

Filling the skills gap with on-the-job training: i-Fundi's Stefan Lauber explains

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Growing talent from within a company makes sense when considering how difficult it can be to find the right people with the right skills. [i-Fundi](#) offers a solution to this challenge through vocational qualification programmes guaranteed to impart the knowledge and skills required to help graduates secure employment and excel in their work. Founder and managing director of i-Fundi, Stefan Lauber explains how these programmes work and what i-Fundi offers.



Stefan Lauber, founder and MD of i-Fundi

Q: Tell us a bit more about more about i-Fundi and the purpose of the institution?

A: I-Fundi is one of the first training providers in South Africa offering learnerships. The idea came about when we as a company struggled to find good people to fill entry-level positions. We asked ourselves how it could be possible that even with such a high unemployment rate we can't even find people to fill entry-level positions.

The solution to this problem was born with i-Fundi, as the institution helps companies find skilled people, through providing school-leavers with entry-level skills required and work with people inside companies to take the next steps in their careers by providing the necessary skills.

Our training is practical and develops skills that are in demand, so that people can apply what they learn.

Q: What type of skills are most in demand?

A: The demands range across multiple industries, with a noticeable increase in demand for IT skills, project management skills, general management skills, customer service and sales skills, as well as insurance and real estate skills. Besides the multi-industry needs, there is also a need across skill-sets, with the need for entry-level to mid-level positions to be filled.

Q: What are some of the most popular courses you offer?

A: Our most popular courses at the moment are:

1. Project management – Both entry-level and advanced training is in demand.
2. Management-related training for new and mid-level managers.

3. IT skills, specifically networking and programming skills.

Q: Do you have any new courses? (Why are they necessary?)

A: We are excited to be launching new courses based on the demand brought forth from the 4th Industrial Revolution. These advanced courses include: Machine learning, robotics, data analytics, user interface, and animation. The purpose of these advanced courses is to reskill companies' workforces in order to avoid retrenchment, and to upskill people after they have been retrenched so that they can find employment again. It is important for South African companies to stay ahead of the times and predict what skills they will need in the future, and by doing so ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills in time, and avoid retrenchment at the same time.

Another thing companies need to bear in mind is that they can improve their BEE score through skills development. I-Fundi helps companies achieve this by:

- Training staff to improve the companies' talent pool
- Offering learnerships to the unemployed, thereby building the skills pool available to companies
- Offering training for disabled candidates
- Training and enterprise development programmes to assist entrepreneurs to build businesses
- Running CSI programs in communities

Q: How do your training and placement programmes work?

A: In the last 15 years, i-Fundi has trained over 15,000 people through fully recognised national qualifications, and helped them find their first job. Our premise is that we don't train if we don't have a job.

Based on this premise, our programmes work as follows:

1. First interact with employers – Find out what are their recruitment and staffing needs.
2. Once we know what the company needs, we will assist in recruiting people and train them.
3. Our training is unique – “Work integrated theory” means candidates learn the theory of the job in class and practice the practical side of the job in the actual company.
4. In this way, we create graduates that add practical value for employers to ensure long-term employment, as apposed to traditional learning institutions that churn out graduates with little or no practical experience.
5. The nature of the programme sees learners working and earning an income while they are completing the course, which means there are no study loans attached to the training and ensures candidates remain debt-free.

Q: Please tell us a bit more about your public programmes?

A: We are launching our public programmes this year. In the past, all our programmes have been sponsored by employers who would come to us and request training for staff/learners. The problem with this is that smaller companies do not have a large number of students and can only send a limited number of delegates to us at a time. Our public programmes have been geared to accommodate people part-time while they are working. The advantage of this programme is that companies can earn points to receive and sponsor bursaries which will assist with BEE scoring. This also addresses the need for people who couldn't go to university but are eager to study.

Visit apply.ifundi.co.za to find out how companies and individuals can get involved and benefit from the programmes.

Q: Are there any new developments on the horizon?

A: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is continuously on the rise. E-learning is something that we are seeing an increase in in terms of placing skilled people in foreign economies. For the last two years to date, we have placed 150 learners in America who are proficient in project management.

Our next market is Switzerland, as the country faces a shortage of skilled people, and skilled young people in particular. Our means of placement abroad aims to address this skills gap and offer South African youth opportunities to work abroad.

Contact i-Fundi on 011 290 5900, email enquiries@ifundi.co.za or visit the website: www.ifundi.co.za, to find out more about how your company can benefit from these initiatives.

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