

Ability is not defined by age

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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Kershen Pillay does not believe in luck. "I believe in working hard consistently and always staying focused on sharpening my skill. As an entrepreneur you have to be open to listening, learning and constantly developing yourself." And it's this strong work ethic and tenacity that saw the young Durban entrepreneur become CEO of Masifunde Foundation at the tender age of 27, and nominated in the Top Performing Entrepreneur category of 2017 National Business Awards.



Kershen Pillay, CEO of Masifunde Foundation

This Entrepreneur Month, we chatted with Pillay about his journey so far, what drives him and where he sees his future taking him.

■ ***Tell us a bit about yourself and Masifunde Training Centre...***

In 2014, at the age of 27, I stepped into my role as CEO of Masifunde Training Centre, an accredited training provider offering qualifications in the Financial Services Sector. This company was started in 2005, and had only four employees and 400 learners on its database at the time. Within 24 months, the organisation swelled from four employees and 400 students to nearly 30 members of staff and 2,000 students.

The company has certainly grown since then. Today it is recognised as a leading player on Africa's skills and training stage, receiving the recognition as a *Finalist for the Fast Growth Category* at the National Business Awards 2017.

We believe that the financial services industry and its stakeholders have a responsibility towards the betterment of this country. We have therefore created various programs and opportunities for young South Africans to gain access to the financial services industry. Our priority is to provide financial education to individuals who cannot access education at the metropolises/ urban areas. This will in turn reduce unemployment and bridge the skills gap in South Africa.

■ ***What are some of the challenges you've faced getting started and how did you overcome them?***

In the beginning of my journey as a CEO, individuals did not take me seriously in my role, due to my age and the fact that I did not fit into the mould of a CEO. However, through my competency and perseverance, I was able to win over their confidence and prove that competence and ability are not defined by age.

■ ***What are the best and worst things about being an entrepreneur?***

The best thing is the growth and development that you experience on a daily basis.

The worst thing is the fear of failure that you experience before the start of a new project/venture. I have learnt, over the years, to use this 'fear' to motivate me.

■ ***What's the most valuable lesson you've learned so far?***

Success is a continuous journey. You cannot hit one level of success and become complacent, as it is an ever-evolving journey. Basking in yesterday's success is counter-productive. Similarly, when faced with adversity, dwelling on it, is also counter-productive. I have learnt that in both good and in challenging times never focus on the "noise", just your craft.

■ ***You were recently nominated for 2017 National Business Awards in the Top Performing Entrepreneur category – what does this recognition mean to you?***

This recognition gives me and my company a sense of deep-rooted pride knowing that we are active contributors to economic expansion, the green agenda, and most importantly, quality education for all South Africans, regardless of colour and creed.

■ ***Where do you see yourself in five years?***

Being an active contributor to the knowledge economy.

I see myself contributing specifically to the Financial Services Industry's educational and employment opportunities. I plan to enter a minimum of 10,000 individuals into the Financial Services Sector, and upskill individuals currently in the sector.

I will continue to support the African scholarship.

On a personal level, I will continue to inspire others to develop the best version of themselves whilst developing the best version of myself.

■ ***What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs just starting out?***

Whilst our industries and country are experiencing significant changes and challenges, it is more important, now more than ever, for us to stay abreast of these changes, whilst remembering not to be distracted by them and focus on sharpening our own skills.

I read this some years ago, and would like to highlight this to entrepreneurs: "Don't let compliments go to your head and don't let complaints go to your heart."

Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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