

[Following are comments written from a talk given in Iowa in about 2004 by Taddy Blecher, co-founder of CIDA. The miraculous and world famous CIDA, is a university in South Africa that gives the poorest students in the country an almost free education]

Creating a World Class University from Nothing

...Apartheid structured this by taking math out of schools. Millions of blacks had no math, no science. This 'education' was cruel." Taddy and four friends decided to create South Africa's first FREE university. Knowing nothing of how to start a university, they talked to professors at other universities, who said you need much money.

"Fifty CEOs of companies slammed their doors on us. It was the most insane idea they had ever heard. We had no books, no computers, no teachers, no buildings. "An old saying kept coming to mind: 'Just begin to weave, and God will provide the thread.' "You don't have any thread. You just have a desire deep inside your heart. You have a feeling in every cell of your body: this is what you have to do. So you just start. Just out of nothing..."

"We wrote to 350 schools. After two weeks, we had five students who wanted to go to this imaginary university that did not exist. "Soon we had ten, twenty, forty applications. We used my old company's fax machine (we didn't have our own). Eventually four thousand students applied... to a university which did not exist." People phoned to ask, "Where IS this university?" "Phone us in a week, and we'll tell you at which building we will register your child."

Taddy spent many sleepless nights. "Two weeks before school was to begin, we got a building downtown. It was terribly dark inside -- awful. On the fifth floor, we found four hundred chairs. So we invited 350 students.

"We talked of consciousness-based education. And why all the other universities, with such huge buildings, etc. -- didn't matter. This was the really great university. It didn't matter that we had no library, computers -- those things are peripheral.

"To teach about computers, we made 250 photocopies of a computer keyboard. We taught every student to type on a piece of paper. For three years in a row, we taught students to type on a piece of paper. "We created things out of nothing. We had no textbooks, so we used magazines. Using donated financial magazines, we learned investments, finance, English, stock markets. This was their only textbook so students really appreciated it.

"There was so much energy in our school, you cannot imagine. The feeling -- I never felt anything like it. All these students -- no nothing. No library. All these students coming every day to university -- and so happy. Just meditating every day, studying the Science of Creative Intelligence." These kids came from deep rural areas, squatter camps. In every case, they were the first in their family that had ever been to university. In South

Africa, 97% of adults never go to college. This was the chance of a lifetime. Their village depended on them. We brought one student from every village. We wanted to bring knowledge back to every village – consciousness-based knowledge, entrepreneurship knowledge... "There was so much suffering in these villages. But now our graduates go back to teach their village... how to create businesses, farm, manage money..."

"Five years later, we have five buildings. Another six buildings were donated, but we gave them back. We have 1400 computers. "We now have a foundation college, where students come and live. All the college's tutors are our graduates.

First Graduation

"At our first graduation, we had a thousand parents and family members. Our students had taught 500,000 people around South Africa how to build businesses, etc. -- now they were graduating. Our first graduation was so touching -- I almost cried. I saw a thousand faces of parents whose lives were changed by our education. Their whole villages were changed. In the middle of graduation, the students couldn't contain themselves anymore; they all got up to sing. We danced and sang for fifteen minutes in the middle of graduation -- on prime time TV. This had never happened at a South Africa graduation."

"Most parents/grandparents knew no English. They held our hands and cried. Their children now worked at Big-Three automakers, big banks, etc., earning huge salaries. "These parents earn maybe 300 Rand a month. Their child now earned 12,000 a month. We calculated: For every Rand that goes to our education, 200 Rand goes to poor South Africans. "These kids came in unemployed. Nobody believed in them. They were down and out. We gave them this education, and they became enlightened, bright citizens with wonderful jobs.

"A Big-Three automaker gave four students a shot at a one- year contract. If they didn't do well, they would be out. After a year, the firm gave all four... full-time jobs, permanent contracts. Three got company cars. "We didn't teach auditing, but one student joined the automaker's auditing department. He got promoted three levels. "In their first year in jobs, these students earned four times the entire cost of their four-year education. Over the forty years of their working lives, they will earn two hundred times what it cost to educate them.

