

# BUILDING VALUABLE BRANDS

**Name:** THEBE IKALAFENG

**Company:** BRAND AFRICA

**Role:** FOUNDER & CEO

**E: YOU ARE A HIGH POWERED ENTREPRENEUR WHO ENGAGES WITH THE MIGHTIEST OF THE MIGHTY - PRESIDENTS, CORPORATE LEADERS, MEDIA MOGULS, GLOBAL CELEBRITIES. WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO KENYA?**

My work is helping individuals, governments, politicians and corporations shape reputations and build valuable brands. I would say that I am currently supporting or participating in the political changes taking place.

**E: TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THEBE THE MAN.**

I was born and raised in Kimberly, South Africa to a humble African family. Like most African children, I was raised by a caring grandmother who instilled the values of hard-work and respect. I'm the eldest of four siblings. I was fortunate because in my family we were not channelled to any career but encouraged in whatever direction our passion and talent led us as long as it was something on which we could build a future. I passed (or is it missed) on the chance to be a 'knight in shining armour' and rather dedicated my energies to being a benevolent African citizen - married to Africa's destiny. I was educated in South Africa and USA (BSc. and MBA degrees in marketing and finance) and also had the opportunity to work in both countries. In South Africa I worked for NIKE as a group marketing director and later within the Africa region. During my tenure, we won over 10 Cannes Lions (the highest honour in advertising in the world).

**E: WHAT DO YOU TYPICALLY TELL PEOPLE WHEN THEY ASK YOU WHAT YOU DO?**

I tell them that, I am a global African brand and reputation architect, advisor and author. I help individuals, governments and organisations to build and leverage African brands and global brands and reputations in Africa to create value.

**E: HOW DID YOU COME TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR?**

While growing up, I was independent and entrepreneurial, always finding ways to earn extra income besides the pocket money I received from home. I would sell fruits, sweets, take pictures or find small jobs in gardens or shops. I did not need to but I got a thrill out of making and spending my own hard-earned money. A year or so after I returned to SA I went for an interview with a head-hunter who was looking for MBA graduates as PA's to the then CEO of Southern Sun Group to groom for future leadership. After going through the psychometric tests, the head-hunter told me I should re-consider the position and instead, focus on fulfilling my entrepreneurial urges and flair. I did not listen to him and went on to have a

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wildly successful career that culminated as group marketing director for Africa at NIKE. When I quit after my internal clock told me my gig was over, I turned down a range of similar and better jobs to start Brand Leadership Group with no consulting experience, but with the confidence that my reputation and passion would carry me through.

## **E: HOW HAVE YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL MOTIVATIONS CHANGED SINCE YOU FIRST STARTED?**

As an entrepreneur you start off trying to survive and prove something – that you can make it – and progress to where I think I am now – which is how can I use what I have learned, where I've been and who I know – to make a difference. I call this developmental entrepreneurship. When I started I went into a 'cluttered' industry – marketing and branding – where the perceived barriers to entry are seemingly non-existent. Everyone in corporate and enterprise see themselves as marketing experts. So I methodically and progressively had to establish a reputation – through results – and basically 're-brand' from just another consulting entrepreneur to elevating the practice of branding to the boardroom and becoming THE standard by which others will be measured by in the future. That I have moved from merely branding corporate products and services to nations and now political parties and candidates, is part of that journey – where the work I do has to have lasting impact not just on shelves but also on the lives of people who buy those products and services, and the policies that are designed to serve them.

## **E: WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT?**

Being a part of a generation of Africans who are central to changing the image and reputation of Africa through our talents – and profits as others like, Mo Ibrahim have done. The Brand Africa ([www.brandafrica.net](http://www.brandafrica.net)) and Public Sector Excellence ([www.publicsectorexcellece.org](http://www.publicsectorexcellece.org)) initiatives are beyond making money, but about making a sustainable difference.

## **E: WHAT DOES A DAY-IN-THE-LIFE OF THEBE IKALAFENG LOOK LIKE?**

No day is ever the same. But irrespective, it will invariably have constant meetings, reading, thinking, talking and creating. In-between there will be a bit of play. My work is my passion, my recreation and my reward.

## **E: WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF SUCCESS?**

The opportunity to do what you love, love what you are doing and never having to explain and apologise for the choices and consequences. Success is being content and happy with your life.

## **E: WHAT'S THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR YOUR SUCCESS?**

Passion. Focus. Diligence. I do not think money should ever be an objective for starting anything.

## **E: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST MISTAKES YOU'VE MADE?**

I try not to look back but to look forward and build on any past failures and successes. As such, I don't think I've made any mistakes rather, I have had valuable lessons. None bigger than realising that this journey, cannot be

taken alone, and that you must always surround yourself with people who bring other skills, and attributes to your enterprise that make you better, and provide a different perspective.

## **E: WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES / WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR NON-WORK TIME?**

I am a couch F1, tennis and football authority. Due to the heavy travelling schedule across the world the last two years, I have been unable to follow F1 around the world as often as I used to and now have to rely on television. Contrary to perceived opinion – I am happiest in my own company because I give 110% of myself when out in public.

## **E: WHAT SACRIFICES HAVE YOU HAD TO MAKE TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR?**

More time for me, family and relationships. But I do not regret decision or consequences as I'm probably where was meant to be and doing. Destiny!

## **E: WHO ARE SOME OF THE MOST INSPIRING PEOPLE YOU HAVE MET?**

I am inspired by people who have demonstrated a strong sense of identity (African), who work hard and measure their success by the difference they have made in the world. They span ordinary people, businesspeople and statesmen/women. Collectively they have contributed to the person that I am becoming every day.

## **E: EXCLUDING YOURS, WHAT COMPANY OR BUSINESS DO YOU ADMIRE THE MOST?**

Globally, I admire Virgin because it is 'Passion-driven'! Samsung for being the 'Resilient under-dog giant'! Apple for being the 'Excellence standard bearer'! Coca Cola for 'Consistency'! In Africa, I admire MTN and SABMiller for being the 'Africa flag-carriers'! Safaricom for their innovative MPESA platform! and Naspers for DSTV.

## **E: IF YOU COULD OFFER A FIRST-TIME ENTREPRENEUR ONLY ONE PIECE OF ADVICE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

Find, follow and feed your passion. What you do should not feel like a job, but a calling. It should wake and fire you up for the day and beyond. Money should never be a motivation. It is the outcome of recognised and valued passion and great work.

## **E: 10 YEARS FROM TODAY WHERE DOES THEBE SEE HIMSELF?**

I hope to still have the energy, urgency and curiosity to get up every day to make a difference in this world. I hope that when Africa summits as a global giant, even if my name is not on the headlines, that I will be able to see the results of my efforts in our success as a continent.

## **E: WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?**

Happiness and leaving this world better than I found it. I'm proudly African, and working hard to earn Africa's respect.

## **E: WHAT IS YOUR LIFE MOTTO OR MANTRA?**

"Success is a continual goal of becoming, where the goal is always ahead, and never behind" George Bernard Shaw.