

Solopreneurship: An answer to SA's youth unemployment crisis?

By [Michelle Matthews](#)

4 May 2022

Our idealised notions of entrepreneurship are not the antidote to joblessness. Only a handful of people can build a fast-growing business able to employ hundreds of people. But what if we could create a million one-person businesses? We should get as many individuals earning an income as possible; participating in the economy and starting to spend, creating markets for other small businesses.



Michelle Matthews - Viridian director | image supplied

Young people with skills and grit should be taught how to apply entrepreneurial thinking to their careers. If they look to the digital economy, they don't even need to be constrained by what's available locally.

Instilling self-efficacy

As many South African graduates have discovered, a degree won't make anybody's life magically unfold. Relevant practical skills, a flexible and opportunistic approach to making work happen, and the ability to bounce back from setbacks are far more effective. These individuals could become confident operating as a business of one: a solopreneur.

We can have a lot more people managing themselves as small businesses and participating in the global economy. Yet, the regular Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) regularly reports a relatively low amount of entrepreneurial activity among South Africans (although we are increasingly looking more favourably on entrepreneurship as a desirable career path). Does this mean South Africans are not entrepreneurial? Perhaps.

Arguably, the reason for this is deeply rooted in our South African history and psyches. Decades of systematic disempowerment have likely led to a general erosion of self-efficacy. South Africans struggle to believe they can take control of their circumstances and influence the world around them.



Why SMME shaming leads to a funding mismatch

Alex Fraser 24 Mar 2022



To solve our youth unemployment crisis, the first thing we would need to do is work with young people to increase their confidence in their ability to execute their own plans. In some schools and environments, this type of thinking is actively discouraged, let alone positively taught. But it is counter-productive to tell young adults what to do: what happens when we're not around? What happens when we're wrong?

We need to allow them to test their assumptions and own the decisions they make. We have to give our youth a space where they can make mistakes, correct their mistakes, experience some small wins and build confidence in themselves so they can make a plan, no matter what. We need to encourage an entrepreneurial mindset in every receptive young person.

Tips to foster self-efficacy among young South Africans

Create safe spaces

There is a saying: do safe things in dangerous places and dangerous things in safe places. Create those spaces within the education framework, entrepreneurial hubs, families, or church groups where young people can try out things and get feedback. Mentorships can support this; people who have been there before, giving young people feedback and encouragement, and helping them extract the lessons from what they are learning.

Provide skills and knowledge

We have to give young people skills so they feel more competent to give opportunities a try (for example, using an online platform to find a piece of freelance work). These include technical skills, whether writing code or designing in Canva, and basic digital management principles. In addition, self-management skills – like time and money management, costing to make a profit, making sales and negotiating – are all useful to a young person running their own career.

Encourage the creation of peer-to-peer support networks

Create platforms, spaces and events for young people, and incentivise them to connect with like-minded peers. Young people who meet in productive places like entrepreneurial hubs tend to positively challenge and motivate each other. Some might even decide to partner up to secure contracts.

Share success stories

We should be fanatical about sharing stories of relatable young people who are blazing trails in entrepreneurship, like Theo Baloyi, who founded Bathu Shoes, an exciting sneaker brand.

These profiles make entrepreneurship aspirational, but also attainable. Young people need to know somebody like them managed to be successful and that they can do it, too, if they work on their skills and connections.

Address young people's trauma

Most unemployed South Africans have likely experienced trauma.

It is important to address young people's trauma for them to master self-efficacy. Otherwise, they will be defined by their woundedness. The circumstances the majority of young South Africans grow up in mean they will have seen or experienced things that may have disturbed and damaged them. They are also generationally traumatised and have just been through a pandemic.

If they are not helped to confront these difficult experiences and reframe how they are thinking about them, the rest of these interventions won't work. Properly mediated, stress can be turned into a strength. South Africa has a lot of problems to be solved. Young South Africans need to believe they are the people who can tackle them, starting with themselves.

The expectations on South Africa's young people are high. We should support them to take baby steps and to realise small wins, develop their resilience and protect their mental health, apply their skills and, ultimately, make opportunities happen for themselves. One job at a time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Matthews is a Viridian director.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>