the division are also involved in NEHAWU. We cooperate well and see each other as equals.

As a shopsteward, my role is broad. It involves training of employees and uniting all workers in the institution

I was elected shopsteward unanimously in the first democratic elections at RAU. The regional office monitored the elections. I was surprised, but I told myself I would have to take this as it comes from the workers. I am the only shopsteward in my department of seven workers. As a shopsteward, my role is broad. It involves training of employees and uniting all workers in the institution - academics, as well as non-academics. I participate in the shopsteward council once a month, according to the constitution.

Actually, I cannot say how far I see myself going in the union. Constitutionally, you should only be elected for three years. The only thing that counts is the workers.

They are there to judge you as they elected you. I am prepared to do whatever the workers want.

I am part of the branch executive committee (BEC). The branch is now located at RAU. The BEC consists of ten members. Four are branch office bearers: the chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The other six are shopstewards. The chairperson chooses who should go to which workshops and congresses. The branch vice-chairperson attended the recent NEHAWU congress. Beforehand we all engaged in workshops in the region.

Empowering workers

At NEHAWU we work according to the mandate of the members. Workers explain to you their needs and problems. You then get a mandate from them. Then we raise the issue with the RAU management, negotiate it and report back. The workers then decide whether to declare a dispute. This is empowerment - when the workers participate in the decision-making process.

At NEHAWU we believe in peaceful situations. We avoid problems like violence and unrest. This allows us to live in peace and harmony. It also allows us to see each other as humans, not as enemies, even if we have different political organisations. We believe in democracy and living together in peace.

What I like most in NEHAWU are the negotiations. I believe in peaceful negotiations, rather than violence. That is the thing that attracted me to the union. Peaceful negotiation means sitting around a table, discussing issues. During negotiations we must be strategic and plan. The constitution is the only path that gives us direction.

The union has a good future because it is involved in many sectors. NEHAWU is

here to stay As long as there are workers, there will be a union' Even if there is privatisation, the union will always remain

Workers' concerns

The main issue that affects workers at RAU is management's lack of transparency. The Skills Development Act and the LRA are not properly adhered to. The provisions of the Employment Equity Act are also not being addressed. In our department, we have come across a lot of problems. The problems were especially in terms of the lower level workers. Because of the marginalisation of the workers, they feel they cannot raise those concerns. They don't have any representative in any sector of the institution.

When managing, a supervisor should know what kind of person each employee is. Then the supervisor will know that when the situation is like this, so-and-so can be highly productive. It helps in terms of working together. We should work as a team.

Management fears losing status and power. If a party is empowered, it does not mean that status is transferred from one party to the other. It only means involving every individual in the decision-making process.

A union for all

Academics play an important role in the union. We also view them as workers. They are also involved in the decision making process. We should share our problems so that we can help find the way forward.



Even management can join the union. They have a right to do so.

We have won unity amongst our members. Our constitution states that we should work in order to unite all workers. Every individual within this institution should be involved.

Collectiveness involves...

Every employee should participate in the decision-making process of any organisation anywhere. Collectiveness means every person should air his view, so that we can view and analyse it together. Thus we can see which way to take. Collectiveness involves participation and empowerment. It also creates transparency' ★

Marcelle Dawson is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at RAU.