

How big business can help accelerate the success of entrepreneurs

The recent Worker's Day was observed by many countries around the world to highlight the importance of good employment standards and fair labour practices. However, with the last official figure for South Africa's high unemployment rate standing at 24.5% in Q4 2015, Worker's Day is also a good time for reflection, and more important action, on what can be done to assist those who do not have regular work to join the ranks of the employed.

By [Khululiwe Mabaso](#) 5 May 2016



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Entrepreneurship has long been touted as a potential solution to our employment crisis. We are led to believe that the innate creativity and enthusiasm of South Africans means that we are ideally suited to be small business owners. While we may indeed have an abundance of innovative and dedicated individuals in our country, resourcefulness alone does not guarantee success. After all, five out of seven small businesses in South Africa fail after less than two years in operation.

The reasons behind the failure of these startups are multiple, but essentially boil down to three core causes – no funding, poor access to markets, and lack of experience, knowledge, and support. It would seem that starting a business is relatively easy, but keeping it running steadily and profitably takes skill and practice. Keeping this in mind, in October 2015, Procter & Gamble (P&G) started a business skills academy, the P&G Leadership College, which would serve as a business incubator for a few selected entrepreneurs, some of whom were in the P&G supply chain.

Phumlani Kunene, 21 Queens Laundry & Dry Cleaner

One of these entrepreneurs is Phumlani Kunene, owner of 21 Queens Laundry & Dry Cleaner in Alexandra. Living in an informal settlement where many residents had no running water, Phumlani saw a need in his community for a reliable and quick laundering service. Nearly two and a half years later, Phumlani now has three washing machines and three dryers that he uses for his business, and employs his mother, brother, sister and his aunt at 21 Queens.

“I thought I knew what it meant to run a business,” says Phumlani. “But the knowledge and information I received at the P&G Leadership College made me realise that having your own company is much more than just providing a service to customers.” The classes are given by P&G employees, who are experts in their respective fields, and other small business owners, who know only too well the pitfalls of going at it alone. The subjects discussed include a wide range of topics – from market research to finance to strategy to compliance to leadership.

Phumlani found that the financial aspects of the programme, as well as the marketing modules, were the most valuable for him. “The college emphasised the importance of keeping records, registering with the necessary regulatory bodies, and how to manage your accounts. I was also made aware of how researching what your customers want and marketing to them appropriately can be key in making your business successful.”

In the near future, Phumlani plans to take 21 Queens’ services to businesses and hotels. He also hopes to find companies who can sponsor the laundry needs of non-profit organisations and charities. Even with the P&G Leadership College course ending in May, he will still have regular mentoring sessions in order to help him achieve his business goals. “I know that my trainers will still give me the support and advice I need to grow 21 Queens.”

Busi Skenjane, BSK Marketing

Having run her marketing and promotions agency successfully for 12 years, one may think that Busi Skenjane would have already learned everything there is to know about entrepreneurship. But Busi firmly believes that one should always take advantage of any opportunity to gain knowledge, and so she joined the first cohort of students last year in October at the P&G Leadership College.

Busi’s company specialises in stokvels, from activations for brands, to educational programmes for stokvel members, to publishing niche magazines on the topic. She has even established her own academy for people interested in running their own stokvel and covers subjects like basic financial literacy, investments and operations management.

Yet her eight months with the P&G Leadership College still had many useful learnings for her. “I employ around ten people at any given time, and I have many staff on my books in the course of a year due to the nature of my business. But the course taught me how to handle my HR function far more efficiently, such as implementing policies. It also made me aware of other areas I may have been neglecting, such as finance” explains Busi.

What particularly resonates with Busi about what she learned was that she realised she could have done so much more with BSK Marketing over the past 12 years, if she was equipped with the skills that the P&G Leadership College taught her. “Knowledge and expertise are invaluable, and I believe that more entrepreneurs need to be empowered with this so that they can navigate their business to success.” Busi’s future plans include expanding BSK into a ‘one-stop shop’ for marketers interested in stokvels.

Looking ahead

After nearly eight months of classes, our first group of entrepreneurs will be giving their final presentations next week, where they will share their future plans for their businesses, based on what they have learned in the past eight months at the college. They will continue to have regular mentoring sessions with one of the

trainers to ensure that they remain focused.

Soon we will welcome a new cohort of small business owners and, hopefully, provide more entrepreneurs with the tools they need to succeed. If entrepreneurship is indeed going to be a tool to address unemployment in South Africa, then it is vital that big business share their skills and expertise so that small companies have a better chance of success.

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