Transformation is about change and you can rarely achieve change without encountering resistance. Change calls for paradigm shifts and for a lot of introspection from various parties – this is an enormous challenge. In my time I’ve had to deal with numerous challenges, not just from external parties but also in changing how I viewed things. Our history has given us – men and women of all races – a lot of baggage to deal with, however, we must now be ready to enter this transformational period ready to talk about those issues and to reach a common vision for our country.

In addition to dealing with issues from our past, transformation has brought along with it various expectations and fears for the future. Expectations for those who thought things would change for the better overnight and fears for those who thought they would lose everything overnight. Most people misunderstand the potential of transformation – seeing it as an event rather than for what it is – a process.

**Holistic processes**

We need to be cautious in our approach to transformational change, which is basically about concentrating on the economic transformation in this country. We’ve achieved political transformation, now how do we create social and economic change to level the playing field for all citizens?

When we start talking about transformation it is primarily understood to be a process of change at business or government levels. But transforming a corporate is only half the battle. I think we have to look beyond that and ask ourselves – how do we reach those on the ground? You have to look holistically – you can’t fix one area of society and think you transformed it all.

True transformation is looking at the standard and quality of living, but even more importantly it is about the soul and spirit of the people, and how they relate to others. If we get to the point where everyone has
enough money to survive, then we must simultaneously ensure that people have regained their dignity and their ability to love themselves and others. Only then will the gains made through transformation be sustainable.

**Groundedness**

It’s a mistake to think it’s just about physical needs – it goes far beyond economic needs. One only has to look at the social ills of this country to know that people need more than money in their pockets. It is for this reason that Edcon has taken its transformational efforts beyond its business and made every attempt to reach the people on the ground. The social spending the group undertakes has played a pivotal role in ensuring that Edcon is one of only 51 companies to be listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange’s Social Responsible Investing Index.

To date one of our largest undertakings has been the Jet Community Awards.

**Heroic women**

The winners in the Jet Community Awards are very often women, which I find enormously encouraging. One reason for their dominance in the awards is that women run most NGOs. It is clear then that when we look at leadership we need to look holistically at formal and informal structures – we have good business leadership certainly, but we have women transforming communities and producing our leaders; somewhere a woman planted the seed for all that came afterwards. Honouring these heroic women means we are succeeding in recognising an often-neglected group of society and personally I’m very passionate about uplifting women.

It is women who have struggled the most in this country and none have been left untainted by the past. Yet, it is black women who have been – and continue to be – the most disadvantaged, especially if we talk about women in the rural areas. I feel very strongly that when you look at rectifying a situation you deal with the most serious issues first – women are the majority of the population but we are a long way from reflecting that in the workplace or government, in leadership positions.

The biggest challenge is perhaps in answering the question: How do you define yourself? Do you go into the corporate world and get assimilated into that culture and lose part of yourself, or do you stay true to yourself and add value through your uniqueness? It’s a concern that the majority of women go into boardrooms and are soon no different from anyone else at the table. The women who are honoured in the Jet Community Awards are role models in their communities whose transformational efforts have influenced the way things are done. These are women being true to themselves.

I’m not a feminist, I am a ‘womanist’, I am proud to be a mother and very proud to be a woman. I do – and will continue to – bring my emotions to the table. You cannot change a nation without having a deep emotional response to desperate poverty, domestic violence, and a society that has produced men that are capable of raping women and children. Unless I feel the pain and cry over these things I will not be able to influence their change and put systems in place to stop these horrors from happening.

**Alternative views**

Everything is not rands and cents – when you deal with people you have to respond as the person you are. That doesn’t make you weak it means you are different in your approach. That is what we need, we need new different answers, and society at this point has had only the same answer provided from one viewpoint. To provide an alternative view, women must stand firm and be confident of the value they add.

It starts with being proud to be mothers, as mothers we will raise different leaders. A woman may not be ruling this country but she gave birth to and raised the man in power. Our generation of mothers is able to be a different kind of parent – especially to our daughters – one of whom might one day lead the country.

In the end it is not about equality it is about recognising the difference. Being equal to a man is quite frankly an insult – who knows if, given the opportunity, I can’t be better than anyone who came before? That’s what we need in this country, we don’t need a lot of people that are the same. Transformation should be about enabling people to be the best they can be and in doing so we become a better team – your uniqueness adds to my thinking and passion.

“True transformation is looking at the standard and quality of living, but even more importantly it is about the soul and spirit of the people, and how they relate to others.”