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**PRESS RELEASE**

**22 October 2018**

**UP student wins Top Human Resources Student in South Africa award**

When Frank Wilkinson failed to qualify for university entrance with his original matric results, he buckled down and prepared himself to take Cambridge A-level exams in a matter of months. Now he’s a third-year student at the University of Pretoria (UP), and he’s just won an award for being the Top Human Resources Student in South Africa.

Wilkinson represented UP at a function organised by the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP), where he was awarded the National Human Resources Management Student Excellence Award. He competed against four other finalists, from the University of Johannesburg, Walter Sisulu University, Vaal University of Technology, and Nelson Mandela University.

Elated at winning the award, Wilkinson explained that each university nominates their top human resources student, who then competes in a series of challenges. A panel of judges assesses and selects the top students in the country, based on academic achievement, an impromptu presentation, extracurricular activities, and an interview.

“This year, the candidates were asked to present on ‘How should HR prepare for the future world of work in Industry 4.0.’ With just two hours of preparation time, the students were asked to present to an audience of human resources professionals and academics with decades of knowledge and experience,” Wilkinson said. “The level of competition was incredibly high.”

The results were announced at a gala dinner sponsored by Juta, where Wilkinson was recognised as the top human resources student in South Africa. He won a cash prize of R15 000, and the latest human resources textbook from Juta. He will also get to speak at the 6th National Human Resources Standards Summit at the end of the year, where the focus will be on the fourth industrial revolution and its impact on human resources.

“I cannot tell you what a privilege it has been to represent my university at this level,” Wilkinson said. “I always knew that UP was a top tier institution, but this has cemented in my mind that the education here is as good as it gets. I have to admit that I was not certain of the outcome, and I was extremely nervous right up until the point my name was announced. We weren’t able to see the presentations of the candidates before us, and those that followed me were of extremely high quality.”

Wilkinson expressed his gratitude to UP’s human resources department, “which has been an incredible base of support for me and has equipped me perfectly for the competition, and no doubt for the workplace. I must however give special mention to Sakkie van Greunen, my human resources lecturer in my final year. He has been a huge inspiration for me. His passion and enthusiasm for the profession are unparalleled, and the way he cares for us as students is far beyond the call of duty.”

Wilkinson said he almost did not make it into university. “While I was at school, in Zimbabwe, I did not work hard enough. I did not achieve my potential. I was unable to attend university with my results, and my dreams were way out of reach. It was a serious wake-up call, and I have learnt my lesson.”

After those initial results, he had to teach himself the Cambridge equivalent of matric (AS and A-levels), a two-year syllabus, and write exams in a matter of months. “To do this I had to break down the course into daily goals and force myself to knuckle down and work. It was the hardest I had ever had to work, but the results were more than worth it. Not only did they grant me admission into my university of choice, they also showed me what I was capable of. All this led to my university career. I applied what I had learnt to my daily life at university, and as a result I was the top student from the first year.”

When he completes his degree in human resources (in December 2018), Wilkinson intends to head straight into the workplace. “There is a good chance I will come back to do my post graduate-studies, but right now I want to get as much practical experience as I can. And though I know it’s a terrible cliché, I really want to make an impact.” He said the human resources profession has a bad reputation in the workplace. “People in human resources are often thought of as oversensitive, bureaucratic paper-pushers. I intend to steer HR in a new direction. The way I see it, our job is literally to make people happy. A happy workforce is an effective workforce. If you dread work, you will find it tedious, and you are unlikely to be productive.”

“On the other hand, if you are engaged at work, if you are challenged and you feel valued by your employers, you are much more likely to be committed and give your best every day. There are many ways in which we can achieve this, but we first need to stop seeing employees as resources to be maximised before depletion, but rather as assets to be maintained and cared for so that they increase in value.”

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