

IEDC alumni Success Story



A School with a View

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Mpho Sekwele, Mandela Washington Fellow, EMBA, 2017, South Africa

»STAND UP FOR THE GREATER GOOD«

Executive MBA transforms lives of Alumni. Especially at IEDC, EMBA is a truly memorable and impactful learning experience that adds value, personally and professionally. It is not just about salary increase and promotion, in the first place enrolling in EMBA opens the world to endless possibilities. Sometimes Alumni make big steps already before the graduation. One of them is Mpho Sekwele from Cape Town, profiled among South Africa's 200 Young Leaders by the Mail and Guardian last year. When she started her studies at IEDC, she was a Retail Planning Manager at The Foschini Group, a South African clothing retail company with 2500 stores across 20 retail brands. But then – EMBA happened.

"I have met such amazing people on the programme. I have subsequently left my job, started a new leaf in social entrepreneurship and the journey is incredible," sums up Mpho. She is a 2017 Mandela Washington Fellow for Young African Leaders Initiative, who spent 10 years of her career in different retail industries: clothing, footwear, fast moving consumer goods and foods. She has worked for the biggest Blue Chip Retail companies within South Africa with exposure to other African markets. Mpho is also a co-founding member of Bantu Hikers, an outreach hiking group connecting professionals with disadvantaged young people for mentorship. Upon completion of the Executive MBA and Mandela Washington Fellowship, she plans on continuing to help develop young people and creating entrepreneurial opportunities, where African products and services can thrive. Another proof that IEDC Alumni make a difference and stand up for greater good and a better world!



Tonja Blatnik, External Cooperator for Content Marketing

South African economy is suffering its second recession in eight years as trade shrinks and manufacturing contracts. How do you see the situation, what are the solutions?

This situation poses a threat to foreign investments, however it is also an opportunity for South Africans to develop their own local markets and create sustainable employment for the youth. We need to keep in mind that South Africa is a very young democracy, we are learning as we grow, and there are still a lot of opportunities for the country to thrive.

Are business challenges in South Africa and Europe different? What are the most relevant topics at this moment?

Challenges in South African businesses are similar in the sense that most businesses are looking for creative ways to scale and grow, yet different in the sense that there is a skills shortage. South Africa has a 27% unemployment rate, with youth population making up 66% of the total population and, youth unemployment at 50%. Education and the gathering of relevant critical skills is one of the biggest challenges business has to deal with if it is to grow.

How could we foster the development of dynamic societies and how important are women in this perspective? IEDC, for example, established Alumni Club in South Africa, it is co-organizing an international conference titled 'Women Leaders, Agents of Change in Africa' in Cape Town in November.

We need to collectively engage and leverage our common networks to move society forward. Working together has a far bigger impact than working alone. We learn and

grow from each other.

And when it comes to the importance of women as change agents: Women in Africa are more often than not the pillars of communities, with a lot of their male counterparts having migrated to cities, in light of work opportunities. Women therefore are a primary direct link to society as caregivers, leaders in churches, and are literally single-handedly raising communities. There are so many touch points where this power can be used to impact communities and foster change.

There are about 13,000km from Cape Town to Bled. How come that you chose to enrol into an EMBA at IEDC?

I had been looking to enrol for an MBA in South Africa and coincidentally met Prof Danica Purg at a networking function in Cape Town last year. In our brief conversation, she mentioned IEDC, I researched the school and fell in love with Bled's natural beauty. As you can tell, the rest is history.

How did EMBA change your life?

It has expanded my world to endless possibilities, and I have met such amazing people on the programme. I have subsequently left my job and started a new leaf in social entrepreneurship. The journey is incredible so far. Also, my network has widened on a much bigger scale and I am grateful for that.

What is your favorite memory of IEDC?

My favorite memory of IEDC is a Marketing class we had with the Spanish Prof Joe Pons. We were debating the Coke and Pepsi business case. The entire class bought bottles of Coke and put them on each table and we pranked

the professor with a Pepsi bottle. It was such a funny moment and the class was alive with so much laughter!

Being passionate about mentorship and innovation, how do you define a good mentor and what defines a valuable innovation?

I think a good mentor is someone who is relatable and is willing to share experiences and offer guidance beyond their call of duty. I define a valuable innovation as doing things differently and creating a 'new norm'. For instance, I run a Non Profit Hiking Group that offers disadvantaged students mentorship through hiking. We climb mountains; they connect with professionals on the hike and challenge themselves physically and mentally. It is an innovative way of reaching young people and it is amazing how powerful the hiking metaphor resonates with them when they discover that they can climb mountains and achieve anything they commit to.

What is the most precious lesson you got in your career as a team leader?

I have been fortunate to have different yet valuable lessons in all the four retail companies I have worked for in the last 10 years. Whilst working for Woolworths, I learnt that you need to have a voice and stand up for the greater good, and that it's okay to not conform to the norm. As a team leader, in my last role at The Foschini Group, I learnt that it is okay to sometimes learn from my team and to also speak truth, even if it's uncomfortable.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

I would tell my younger self that you are worthy of all your dreams and desires - trust yourself and be yourself!

MEET MPHOTO PERSONALLY

I love ...

... traveling and music. I mix house music. I **dislike** injustice.

My biggest ambition is ...

... Elevate Africa and be a part of creating the Africa we want to see.

My role model is ...

... my dad. He is a very intelligent and witty man.

When I think of IEDC, I think of ...

... a creative place of reflection.