

Moses Kotane Institute CEO remembers her challenging years as an MUT student

Coming from high school and not understanding a word in lectures because of the language barrier and content shock is one of the vivid memories Thandeka Ellenson, the acting Chief Executive Officer at the Moses Kotane Institute, shares about her first semester as an MUT student. Initially she wanted to study chemical engineering but could not make the admission requirements. She ended up studying for a diploma in human resources management, which she says was the start of her life. Although she always thought she wanted to be in a laboratory mixing chemicals or doing a job that involved calculations, she knew that one day she would run a company in one way or another. She confesses that by the end of the first semester the future looked bleak - but the thought of quitting and going back home to explain to her grandmother that she wasn't coping was even scarier.

She knew she needed to stick it out for at least one more term. One of her major subjects was business management, which turned out to be the first subject she fell in love with (and enjoyed so much that she completed the entire course in record time). She has since completed a number of post-graduate studies with other institutions in South Africa and abroad, focusing mainly on accounting, governance and operations. Her highest qualification is an MBA in Finance which she completed with Anglia Ruskin, an institution in the UK.

"MUT opened my eyes to a world of possibilities both for my career and life in general. I got an opportunity to mingle with different students from different backgrounds, and I learned two key lessons as a student: you are the consequence of your choices, and you can't achieve what you cannot visualise. I have worked in various sectors and companies, including MUT, UKZN, SASA, CIDB, Land Affairs, SABC, and currently at the Moses Kotane Institute of Research. I have also worked in various portfolios including research, marketing, accounting, finance, projects, compliance, governance, human resources, operations and more. I see myself as an all-rounder and do not confine myself to one specialisation," said Thandeka.



Thandeka Ellenson,
Acting CEO, Moses Kotane Institute

Making a conscious decision to give back, Thandeka established a bursary fund in 2017. The fund supports students with registration fees because sponsors and NSFAS are often slow to process applications. The bursary enables new students to register and reserve spaces with tertiary institutions so that they do not lose out due to financial challenges. Thandeka also mentors women who are starting businesses in communities, guiding them in what doors to knock on for funding, what documentation to prepare for company registrations and so on. She also runs a short-term loans business called Ellen Invest and a Company Secretarial consulting service under the name ACCSEL. As if these roles didn't require all of her time, she is also an examiner for the Risk and Compliance module at CSSA.

"I am currently acting Chief Executive Officer at the Moses Kotane Institute, but my normal role is that of Chief Financial Officer at the same institute. These roles require vision, dedication, discipline, integrity, honesty and hours of serious thinking and implementation. You must be able to see the bigger picture to craft the direction of the company while solving problems daily," Thandeka said.

Although her transition from high school to university was not an easy one, she has crafted a very lucrative career and advises the youth to use their passion to start businesses. She strongly believes that creating one's own economy is the most guaranteed means of achieving economic freedom.

Marketing graduate provides engineering solutions

Thabang Mofokeng, chief executive officer of SAMAC Engineering Solutions (Pty) Ltd, has always been a strong support to his peers by providing innovative ideas for any sort of challenge. In his years as a marketing student at MUT, he never aspired to join the student representative council but was the main go-to person for advice and support to wishful SRC candidates. This solutionist desire ultimately resulted in the founding of SAMAC Engineering Solutions - a mechanical engineering solutions company focusing on technological research & development and component fabrication. The company's services include the supply of thermal energy storage air conditioning, tooling and component fabrication and design services. On 29 November 2018, SAMAC received an award for being the Most Innovative company at the SAB Kickstart awards: a great endorsement for the work that Thabang and his teammates are doing.

"What sets us apart is that we are a green company; we support clean energy and zero carbon emissions in all our inventions. One of our award-winning patented inventions is the first African designed and manufactured thermal mobile air-conditioning unit, launched during the Business Fair in 2017. This air-conditioning system reduces electricity cost by up to 30%. Its distinctive feature is its ability to generate thermal energy during off-peak period when electricity is at the lowest billing rate, thereby offering a load shifting advantage. We believe that through our energy saving products we contribute greatly to environmental sustainability," said Thabang.

With his vast experience and professional training in Marketing & Business Management (he holds strategic positions such as chairperson of the SME Forum and business advisor/mentor for the Umsobomvu Youth Fund), it made sense for Thabang to team up with experts across various engineering streams. The result is the power-packed team that is the brains behind the SAMAC Engineering Solutions brand. This team of innovators is working tirelessly to spread their wings beyond South African borders through participation in international conferences and exhibitions. SAMAC was recently selected by SEDA KZN as one of the few companies to attend the Manufacturing Best Practices Tour in India in December 2018.

Amidst his very busy schedule, Thabang is a regular visitor to MUT, his alma mater. His company has many joint projects with MUT's Research Office and the Faculty of Engineering. The collaboration includes knowledge sharing and testing of inventions. There is also the possibility of Thabang doing presentations and mentoring MUT students on entrepreneurship. This would be a welcome contribution to enable MUT students to rise above the challenges of graduate unemployment.



Thabang, right, with Dr Malaza



Mapule Sikhosana

Juggling a post-grad qualification and weight loss? No sweat for Mapule

Mapule Sikhosana, Senior Secretary in MUT's Directorate of Institutional Planning & Research (DIPR), is graduating with a Post-graduate Diploma in HRM (PDHRM) - one of only 20 people to attain this after 16 dropped out. The PDHRM is offered at NQF Level 8 and therefore it articulates horizontally into an Honours degree or vertically into a Master's degree.

Mapule undertook the course full-time, which meant she left the University at 8pm from Monday to Friday. "This course couldn't have come at a better time for me. I always wanted to further my career. I had attempted to register with DUT and UKZN but it was not going to be easy leaving work and going to another campus to attend lectures," she said.

Over and above ensuring that she completed her studies, Mapule also had to undergo a weight loss programme. "I have been on many weight loss programmes and I am well aware about obesity in this country, hence I had to take the challenge to lose weight. I read articles on obese and overweight people and how they are at risk of contracting Type 2 diabetes, various cancers and musculoskeletal disorders like osteoarthritis, a highly disabling degenerative joint disease which is what I suffered from. We need to be aware of all these ailments that could affect us, and awareness needs to be created even at our workplaces. We need to prioritise a healthy and active lifestyle," said Mapule.