Businessman believes in entrepreneur's innovation

Mireille de Villiers

MBOMBELA - The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is elusive, and this lack of money can stand in the way of success.

Mr Nick Elliot, managing director of Ulusha Projects, recently shared advice on how to address this with Ms Phepsile Maseko, winner of the Bring Change Lowveld mentorship programme and Elliot is thrilled about it.

"From time to time when there is so little positive activity in the marketplace and business in general, it is necessary to come up with innovative ideas to try and stimulate creativity," he said.

He is very excited about Maseko's idea, and tailored his general business advice to suit her needs. With her start-up business, Phepisa Natual Resources Institute, she aims to make skin products using an indigenous plant sourced from farmer cooperatives in Nkomazi.

Being in an intensely competitive sector, namely construction, Elliot is particularly enthusiastic about the uniqueness of Phepisa's products. "She will enter a niche market should her product be successful and sought-after."

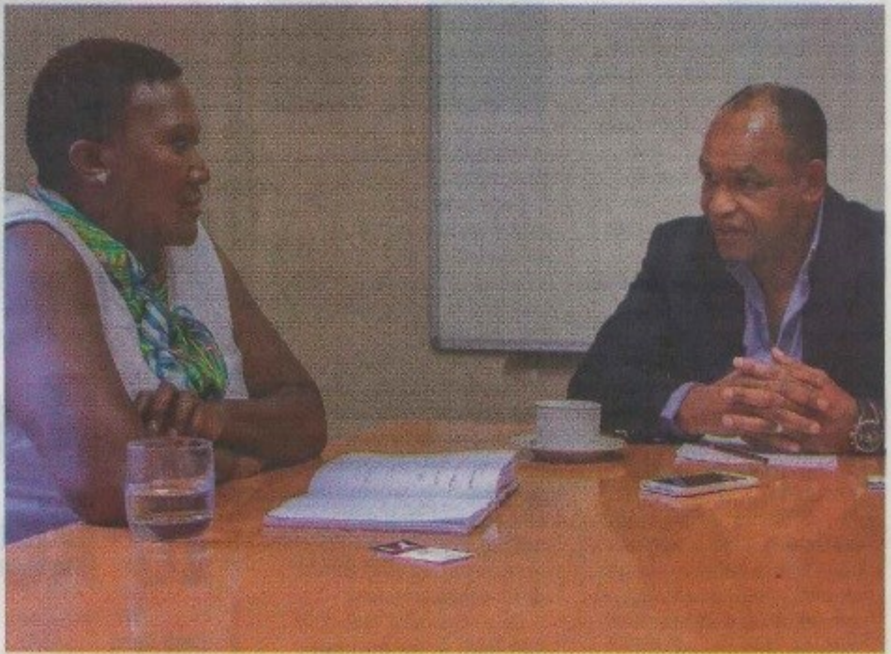
On this subject he advised Maseko where and how to apply for grants, and even provided her with details of relevant contact persons to avoid her being sent from pillar to post.

Elliot comes with a wealth of experience, having had his start in government. "When you are in government it is your duty to give opportunities to those outside of it. You are employed so you have an opportunity already.

> **It is necessary to come up with innovative ideas to try and stimulate creativity**

"When I left government I started my business from the boot of my car. It took seven years to build it up before I could branch out. Seven years is how long it takes to say you now have a successful business."

Luckily not only Maseko has access to the crème de la crème of business minds in Mpumalanga as they also share their wisdom with *Lowvelder* readers on a weekly basis.



Ms Phephsile Maseko and Mr Nick Elliot. ***Photo: bigchangeafrica.com***

Elliot's 10 points of advice on sound business principles and practices:

1. Business is volume-driven, therefore make sure that you have a product that is also in demand. It is no use having a wonderful product that no one wants to buy. Volume aside, remember that it must also be user-friendly and safe.

2. When you target only a certain section of the market, make sure your market research is spot-on.

3. Ensure you have products in your range that will also be affordable when the local and global economy is bad.

4. Protect your intellectual property with all your might and all the legal tigers at your disposal.

5. Branding is essential. In Maseko's case her products will be uniquely South African: Elliot advises that she ensures her product is endorsed by Proudly South African.

6. When applying for grants at different institutions, be careful of double-dipping. Rather be transparent in your application. "Focus on what you need a grant for - the institute don't want to back something that is not going to fly.
It is better to focus on one thing and get it working.
Get them to be part and parcel of your launches so they spread the word about you."

7. If you make a mistake, move through it and don't let it discourage you. "Even currently successful business people still make mistakes every now and then," Elliot said.

8. Focus all your energy on the path or product you have chosen. "Don't scatter your energy on pursuing many different opportunities at the same time. Just keep yourself sufficiently informed so that you can change direction should your Plan A turn out not to be feasible.
"You have a special unique project that someone can't just imitate. But make sure everything is in place, from your supply to manufacturing to the client. Only then you can start looking at other opportunities."

9. Through all your endeavours, be kind to your fellow man. Remember to give: time as well as money. You cannot receive anything with a closed hand – let your hands be open.

10. Most important of all in any business: Cash flow is king. "Very big businesses have folded because this basic principle was thrown out the window. It doesn't matter how big you are, if your cash flow is not good, you will go under," he concluded.