

# FOLLOWING IN MY ELECTRICIAN FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

By Temana Masekela



» Mkhusele Nkabalaza, Auto Electrician removing an alternator from one of the vehicles he is working on.

“As a boy child, my ambition was to follow in my father’s footsteps. My father was an Electrician, so I took it up a notch and became an Auto-Electrician,” says Mkhusele Nkabalaza.

**N**kabalaza is a recently qualified Auto-Electrician from Qumbu, Eastern Cape. He was trained at his father’s workshop, KO Auto Electrical from 2014 until he qualified in February this year, funded by the merSETA.

As an Auto-Electrician, Nkabalaza’s job is to ensure the electrical parts of a vehicle are in good working order.

“When it comes to cars, many people concentrate on mechanical components and neglect the electrical parts. That’s what many schools teach,” he says.

Through mentorship from his father, Nkabalaza started working on cars in his village and realised his passion. “Being an Auto-Electrician requires discipline, patience, hard work and the willingness to learn continuously because cars keep changing with developing technologies. My father thoroughly trained and prepared me

for my qualification,” he says.

His father’s workshop was in uMzimkhulu in the former Eastern Cape. When Nkabalaza was in primary school, he would visit the workshop during school holidays and play with wiring on some of the materials. In high school, he studied physical science but they did not have practicals. “I got an opportunity to do practicals at the workshop. This is where I developed a passion for cars,” he says.

Nkabalaza completed his matric at Kokstad College in 2005. He then went to Tshwane University of College (Tshwane University of

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Technology) to pursue a Chemical Engineering degree. He struggled to settle into the environment and thought it was because he was far from home. So he moved to Walter Sisulu University in East London to continue with his degree. This is where he discovered that he was not “cut out” for the field.

“I came back to Qumbu and focused on my training as an Auto-Electrician. A lot of people in the area knew of my capabilities, so I started fixing cars and through word of mouth, my customer base grew drastically,” he says.

Nkabalaza explains that his greatest achievement is being recognised as a qualified Auto-Electrician, since there are not many of them in his area. “There are only two auto electrical



» Nkabalaza (centre) with his two apprentices, Avela Nkabalaza (right) and Mphakamisi Dimane (left).

workshops in my area, which are owned by old artisans. Although we appreciate their wisdom and advice, some of the things they know have changed and we have to step in and bring in new knowledge,” he says.

He adds: “I have gained independence through my training. Not only am I employable, but I can also launch my own business in the field whenever I want to. What I like most is that I can teach other people how to do the work that I do and they can also become employable. My goal is to uplift my community.”

Nkabalaza says being an auto-electrician requires patience and consistent practice as it is not learned overnight. “When I started my training, cars were not the

same as they are today. A lot has changed, and one needs to adapt to the change if you are to remain relevant,” he says.

Looking to the future, Nkabalaza plans to become an assessor so that he can train others who want to follow his career path. “My father has been my greatest supporter and pillar of strength throughout my career. My plan is to uplift my community and the only way I can do that is if I do for others what he did for me,” he says.

He concludes: “I am grateful to the merSETA for the funding and support they offered me. A few years ago, I was just a village boy with an ambition to become qualified and through them, I am now a qualified artisan.”



» Nkabalaza with his father and owner of KO Auto Electrical, Khayaletu Nkabalaza and mother, Mpofukazi Nkabalaza.



» Nkabalaza repairing a car starter.