

The dignity in a pair of shoes

By [Charlene Lackay](#)

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There's a wise old saying that goes, "Good shoes take you good places". It may seem like a simple inconsequential thing, but a good pair of shoes could be the first step in helping some young person start their career.



Image source: www.pixabay.com

At MMI, a pair of shoes have become a symbol - a sign of how corporate South Africa can help break down the barriers to entry that exist for the youth of this country.

One of the many challenges faced by the youth of South Africa is the inability to "show up" adequately for life changing moments and opportunities such as job interviews, sporting activities, peer gatherings and going through their basic daily routine. Being presentable and restoring one's dignity cannot be taken for granted.

Corporate South Africa has an important role to play in helping our youth show up in a dignified manner. Corporate responsibility programmes aimed at the youth must make a tangible difference in their lives, because an investment in the youth of South Africa is an investment in our country's future.

Already, the youth represent one of our most vulnerable groups. The total unemployment rate among young people aged 15–34 averaged 55.97% in 2018 according to StatsSA.

Hurdles to employment

While our economy has made job creation difficult there are many factors, outside of economic conditions that influence whether young people become employed. Some of these issues include generational poverty and inequality, gender-based discrimination and health and social pressures.

Young people need to be equipped and fully supported to make good choices and overcome many of the hurdles to employment or generating a sustainable income.

This is where corporate citizenship can play a critical role. Employees at major corporates can act as mentors guiding young people in their chosen career paths, grooming them when it comes to interviews and professionalism in the workplace and even helping them with developing their CVs and filling out job applications.

At MMI, young people are the focal point of our CSI strategy. Through the MMI Group we are focusing on driving youth employability in South Africa. We are committed to supporting young people achieve their life aspirations and partner with them along their entire employment journey – from training, through recruitment, to being placed in the workplace.

This is how we believe we can have a tangible impact on the country. Less than a year after we adopted this approach to youth employment, we have enabled employment for 669 young people and have a further 1038 in training during July 2018 and June 2019.

Shoe collection

This year for Mandela Day we started collecting shoes for young boys and girls to be able to take that important step towards unlocking their possible futures. This is one of many ways we can be that significant partner in their journey to success. The campaign started in June in celebration of Youth Month and our aim was to collect as many pairs of shoes for the young people going through job readiness programmes with our NPO partners in Gauteng, Durban and Cape Town.

Our employees answered our call and helped us collect more than 500 pairs of shoes.

When we handed over the shoes we hosted masterclasses for the identified youth in these areas. These masterclasses involved tips on how to prepare for job interviews, compile a CV and grooming tips for young people to help make a good first impression. We also had colleagues from various areas of our business and even some of our business partners, give insight about the career paths within our organisation.

For most of us a pair of shoes is just a pair of shoes, but for many young people it's a symbol of empowerment. It's an indication that they matter and that they are worthy of being employed and changing their economic status. Every year the clamour around Mandela Day grows louder, but what we all need to remember is that while giving is important, empowering South Africans by helping them, or providing them with the tools to help themselves remains essential – and it can start with just giving someone a pair of shoes because sometimes a pair of shoes isn't just filled with feet, sometimes, it's filled with dignity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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