Full Accreditation for CIDA

"Last year we miraculously got our full accreditation. You have no idea how hard it was. Especially for people who knew nothing about running a university. We just made it up as we went along. We came up with two hundred new ideas as we went along. "Now everyone loves our ideas: students running the whole campus; the ways we teach; the ways we use technology. We've got educational innovations, financing innovations, access innovations...

"We won the award for the most innovative organization in the whole country. A huge, prestigious award. Seven hundred companies compete every year: giant telecoms, cell phone companies, I.T. companies. It has never NOT been won by an I.T. company. We

were the first. Nelson Mandela heard of this, so we got to see him again. He absolutely loves what we are doing. He was so excited. We won multiple other awards.

"Six years ago, South Africa had 1200 higher-education institutions. After they introduced the new accreditation process, 800 universities closed. Only 400 continued. Of these, only ninety got accredited. Only five got accredited for undergraduate business degree -- we were one of them. "To get accredited took four long years, slaving away, eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. Now our university is a household name in South Africa, especially in poor areas.

"This is South Africa's only free university. The government does not understand how we have done it. No one understands how we have done it. "Our kids are doing brilliantly. Many visitors come in, spend time with our students, and start crying. They can't believe it. "All our 1350 kids have learned TM. Every day we have a powerful group program. You feel it when you enter the building.

"Really this just arose from the mud. Our students come from nothing. If you meet them, you can't imagine that they have achieved what they achieved." "When they come in, English is their fourth or fifth language. They're so shy. They know no one. "They have heard their whole lives they are nobody. So we get them into every competition we can think of. Every day we tell them: 'Man is made in the image of God. You are the greatest people that ever walked the earth.'

"We had some \$10 bikes donated. In big races, people ride \$1,000 or \$10,000 bikes. One of our students got a map and a light...and (without our knowledge) bicycled 300 miles to compete in a race. "He got lost, and was exhausted when the 100 kilometer race STARTED. He finished in the top ten, of seven thousand competitors. With a \$10 bike. He had no money for lodging, so he immediately bicycled, day and night -- his big trophy tucked in his shirt -- the 300 miles home.

CIDA Students Sweep Microsoft Competition

"In 2004, a Microsoft competition sought the top person on earth in Microsoft Word and Excel. Forty-seven of our students competed in this, against thousands of top students from other South African universities.

"Our students scored highest in the whole country, in both Word and Excel. These students had never touched a computer. They had learned only on a piece of paper. Microsoft flew them to France, where a little girl of ours came in third in all of Europe.

The Dalai Lama Visits CIDA

"The Dalai Lama visited us. We put a thousand students in front of him. He was to stay forty minutes. After ten minutes he told his helpers, 'Cancel my other appointments. I am not leaving.'

"He stayed three hours. At the end he held my arm and said, 'These students are so BRIGHT.'

"He had never seen children like this. We told him about TM and Maharishi's programs.

He said this was his favorite thing in South Africa.

"Now the Dalai Lama himself personally sponsors a student to come to CIDA. The Dalai Lama told us a black friend... had said 'black people can never be as intelligent as whites.' He had come to know that, and given up trying." The Dalai Lama said, "You are absolutely wrong." To prove it, the Dalai Lama is sponsoring this man's son to go to CIDA. The Dalai Lama insisted on paying the full fees for this boy.

Oprah Visits CIDA

2003: Taddy got a call: "Oprah is coming to visit you." Taddy: "Oprah who?"

"Oprah Winfrey came with an entourage. We put her upstairs with ten young sidhas [advanced meditators]. After an hour, I walked in. Oprah was shining, excited. She had never heard young people talk like this. She kept saying, 'But how could you know that?' "They told her: 'We all do Transcendental Meditation.' Oprah: 'TM? That is so fantastic.' From that moment on, that's all Oprah spoke about. She loves TM."

"She talked to giant groups of students. All she talked about was how she meditates every day. We don't know if she does TM. She went on and on about meditation. "She wanted to fund us because we have meditation. She gave us \$1.3 million to build a ladies residence."

"2004: Oprah turned fifty. Her staff said her favorite thing in the last few years was our little university. Her staff's birthday present: checks for \$4,000 and \$10,000, to sponsor students in Oprah's name to come to our university.

"Will this model work in America? I don't know. But we could find something. Certainly it's possible. We just have to desire it enough, and it will come.