

Wits University empowers informal traders

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Over a hundred informal traders recently gathered at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg to get more information about registering their businesses.

They were attending an exhibition, at Wits's Senate House in Braamfontein recently, set up for traders taking the Grow Your Business course, according to the city's official website.

"The intention is to provide exhibitors with the opportunity to show informal traders what support is available in general for small, medium and micro enterprises [SMMEs], as well as to market specific products," said Xolani Nxumalo, the deputy director of the city's SMME development and support unit.

Traders received information on how to register their businesses, how and where to receive financial help and the by-laws governing street trading.

Metro police's spokesperson, Superintendent Wayne Minnaar, said the metro police wanted to see these small businesses grow but explained that they also had a duty to ensure that citizens' lives were not endangered in the process.

"We as the metro police ... wish you success, but at the same time we have a job to make sure that everyone obeys the law."

By the law

Some of the by-laws include:

- A minimum width of 1,5 metres must be open on the pavement for pedestrian movement;
- All property must be removed at the end of the day's activities, other than structures permitted by the council;
- Goods must not be displayed on properties or buildings without the owners' permission;
- Goods must not be stored in manholes, storm water drains, public toilets, bus shelters or trees; and
- Trading may not take place in areas declared by the council as being prohibited for trading.

The traders heard that if they did not comply with the by-laws, metro police officers "are left with no choice but to take the stock".

However, Minnaar did try to set their minds at ease, saying that the new seal bag system was being used to keep their

stock safe.

"After your stock is taken from you ... it is placed inside a bag with a zip and then the bag is zipped so that your stock is not stolen."

Other city stakeholders at the exhibition were the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market, Joburg Water, the environmental health department, the South African Revenue Services (SARS), the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and the financial service providers Absa and FNB.

The environmental health department's Flavia Masekwameng said: "We are concerned with traders who sell cooked food and second-hand clothes, and informal hairdressers on the streets as these present public health hazards and nuisances."

Tax registration

Tshepo Ntshedi, from the SARS, explained that traders had to register their businesses so that they got a tax number. Registering for a tax number, however, did not necessarily mean that owners must pay tax.

"If your profit is below R46,000 a year, you do not have to pay tax but you still have a responsibility and obligation to declare your profit."

Benefits

Traders said they benefited from the course. Linnat Rabopape, a clothing trader from Alexandra, said: "This course was right because it has taught me a lot of things about running my own business and now I know a lot of things I did not know about the business industry."

She was grateful that the metro police had explained the by-laws for street trading. "I did not know much about these by-laws, so now that I have more information, I know what to do so that I do not get into trouble with the law."

Rousse Chibanda, a photographer from Berea, was also impressed by the course. "This course has helped me a lot because now I know how to separate my business money and my salary. I also got knowledge on strategic marketing and how to create [relationships] with customers and suppliers."

Through attending the course, he got new business ideas and was no longer only a photographer.

He also now sold clothes and watches and was growing his photography business.

Course prerequisites

The city's Nxumalo said that for traders to qualify for the course, they must have an informal trading business and they must also be able to read and write.

Those who were not able to read and write but had an informal trading business, were given adult basic education and training, or Abet, classes for a year, at which they were taught to read and write.

Once this was completed, they were able to attend the Grow Your Business course.

The course is aimed at informal traders, teaching them about marketing, relevant by-laws and other pertinent information.

It is run by the city in conjunction with the university. The course has been running for six months on weekends at Wits and the exhibition was the last meeting for the traders.

They will receive certificates for completing it on 20 July at a ceremony at the university.

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