

Whatever it takes

'We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit' - Aristotle.

 By Courtney Bentley 26 Sep 2013

I'm often asked what it took to start my companies from scratch in South Africa. Many people have convoluted ideas and misconceptions about starting their own companies. I've heard many things from Lean approaches, Agile methods to waterfall type business plans that run for six months.

I remember when I started my first business. I was 19 and had absolutely no clue about business plans, waterfall strategies or any other bizarre methods. There's one thing though that's remained with me throughout my journey of continued learning. Nothing matters more than heart. You **HAVE** to have heart more than any other trait.

It's hard work

Starting any business, no matter how big or small, is very hard work. However South Africa is one of the easiest places to start a business. According to the World Economic Forum, South Africa is ranked number 52 out of 144 countries surveyed in the Global Competitive Index. We have a superb banking system, ever improving infrastructure and excellent communication resources.

The greatest challenge a start-up faces in Africa is the lack of skilled human capital. I have all too often been in meetings where I've heard there has never been more funding than what is currently available to entrepreneurs. However, if you don't have the right people on your team, you're not going to get anywhere cannot emphasise enough the importance of the right personnel. I believe this is the number one reason most start-ups fail. Combined with some poor advice and unsustainable financial models prove fatal to a young business.

Finding the right team can take time

Don't despair, the keys to success are not far away. My first comment related to heart. It takes heart to get phenomenal team together. I have started two new businesses within the mobile education and school supplies field. My quest to find the right team has taken me two years... I don't know too many people who are willing to spend two years looking for people you don't even know exist!

As a small business the greatest asset you have is agility. The ability to move at a rapid pace with the capability to make big or small changes at high speed. Once you realise this strength coupled with an outstanding team and sound advice there's nothing stopping you.

If you're not aware I'm a mobile fanatic. I believe the power mobile technology has to offer is still yet to be realised. The mere fact you can code on some handheld devices is a clear indication of the power a fully functional mobile computing device has. Don't be fooled by brand. That means nothing in the information age we're living in. Choose devices that best support the objectives you're trying to achieve. And make sure you align yourself with people who have a similar point of view.

Many operating systems confine their developers and users to suit their market. So as an SME I'd

recommend making use of as many cloud based services as possible and use them with the most powerful mobile device you can get. Data prices are coming down all the time so the barrier to entry is lowering regularly. This type of approach maximises your use of time and location, whilst providing you with the online tools that can enable basic and some advanced services for you and your team.

Why can't big business help small business?

Running three companies means I have limited time and have to be in many places at once. With the efficient use of my devices and my affinity to cloud services this enables me to provide my expertise where needed the most and apply input remotely if needed online, wherever I may be in the world.

The changes I'd really like to see in the start-up and SME world are access to the right driven people who really want to make a valuable contribution to your business. Often for business to support a start-up company they need insight from dynamic young entrepreneurs to guide them in what start-ups need and the kind of services they would most benefit from.

If we can get this right with big business helping small business, South Africa's entrepreneurs will be growing at a far more competitive rate.

ABOUT COURTNEY BENTLEY

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