

# UBUNTU: Swellness for Humanity

Ubuntu is a sub-Saharan African philosophy that recognizes the interdependence of life. It means:

**I am who I am because of who we all are.**

“The 'solitary individual' is a contradiction in terms. A person is a person through other persons.”

- Archbishop Desmond Tutu

I am a person among and within other persons. I learned how to be a person through my relationships. We are born in relationship and we exist in relationship. My destiny is inexorably bound to yours. Any concept of separation is an illusion. I cannot hurt you without hurting myself, and the only way I can become the best version of me is by supporting you to become the best version of yourself.

The term is often used to describe human relationships, and it can be expanded to include our relationship to all living things as well as our planet, which keeps us alive. Ubuntu begs us to take greater ownership our swellness, as well as the swellness of everything around us...because our safety, our security, our success and our needs depend on the swellness of others and the world around us.

## UBUNTU: Building Social Fabric

When I present Fair Shake in prisons, sometimes people ask me if I can connect them to mentors that can bolster their reentry success. They also ask about opportunities to give back to their community or to support the youth.

These desires reflect our need for belonging, and the philosophy of UBUNTU. When these deep feelings are engaged, they strengthen our social fabric.

But this ideal is difficult to achieve. Today we are discouraged from solving problems together, or trusting one another. We are expected to ask the 'experts' and 'professionals'. We are told to purchase products and services, but we are not educated to understand how to build stronger relationships - even though healthy, caring relationships are vital for building a

safe and satisfying future.

Since this understanding is rarely taught, we need to study, to listen, to be curious, to be open, to reflect, to share our perspective, to care...and then to collaborate with others to conjure and create trust, cooperation, and possibility.

Despite what pundits and politicians promise, no one can "fix" our challenges without our participation.

Once we understand that developing ourselves is vital to developing healthy communities, jobs and relationships, it will be much easier to build a successful democracy that can pay attention to civic life. When we work together to solve problems, we begin to create more of what we want, which has the potential to improve everyone's quality of life.

To encourage people to see a hopeful and convincing picture, I consulted with the author of *The Business of Belief*, Tom Asacker. He reminded me that we are not motivated by logic; we are driven by our beliefs -based on our feelings and experiences. He also told me that we need a clear picture of where we can go, in order to move ourselves toward a goal. When we change our belief of what is possible, we can change our attitude, and when we change our attitude, we change our approach and our ability to solve problems.

When we realize that we must do this together, we realize that no one understands the situation like we do, we realize "we are the ones we've been waiting for." I'm looking forward to building the future with you. Ubuntu!

**What can one person do? They can join others to build our SOCIAL SAFETY NET!**

"I need you to be YOU!...so that I can be me." - Desmond Tutu

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"I want you to be all that you can be, so that I can be all that I can be!" - Desmond Tutu