

GCB FUTURE LEADERS' SYMPOSIUM

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by Malebogo Mashishi, Pretoria Bar

On 27 to 28 June 2025, I had the privilege of representing the Pretoria Society of Advocates at the General Council of the Bar of South Africa (GCB) – Future Leaders Symposium held at Protea Hotel Clarens, together with Atlegang Morare-Moroeng, Brendan Smith, and Martin Van Ryneveld.

The purpose of the symposium was to expose future leaders to present debates in the profession and matters affecting common interests. The symposium was aimed at members who, in all probability, will occupy leadership positions at their respective bars within the next five years or so and who will be serving on their bar councils within the foreseeable future in line with GCB circular no.13/2025.



Justice MB Molemela with Mokhele Mojaki, Thabile Ngubeni, Neil Snellenburg SC, Poloko Mokhuoane and André Verhoef.

The President of the Supreme Court of Appeal, Justice Molemela, in her keynote address, spoke about the importance of cultivating excellence in our practices as junior advocates to ensure that justice prevails and that the confidence of the members of society is restored in our justice system. Emphasis was also made on the importance of being proficient leaders even beyond the legal profession, as that is what is required from us as legal practitioners; to be people of integrity and good ethics.

The other incredible speakers and panelists included the chairperson of the GCB, the chairperson of the Free State Society of Advocates, representatives from the State Attorney and South African Revenue Service, as well as a life coach.

This was indeed a necessary and relevant event as I learned so much from the speakers about the profession and the changes currently taking place in the profession.

In conclusion, the symposium was a great opportunity and/or platform that encouraged healthy dialogue and networking among all attendees; and it is my wish that these kinds of opportunities are made available to all members of the profession to ensure that no one is left behind.



THE FUTURE MADE IN CLARENS

by Thabile Ngubeni, Free State Bar

The General Council of the Bar aims to promote and actively develop all matters concerning the teaching and practice of law, as well as the administration of justice, in the interest of the public. Furthermore, the purpose of the GCB is to deal with all matters affecting the profession and also to uphold the interests of advocates in South Africa.

The GCB introduced the Future Leaders' Symposium to expose future leaders to present debates prevalent in the profession, as well as matters affecting the common interests of those in the profession. In order to ensure growth and sustainability, the symposium is aimed at equipping those identified by their respective societies (constituent bars) as potential future leaders.

From 27 to 28 June 2025, the Free State Society of Advocates welcomed 30 advocates identified for leadership from eight provinces to the picturesque town of Clarens in the eastern Free State for the GCB Future Leaders' Symposium. The theme of the symposium was "Cultivating excellence in practice and proficient leaders".

Following a night of networking and a word of welcome from the chairperson of the GCB, Ahditya Kumar Kissoon Singh SC, as well as the chairperson of the Free State Society of Advocates, Neil Snellenburg SC, the symposium commenced.

Kissoon Singh SC and Snellenburg SC imparted invaluable lessons about how to navigate the business side of practice. Mokhele Mojaki, who practices tax law, shared "pearls of wisdom" on how to best engage with our silent partner, SARS and Mr Ganyane Chauke, acting head of the Free State office of the State Attorney (as he then was) shared "The Client's Perspective". A business coach advised on the importance of a "work-life balance", as well as the need for professional assistance in this regard.

The highlight of the symposium was the keynote address by the President of the Supreme Court of Appeal, Justice Mahube Molemela, who presented an inspirational speech under the theme "Cultivating Excellence in Practice and Proficient Leaders". Justice Molemela emphasised that excellence and proficiency can only be obtained through commitment, discipline, an efficient system, together with help from colleagues and the audacity to push boundaries (within the law).

Thabile Ngubeni, together with her team and programme participants collectively contributed to the success of the programme by ensuring that the experience reverberates in leadership of attendees, which serves the interest of the profession and the public.



OUR GREAT ESCAPE TO CLARENS

by Michelle Schoeman, Cape Bar

At a time which only exists when you are in an urgent, or where you have procrastinated yourself into a pickle, we made our way to the airport to fly to Bloem. Out of respect of the hour, and before the flight attendants finished the safety briefing, I immediately fell asleep and was woken by the pilot informing us that we were currently in a holding pattern over Bloem. He said those soothing words, such as “no visibility”, “fog too dense”, “-3°C on the ground” and “might have to divert to Joburg”.

