

Hard work leads to prosperity

By Temana Mabula

The sound of machines grinding and creaking greets you when you enter the greasy mechanical workshop situated in the heart of Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. The owner is Chuma Songca, a 35-year-old successful businessman. He has beaten all odds – after struggling to find employment, he launched his own business in 2013 with just a small toolbox.

Songca completed his N3 Mechanical Engineering at Esayidi TVET College (then Port Shepston Technical College) in the South Coast of Kwa-Zulu Natal. He approached Meyers Motors in the Eastern Cape wanting to be trained as an apprentice, but was informed that there was no space for apprentices.

Determined to get the training, he offered to work without remuneration. His pliability and hard work paid off as after three months of working for the company, he was offered permanent employment as an apprentice registered with the merSETA in 2004, and qualified as a Mechanical Technician in 2007.

“Being a merSETA-registered apprentice turned a new leaf over for my career. I gained valuable expertise through the training I received and I will forever remain indebted to the mentors who took me under their wings,” says Songca.

His employment with Meyers Motors ended in 2013 and he subsequently struggled to secure permanent

employment. This, however, did not dissuade him from following his dream of building a career in auto mechanics. He is now the owner of CMS (Chuma Mlungiseleni Songca) Automotive with 100% shareholding.

“I had no money to pay my monthly debts, let alone capital to start a business. The greatest asset I had was the skills and knowledge I had acquired during my apprenticeship training and a small toolbox,” explains Songca.

Songca’s workshop specialises in fixing light commercial vehicles and he employs eight staff members, including three merSETA-registered apprentices who he mentors.



Chuma Songca with his team at CMS Automotive in Mthatha, Eastern Cape

“I had an unequivocal intention to transfer skills to learners from colleges when I started my business, so that they could also be in a better position to build their careers in auto mechanics, and possibly manage their own businesses one day,” he adds.

Songca explains that this stems from his desire to eliminate the stereotype that people who attend TVETs are of less value than those who study at universities. “Many people tend to look down on college graduates.

There is a perception that if you study at colleges, you will earn less than people who study at universities. This is not true and people need to know that there are great career prospects for people who study at colleges,” he explains.

Songca's apprentices speak highly of their experiences. Jongithemba Magadla has been an apprentice registered with the merSETA since 2016. Magadla commends the dedication Songca has portrayed in training him, and says he would also like to mentor other young people once he qualifies.

Songca says that his plan is to get his apprentices qualified, so that he can train more and have the training cascade to others. “Unemployment is spreading like a raging fire in the country and the more we can give the youth jobs and get them off the streets, the better,” says Songca.

Mzuvelile Notshulwana says: “I am now able to strip and assemble petrol engines, do clutch overhauls, brakes and fault finding on vehicles after being mentored by Mr Songca for just five months.”

Andile Gani says he has learnt valuable lessons from Songca and appreciates that he is now able to work independently with little supervision.

Songca advises youngsters to have the drive and dedication to succeed in the field of auto mechanics. “I never used to worry about time. I was very dedicated and would sometimes work until midnight to get work done,” he says.



Chuma Songca with his two apprentices, Jongithemba Magadla and Mzuvelile Notshulwana checking camshaft for wear with vernier calliper on a Corsa engine

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Songca's business kicked off successfully without funding because of his resilience and hard work.

CMS automotive is looking at expanding into car rentals and eventually having a showroom to sell vehicles.

“We also want to obtain funding for equipment so that we are able to provide optimum service to our clients,” he concludes.



Chuma Songca, Director and owner of CMS Auto Engineering pulling up an engine with an engine crane after assembling it