

# From fitness to finance - Building a smarter, stronger South Africa

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**As a recently qualified chartered accountant [CA(SA)] Fulufhelo Siphuma's career has moved swiftly. But it's not a case of "all work, no play", this fitness coach also finds the time to put her sustainable development goal (SDG) passions to play. This fitness coach also puts the UN's SDGs to work.**



The first thing I noticed on talking to Fulufhelo is that her passion runs deep. The importance of the sustainable development goals shine through in everything she does, and inspires others to action.

The reason is simple: While she seems to have it all now, life hasn't always been easy for Fulufhelo. Having overcome challenges such as attending under-resourced schools, she says, "Given my background, I could have easily fallen off the rails as I didn't have the blueprint." Now, she offers that blueprint to others, as she has what she calls the "compassion and privilege to help those who are less fortunate, so they can be guided by someone who has been in their shoes."

## **The CA(SA) dream: Never for a black child, let alone a girl child**

She explains, "Growing up in Limpopo, I used to fetch water from the communal street taps – those were rare, blessed days. Otherwise you would first have a fierce fight with a bull to get your turn to draw water from a spring.

"It's a far cry from where I'm based now, in Pretoria. Paved streets remain a luxury we'd never have dreamt of. In high school, I also took care of my sisters while my mom was away at nursing school."

It's enough to set anyone on a tough life path. And yet, despite the social, financial and quality education challenges she faced, Fulufhelo passed Grade 12 as the best economics learner in the province. She confirms that little spark of success has been driving her ever since to make a difference in her community. Not only did it clarify her passions, it has also served as the guiding star to help her reach her desired destiny.

That is how Fulufhelo stood strong and moved beyond what she calls "the worst-believed myth of that time, which is likely still a reality today – that becoming a CA(SA) was never for a black child, let alone a girl child."

## **Mentoring and mobilising funds to make the SDG of quality education a reality**

In helping others on that often rocky path, she talks at various schools to address issues of poverty, unemployment and inequality and offers mentorship. She has even taken that further by adopting the New Jerusalem Children's Home in Midrand as a mentor and a big sister.

This involves more than just spending time with the children at the home, but also mobilising funds to assist – often from her own pocket, because it's only when people access quality education that they can break from the cycle of poverty. This is why education is seen as the key to achieving many of the other SDGs to further reduce inequalities and help reach gender equality.

Fulufhelo further fights the struggle for economic emancipation by contributing towards the increase of black chartered

accountants in the country by talking at university where she engages with future business leaders about responsible leadership and the value of CA(SA) designation.

### **After 9-to-5: From awareness to action on preventing lifestyle diseases**

The same sentiment that it is on each of us to make a difference is woven into Fulufhelo's commitment to the UN's third SDG of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being at all ages, as well as SA's own national development plan.

At time of writing, 200 attendees had taken part in her most recent free 'Fulufhelo Siphuma-Fitness' free masterclasses and she regularly shares healthier lifestyle tips on social media and Phalaphala FM's fitness talk segment.

Fulufhelo believes a healthy mind is housed in a healthy body, and a healthy body brings about better productivity, which in turn benefits the profession overall, as it makes us more physically and mentally active participants of the economy.

This is because "exercise boosts our problem-solving ability and helps with generating ideas and concentration, while also relieving stress, improving memory, helping us sleep better and boosting overall mood. This is especially important in the industry, as the workload of a chartered accountant involves lots of complexity and stress."

Add in the modern-day work environment, complete with long hours of sitting, computer screens straining our eyes, and the unhealthy practice of daily take-aways, and it is all the more easier to fall prey to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) or 'lifestyle' diseases such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes, as well as breast and colon cancer, and other NCD risk factors, such as hypertension and obesity.

### **Prevention is better than cure...**

The good news is that these NCDs are linked to lifestyle so can be prevented if you take action. For Fulufhelo, just seeing so many people suffering needlessly from preventable diseases was the spark behind starting Fulufhelo Siphuma-Fitness, to encourage people to live a healthy, fitness-first lifestyle.

She is big on promoting a positive body image and self-love, yet drilling into the difference between the concept of being body confident and in allowing unhealthy behaviours. "I'm confident in my skin," is no excuse for a lifestyle that is detrimental to your health.

It is about transitioning the concept of fitness from a subculture into mainstream lifestyle. Work-life balance, wellness and fitness, healthy eating and having enough sleep, are health goals we would all like to achieve, but we need to overcome the biggest limitation of all to do so – time. Over and above this, we need discipline, determination and self-drive as qualities to commit and keep at it. Fulufhelo says these are all qualities CA(SA)s have in abundance.

Drilling down specifically into her unblinking focus on preventing non-communicable diseases, while also instilling a love of fitness in others, Fulufhelo encourages physical activity through initiatives such as the tangible solutions of her free Fulufhelo Siphuma-Fitness masterclasses, usually held at the Union Buildings. She also raises awareness through traditional media, such as radio talk shows and newspaper articles, while providing further tips on social media platforms.

Impressive as this is, Fulufhelo's not done yet. Her goal is to grow and offer additional wellness services houses in Fulufhelo Siphuma-Fitness, such as fitness challenges, health fairs, lunches and learning sessions on fitness topics to corporates, thereby making meaningful brand partnerships and collaborations.

Explaining why it is so important to her to measure her own success in how she helps others, Fulufhelo says: "To me, changing and impacting the life of a 'stranger', who will in turn impact someone else's life, is the ultimate in humanity and leaving a legacy for generations to come."

She concludes: "The greatest form of gratification comes from within, not from without. It's not about the accolades, but

internal fulfilment after 'doing good', even without accolades. This is why it's never so much about what you've given, but rather how much of yourself you have given in the giving."

Fulufhelo is living proof of the community-boosting power of the giving-back nature that exists in members of the accountancy profession.

Connect with Fulufhelo Siphuma-Fitness on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) for further inspiration.

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