

# Once an apprentice, now driving apprenticeship development

By Temana Mabula

**A**s a young boy growing up in Uitsig suburb in Cape Town, all Owen Francis wanted to do was to dress in a suit, carry a briefcase and work in an office. Although he was able to achieve this, fate had bigger plans for him!

Francis completed his matric in 1991 at Ravensmead Senior Secondary and with no money to study further, the only option at his disposal was to dive right into the pool of the working class. "My first job after matric was as a Welder Assistant at Lembeckers Trucking. It was hard labour and not something I envisioned myself doing for the rest of my life, so I decided to set sail in a different direction," he explains.

He was offered employment at Brian Porter Motor group in 1992 and was registered as an apprentice under the Merseta. He qualified in 1997 and says that this was the flame he needed to ignite his career.

Francis's climb up the corporate ladder progressed swiftly upon completion of his apprenticeship. He left Brian Porter Motor Group and joined Barloworld as a Diagnostic Technician and what followed was a series of movements from one company to the other in pursuit of his dream of becoming a Service Manager. He went for 12 Service Manager Interviews and none yielded results. "Everywhere I went I was told that I was too young and inexperienced, but hell was going to freeze over before I gave up!" says Francis.

While at Barloworld, Francis registered on the Management Development



Owen Francis, Regional Training Manager at Imperial Technical Training Academy in Cape Town

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Program and also studied Financial Management at the University of Stellenbosch Business School. He also graduated with a Bachelors degree in Business Administration from Southern Business School in March this year.

“I had to make sure that I was well equipped for the work I wanted to do. I did not want to find myself in a position where I had the experience for the job, but not the qualifications,” says Francis. The big break for Francis came when after the 12th interview, Landrover Stellenbosch offered him a position as

Service Manager. Hard work, dedication and sheer resilience saw Francis turn the Service Department around. “We won dealership of the year and best service department in South Africa in 2010 and 2011,” he says.

Francis is currently a Regional Training Manager at Imperial Technical Training Academy in Cape Town. He is passionate about giving proper training to apprentices and this he says, is what differentiates him from other managers. “I was trained to become a pro, and my wish is that all apprentices get the same



Owen Francis with some of his staff measuring engine parts at the Imperial Technical Training Academy in Cape Town

quality of training I received. I always strive to become number one, because people always remember number one, not number two,” he says.

Francis acts as a bridge between these young people and companies that want to train them as apprentices, by negotiating placement opportunities for them.

“My focus has always been on helping young people. Because I was an apprentice before, I can relate to the struggles these youngsters go through and I always encourage them to do their best in order to become the best. It gives me great satisfaction to play a part in

developing someone’s future,” explains Francis.

Imperial Technical Training Academy has nine classrooms onsite, and they aim to train students from colleges and technical high schools to become apprentices. They have over 350 learners on their database who are placed at different dealerships across the Western Cape.

“We intend training them through our apprenticeship programme in order to equip them with the relevant skills to qualify as artisans for the motor industry. This we believe will act as a pipeline

between the motor industry and these colleges and schools,” he says.

Owen says that his success comes from his determination that he got from his father Joe Francis, who had worked as a motor mechanic for 37 years. This propelled him to work twice as hard as well as to think and do things differently.

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Owen Francis with his team of young apprentices, qualified artisans and other staff at the Imperial Technical Training Academy in Cape Town