

Meet McCain SA's new MD Unathi Mhlatyana



By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Unathi Mhlatyana has stepped into the role of managing director at McCain Foods South Africa, effective from 1 February this year. Having occupied leadership roles at PepsiCo and SAB/AB InBev, Mhlatyana brings with him over 20 years of experience in the FMCG industry and a thorough understanding of the value chain from farm to fork.



Unathi Mhlatyana

The new MD intends to drive a purpose-led business model at McCain with a clear sustainable profitability trajectory, whilst leveraging the potential of the company's resources to create strategies that deliver sustainable organic growth in collaboration with the customers and communities in which it operates.

Mhlatyana caught the attention of McCain Foods South Africa human resources director Karabo Mothibi, who describes him as a people-centred leader. Outlining the requirements and qualities the company deems essential in an MD, Mothibi explains that McCain was looking for candidates that are strategic leaders that have an understanding of both the agricultural and FMCG industries in the country.

"They needed to have a combination of management and business skills as well as being able to fit into the McCain Foods South Africa culture. Ultimately, we wanted our new MD to be able to work well with people and lead the team whilst continuing to build and grow the business," explains Mothibi.

Mhlatyana says he aspires to be an authentic and transformational leader that has a positive impact on people's lives. Here, she shares more on his career move and plans for the company.

■ ***Congrats on your appointment as McCain Foods MD. How do you feel about it?***

Thank you very much. My appointment comes at a critical time of McCain's history in South Africa, having celebrated 20 years of good performance. It's exciting for my team and me to take our business to the next level of sustainable profitable growth.

■ ***What's at the top of your to-do list in your new role?***

The first order of business is to ensure we keep to the top three simple but important priorities which are:

1. People safety - It is extremely important to keep all McCain associates safe at all times;

2. Revenue generation - It's imperative to keep in mind that what we are doing today, even in these difficult times, is setting us up to be an even stronger McCain than we were before the pandemic;

3. A simpler McCain - As we move forward we need to transform faster to operating with planet-friendly practices by investing in sustainability initiatives and partnering with key strategic stakeholders for the long term.



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■ ***Tell us a bit about your professional experience and how this has equipped you for your new position.***

I've always been a curious individual who is willing to learn and continuously develop my skills, knowledge and self-discipline.

Exposure to multiple functions, roles and markets will equip me in this current and future role within McCain. In the early years of my career post studying various fields such as Industrial Engineering, Labour Law, Quality and Business Studies, I quickly learned that application and on the job hands-on experience, learning through others and being a team player are important.

This won't be any different in my current role and collaborating with customers and other key stakeholders will be at the centre of our operating model.

■ ***Considering your extensive FMCG experience, what do you enjoy most about working in this industry?***

Our industry is a very exciting one and there's never a dull moment. The energy that one can feed from is amazing throughout the value chain. The short answer is that one never stops to learn and that's what I enjoy.

■ ***What hurdles have you overcome in your career to get to where you are now?***

Keeping up with consumer shifting behaviours, collecting actionable insights, understanding the competitor landscape, adopting the latest technology and making the correct investment at the right time has always been some of the hurdles and I believe that remains relevant today.

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■ ***Can you comment on the state of the industry at present – what do you see as the key challenges and opportunities facing consumer goods companies like McCain going forward?***

Covid-19 without a doubt remains one of the biggest challenges we face today. Secondly, we need to drive business growth in a very competitive market where consumers continue to face affordability challenges. The opportunities we face include stretching our company to innovate, transform the value chain and bringing new excitement in our various categories.

Working closely with various key stakeholders remains more necessary now than ever before as we unlock opportunities in the sustainability space, taking our brands across the continent and transforming our industry for the greater good of the planet and future generations.

■ ***Anything in particular you're currently reading or listening to for work inspiration?***

I'm currently reading three books in my winding down time:

1. *Doing What Matters* by James M Kilts;
2. *The Leadership Riptide and How to Escape* by Tracey Swanepoel; and
3. *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell

■ ***Could you leave us with some valuable career advice?***

In whatever you do, don't be complacent. Continue to learn. Be kind and be a team player.

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