

GCB Advocacy Training Teacher Training in the Ukhahlamba Drakensberg

by Paul Wallis SC and Penny Bosman

“What has been truly impressive is the thought and effort that has gone in to make the teaching better. The SA Bar probably has the best programme, even though many of us started programmes earlier. This is testament to the SA spirit and the people – leaders of the Bar, tutors and trainers, students and, of course, our irrepressible guinea pigs and piglets! Thank you all so much for the week and more importantly, the warm friendship and memories.”
– *Sreeni Narayanan SC* (Singapore)

GCB Advocacy Training has come a long way since its inception 25 years ago. The journey continued with the combined Teacher Trainer (TT) and Recently Admitted Junior (RAJ) course held at Champagne Sports Resort from 18 to 22 September 2023. For Teacher Training, 40 aspirant trainers (judges, silks and junior counsel of wide ranging experience) left their comfort zones to learn ‘the Method’. A similar number of juniors between zero and three years call hoped to improve their skills.

All this took place under the tutelage of a host of South African trainers assisted by our international friends from Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and England. The presence of international trainers established clearly that South Africa can hold its head high. Thanks must also go to the ‘guinea pigs’ (juniors in their first year of practice) who gave life to their long held acting dreams as witnesses and trainee performers on the TT course.

The RAJ course targeted advocates whose formative years were during, or just after, Covid. Many had only limited

experience in a courtroom so the challenge of preparing a trial from inception together with an appeal and an opposed motion and the heads and advice on evidence to accompany them – all to be delivered within 4 days – was a tall ask. Nonetheless all the candidates rose to the challenge.

In parallel, the aspirant teacher trainers (who were for the most part senior practitioners in no need of being told what they can’t do) were being introduced to the standard training approach of the GCB. Some new innovations proved successful while others still need work.

The scale of programme that the GCB operates is extraordinary. Aside from the support given to constituent bars and these two courses, courses operate at intermediate and advanced levels. These courses are a vital component of the GCB programme to ensure the excellence that sets our members apart in court. But such a programme requires voluntary contributions from members who selflessly give up their time and gift their knowledge at every level, from pupillage to advanced. The constituent bars will be grateful to receive the newly qualified TT candidates into their local faculty.

As always, the last evening culminated in a celebratory gala dinner. The guest speaker, Sandhya Mahabeer SC, focussed on the role that women have played in the profession and the importance of training. Conviviality and collegiality were the order of the day. As the Heritage Day long weekend approached, the best of South African excellence was on display – represented in all its multifaceted forms.

Farewells were eschewed in favour of “until next time”. Hopefully many of the readers will join us then.

