

Siphiwe Zikalala: A ‘game changer’ of note

By Sibongiseni Ziinjiva Ka-Mnguni

merSETA and the Small Enterprise Development Agency continue their efforts to ensure that the dreams of an energetic and resourceful motor mechanic are fulfilled

With South Africa grappling with the growing high unemployment rate, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have been identified as key drivers of inclusive economic growth and development. SMEs contribute 56% of private-sector employment and account for roughly 34% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP).

SMEs are considered an important contributor to the reduction of the unemployment rate, especially as the formal sector continues to shed jobs.

A shining example of SME development is 36-year-old Siphiwe Zikalala (pictured below), whose desire to create jobs and promote skills resulted in him establishing Volkscity Motor Specialist in Silverton, Pretoria.

Zikalala, who holds a motor mechanic diploma from Pretoria West College, always wanted to be his own boss. After obtaining a diploma, Zikalala joined Volkswagen Menlyn in Pretoria as an apprentice. “I worked at VW from 2006 to 2009. This is where my dream of starting my own business developed.

At VW, I learned about motor plans, management and different training interventions to upskill the workforce,” explains Zikalala.

He started his business about seven years ago, with only three staff members. Today he boasts a complement of 12 employees; four full-time technicians, a receptionist, a wheel alignment specialist and six students on a level 1 motor mechanics learnership.

This young entrepreneur has seen his business grow phenomenally over the years – from servicing only



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Siphwiwe Zikalala (left) with some of his employees

10 cars a day to more than 20 a day. His growing client base now includes high-profile organisations such as the South African Police Service and power utility Eskom.

“My recipe for success is built on patience and the foundation laid by VW, as well as the help I received from merSETA as far as skills development is concerned and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) in relation to funding and financial management,” he says. Zikalala approached SEDA for funding to expand his business. The agency provided him with a R700 000 grant to buy the necessary equipment. With help from merSETA, he started training apprentices in 2013.

“I must admit that it has not been smooth sailing. When I started the business, I didn’t have adequate equipment. This is where SEDA came in. Thanks to SEDA’s generous 100% grant, I now have state-of-the-art equipment in my workshop. Some of the conditions of the grant include running a fully-functional business,

up-to-date taxes and potential for growth,” says Zikalala.

“I must say that the SEDA funding really came in handy. When we started, we experienced a steady flow of customers, but the lack of machinery was an impediment. Managing our finances, including record-keeping and accounting for each and every business transaction, was another challenge. I found that starting a business was not only about wearing overalls and diagnosing problems with a car - it entails a lot more,” says Zikalala.

To further strengthen the skills levels of his employees, Zikalala approached merSETA to provide his company with motor mechanics training and to fund the learnership.

Through merSETA and the Unemployment Insurance Fund’s database, about 20 learners were interviewed and six – three young men and three young women, most of them from the retail industry – were selected to undergo training in the arduous two-year Accelerated Artisan Training Programme (AATP).

Every six months, the learners write exams and there are four levels to complete.

“The cornerstone of success is that every Friday we sit with them and look at the progress made during the week. We sometimes even come to work on Sundays, because they have to learn everything at a very fast pace,” says Zikalala.

“Levels restrict you in terms of what you can and cannot do. But here, we expose the learners to higher levels. At Level 1, they are only required to do maintenance and to work on the brakes. To overhaul the engine, you need to have attained a level 4 qualification. But here, we expose them to that level. Some of them started working here only a few months ago, but they are able to do maintenance on their own,” he says.

“My plan, as a way of growing the business, is to have a one-stop centre that will include the workshop, a sound system centre, as well as wheel alignment, tyre and panel-beating shop, all under one roof.”