In an effort not to be dramatic, I tried to fall back asleep, thinking a sleeping-limp body would be advantageous in a crash. I also looked over to my side to see Tumi peacefully reading, sitting cross-legged on the seat, and thought, at least her legs wouldn't be flailing about if we crashed. It is a good thing I did not overreact.

As we left the terminal building, we were met with a cold that can only be described as *moer koud* (or “rather chilly” for the more refined folk). I looked at my phone and got a “check-in” message from our administrative officer Henda Beyers-Gersbach saying that it was “apparently very cold in Bloem” and that she just received a message from the GCB to warn the delegates about the cold. Look at the GCB always having our best interests at heart.

The Free State was putting on a show; the road to Clarens was unbelievably pretty, the landscape looked prehistoric. Jan-Hendrik warned me that there were apparently quite a lot of potholes on the road, but I don't think he appreciated that he was speaking to someone from the Eastern Cape. Cape Town has the Boer and Butcher, or Belly of the Beast, and we have The Pothole and Donkey for a reason (#Makhanda_Forever). Also, I don't know what law of physics can be ascribed to it, but rental cars just seem to glide over potholes (don't tell Henda).

Upon our arrival in Clarens, we immediately sought sustenance and went to the highly recommended *Artist's Café*. Ntokozo and I decided that we needed to test the quality of Free State steaks – and damn did they deliver. I wish I could say that we explored the town a bit after lunch, but the truth is we all fell into a wondrous meat coma.

We attended the welcome dinner where we had our first opportunity to meet the other delegates, co-ordinators and panellists. Jan-Hendrik and I had the privilege of seeing someone whom we last saw in Stellenbosch during our pupillage advocacy training regional course (shout out to Yonela Cetywayo [EC Bar, Gqeberha]). This is one of the many reasons why events like advocacy training courses, or GCB symposiums are so important, they solidify networks in an entity which can sometimes feel quite fragmented.



Ahditya K Kissoon Singh SC (Chairperson GCB) and Neil Snellenburg SC (Chairperson of FS Bar).

In testament of speaking to your audience, Kissoon Singh SC (the GCB chair), likened juniors' success at the Bar to *Kung Fu Panda*, and reminded us that Po only grew into the Dragon Warrior after consistent hard work. He also said that it is hard to be an advocate, but it is even harder to give of yourself to the benefit of your colleagues.

Snellenburg SC (Free State Bar chair) gave a panel discussion on “the business of law”. He cautioned us on the costs of setting up practice, and reminded us that we do not need to have the most extensive library, that we should not overcharge or undercut our fees, and that we should, when rendering an invoice, ask ourselves: Can we send ourselves to court?

When asked how one balances the feast/famine phenomenon, he joked: “Fall behind and then you always have work!”

The other panellists were:

- Mr Chauke (Acting Head of State Attorney);
- Adv Mojaki (on SARS) – I was hoping for a cheat sheet on how to minimise tax liabilities, but he mirrored the sentiment from my dad, which is that you should never incur debt to decrease your tax liability. I don't think either of them appreciate that I just want to live my best life; and
- Mrs Mohlamme (Master coach).

Our keynote speaker was Justice Molemela (president of the SCA). Her address was poignant, relevant and thought-provoking.

Below are just some of the notes I took during her address:

- Leadership is the art of knowing when to bow, when to stand tall and when to dance with the others;
- No pillow is as soft as a clean conscience;
- Try not to take things personally, no one is infallible;
- Drop a rope for your junior colleagues – lift as you rise; and
- The three tips to being a good advocate: Preparation, preparation and preparation.

We are truly grateful to the GCB and Free State Bar for organising and hosting the symposium, and special thanks to advocate Thabile Ngubeni who was the convenor.

Thank you to the Cape Bar for the privilege of allowing us to attend, and thank you to Henda Beyers-Gersbach for organising everything.