

IN MEMORIAM

PROFESSOR BAREND LESSING

1941 – 2005

'Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of value ...'
– Einstein, Albert



The *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* sadly notes the passing away of the former Chairperson of the Department of Human Resource Management, Professor Barend Lessing on 11 January 2005. He was employed by the former Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) – firstly as Senior Lecturer, later as Professor. Lessing served as Chairperson of the Department RAU from 1995 to July 2003. Under his leadership the Department flourished and experienced significant prosperity and was acknowledged as one of the foremost Departments of Human Resource Management/Industrial Psychology in South Africa. He stepped down to become actively involved in the transformation of the University as Chairperson of the Human Resources Task Team for the Incorporation and Merging Process of the University, and as Project Leader for the implementation of a new Performance Management System for the University in August 2003.

Acknowledged for his fundamental contributions to the former RAU and in South Africa towards the status of and academic capacity building in Human Resource Management, Human Resource Development and in Distance Education, Lessing pioneered the establishment of Training Management as a new discipline in South Africa in the early 1980s. He was been a major driving force in the implementation of extracurricular and distance education courses in Human Resource Development at RAU – an accomplishment that opened up high-quality higher education opportunities in this field to thousands of previously disadvantaged South African students.

Under his leadership, the Training Management discipline (currently referred to as Human Resources Development (HRD)) was transformed into a widely-acknowledged and prestigious academic programme with a variety of courses. He elevated the field of Human Resources Development at RAU from being viewed as a functional discipline within organisations, to that of a science worthy of academic study.

Praised for his initiative, intellectual capacity and creativity, Lessing networked constructively as Founder and first Programme Leader of the HRD Programme with international colleagues to find the most beneficial way of stimulating and promoting departmental initiatives and research. Despite the difficult political situation in South Africa and international boycotts in the early 1980s, he succeeded in making contact with international academics for benchmarking purposes and obtained relevant study material.

Lessing is listed in *Who's Who in the World*. The Institute of People Management presented him with the *Presidential award in 1977 and the HRD Person of the Year award in 1991*. He was also honoured in Austin (Texas) in March 2004 when he was inducted in the *International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame as Member of the Class of 2004*. The Hall of Fame acknowledges those who have made distinguished contributions to the field of adult and continuing education. A wall plaque, commemorating some of the major accomplishments of each of the inductees, is being displayed at the University of Oklahoma's Center for Continuing Education.

The current Chairperson of the Department, Prof Kobus Slabbert, paid tribute to him as a man who had become so much a part of the Department that it is difficult to imagine it without him. He praised him for his impartiality towards academic and administrative staff, his Christian values, loyalty and modesty. He was valued and admired by former colleagues and friends for the qualities he displayed: namely integrity, commitment, loyalty and dedication to the task at hand.