

Fast-track innovation with design-thinking methodology

 By Leigh Andrews

23 Nov 2017

Lethabo Motsoaledi and Matthew Westaway are the dynamic engineering-educated duo and joint CEOs behind disruptive intelligence innovation studio, Motsoaledi & West. Here's why design thinking is a must for any business.



Motsoaledi and West in action.

Motsoaledi and Westaway are fresh-faced, bright eyed and bushy tailed despite only logging four hours of sleep the night before. They constantly challenge the status quo, thrive on deadlines and energy drinks and are fans on Elon Musk's '100-hour work week' ideal for true innovation.

Relatively new to the working world, these two have their heads screwed on straight and are clearly firing on all cylinders. Having spent a weekend pinning down their vision and mission for Motsoaledi & West or M&M, they've also taken their 'The Hourglass Project' innovation to many corporates and had success with another innovation, "Hello Baby 3D Prints", at the recent Mama Magic expo. It's proof of their exemplary work ethic and belief that there is always a better way makes the world a better place.

Take Motsoaledi, for example. And yet she almost went the consulting route, which many graduates do as it's certain pay if you aren't sure of your career path. Just 24 years old, this 2015 Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Fellow and 2016 Mandela Rhodes scholar has since made the 2017 lists of *Mail & Guardian's* Top 200 Young South Africans, *Destiny Magazine's* Power of 40 – announced on 21 November 2017, and *Inspiring Fifty's* SA Women in tech.

On her accomplishments, Motsoaledi says she's keen on inspiring women in tech, as “men have been raised to be go-getters, women still need that push.” It's about putting yourself out there, and undoing the years of learning to be quiet.

And M&W's innovation solutions is part of that strive for success. They're currently based on the grounds of Montebello Design Centre in Newlands – itself humming with the soft thrum of innovation as entrepreneurs work at this space supporting local art, craft and design. Westaway explains M&W formed as they noticed a distinct lack of knowledge about the implications of design thinking, particularly among corporate SA, where the biggest pain point is that it takes forever to take something new to market.



Motsoaledi and West in action.

As a result, the all-important *ideation phase* usually comes at end. Westaway explains that they formed M&W out of a passion for challenging the status quo particularly amongst corporates where the needs of customers are seldom taking into consideration.

This is where design thinking flips the script, as M&W start with understanding the real human needs and desires, by immersing themselves in their clients' environment, before ideating for solutions. Not everyone needs to be pushed through the whole design thinking cycle, so they see where their client fits in and have services for each stage of the cycle.

It's quite simply about empathising with the customer to find their specific needs and decide on which need can be satisfied within certain business constraints. defining the real problem at hand.

Weaving design thinking into the legacy corporate world

It's a good, brave move as Motsoaledi and Westaway have been able to grow their Innovation Studio without a big team behind the scenes doing the A-Z of business – what you see is what you get for now, plus some smart AI algorithms that they developed during their studies to automate previously time-intensive tasks, which allows for some much-needed creative time.

“ M&Wers hard at work [#designthinking](#) [#motsoaledi&west](#) [pic.twitter.com/kP4LEVGeZ](#) — Matt Westaway (@WestawayWest) [October 11, 2017](#) ”

They're a startup well-acquainted with the reality of pulling all-nighters to get the job done by presenting robust, quality findings from analysing lengthy customer insight interviews for clients based on the above.

That's not quite as arduous as it sounds though, as they have a handy transcription app tool at hand and use an algorithm to pick up key topics with 'drag and drop' functionality into the basic report skeleton – both self-devised, of course – to speed up the process. Westaway says this is 'data brought to life', as the natural language processing allows for qualitative analysis without needing to read every word of the interview. It's genius and proves that design thinking is more than a buzzword. Rather, it's a methodology to fast-track innovation in the current customer-centric world.

On how they differentiate themselves from other innovation studios, they explain that they are driven by their purpose to always challenge the status quo, and find the better way of doing things. This is evident in their use of algorithms to simplify innovation and the story of their startup life.

The reality of the entrepreneurial 'broke point'

Entrepreneurs need fear to drive them because when you have the most to lose, that's when you get the most done. Throughout varsity, the two saw entrepreneurs speaking to them about 'the broke point'.



Motsoaledi and West in action.

Westaway says, "Truth to the word it happened, we were down to our last R20 for a loaf of bread and a packet of chips."

With their first hourglass, an interactive tech-enabled art piece that stands out from digital clutter and helps corporates

encourage and track participation in Employee Volunteerism Programmes (EVPs) through a unique Internet Of Things (IoT) platform, there was no signed order and no money, and the material alone cost over R100,000.

“ [#SPW2017 #BeExceptional](#) motsoaledi & west is the most creative stand at the [#ESDexpo2017GP](#)
[pic.twitter.com/FbyCelYqOz](#)— Thandanani (@thandakhoza) [September 20, 2017](#) ”

But they buckled down and made it through. The project is now powered by Vodacom, with their framed 3D baby ultrasound scan prints part of Pampers Hello Baby 3D Prints and the Netcare Hello Baby Family Journal.



Motsoaledi and West in action.

Motsoaledi wraps up our discussion by describing entrepreneurship as a rollercoaster that's constantly going up, they're used to it now and need that stress to function. Her advice to others in the space is to focus and try everything, as the risk of failing on just one thing is huge.

Talk about an impressive young duo – accomplished, grounded and oh-so humble. I'm sure we will hear their names pop up on the business radar much more frequently in the years to come. Until then, visit their websites <https://www.motsoalediwest.com/>, <https://www.thehourglassproject.co.za/>, <https://www.hellobaby3dprints.com/> and follow their latest updates on Twitter: [@ThabsMotsoaledi](#) | [@WestawayWest](#)

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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