

Shashi Naidoo - model businesswoman

 By [Kim Lawrence](#)

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Kim Lawrence chats to TV presenter, actress, model and businesswoman Shashi Naidoo about her modelling agency, [Alushi](#), and her thoughts on celebrating women this month.



How do you balance family and career? How much modelling are you doing at the moment?

It's easy to get carried away with work and forget to make time not only for yourself, but also for family. I try to always make midweek plans with family - it's an excuse for something to look forward to midweek and breaks the work week, so it's a win/win, because family catch up time is always important. My career for some time has been evolving into something new. My focus has been on Alushi and driving the models I represent and now on my new business venture, The Laser Beautique Menlyn.

How old were you when you first realised you wanted to become a model and how did your career kick off?

Modelling wasn't always my plan. I actually studied Chiropractic, however, one of my part-time jobs as a student was as a florist. One day I was delivering flowers to an advertising agency and was asked if I was there for the casting, which I obviously wasn't. But, being a bit of a risk taker, I decided to try my luck anyway. And the rest snowballed from there.

How did the birth of Alushi begin?

I wasn't your typical model. When you think of a model, most people picture a very tall, rake-thin girl. This wasn't my build at all and for a model, I am regarded very short and struggled to find an agency that would represent me, because of my height. But, despite being the only unconventional model at my agency, I wasn't struggling to book work. There were plenty of clients looking for a different kind of model. This gave me an idea: why not start an agency of my own that focuses on offering the kinds of models that the traditional agencies don't? My idea wasn't to supply what the industry calls 'character' models – people who completely defy the traditional image of a model and fill a very specific niche. My aim was simply to stretch the definition of the concept a bit to include people who didn't conform to the absolute stereotype. I followed my hunch and I'm so glad that I did.

Why did you decide to start your own business?

I had seen a gap in the market and hoped to capitalize on that.

As a strong and successful individual do you find men / women intimidated by you?

You will always get people who are intimidated by others' success, but I think that has more to do with their own insecurities. I surround myself with people who are always pushing me to go further and strive for more than I have.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of being your own Boss?

The hardest part of being your own boss is definitely self-discipline; when you have no one to report to it's easy to lose track of what you are doing and procrastinate to get things done. That's why I've become very goal orientated. I set targets

for the day, week and month and make sure I stay on top of them.

■ ***You are always encouraging young ladies to pursue their dreams and remain positive, how do you manage to do this?***

I think the easiest and best way to do this is to be a good role model and live by those principles in everyday life.

■ ***How would you identify a good entrepreneur?***

I think some people are more inclined to entrepreneurship and some people are more comfortable with the security of being a 'jobeneur'. I think a good entrepreneur is someone who can identify a demand for a service or product that doesn't currently exist, as well as the discipline and determination required to get a project off the ground.

■ ***What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs?***

I would tell them never to be discouraged- it's all about trial and error and you really need to just keep trying different things until you figure out what works for you.

■ ***You've achieved a lot thus far. What would you say are one of the major things you have not yet achieved?***

I'm 35 now and really looking forward to having a family.

■ ***Being humble is a key factor in your industry what would you say keeps you grounded?***

I have had the same circle of friends since I moved to Johannesburg in 1999, a true friend will always call you out if you are acting out of character, and that's been of great value for me.

■ ***Since your first appearance on TV in 2004, how has Shashi Naidoo evolved?***

I really enjoyed my time in the industry as a model and TV presenter. I got to travel the world and meet a diversity of interesting people, but I've also enjoyed my evolution to someone who works behind the scenes. I have such a sense of fulfillment in scouting a new model and then watching his/her career flourish.

■ ***You completed your chiropractic degree in 2007. Do you find yourself using your degree or would that be a future plan?***

What I took from my studies was hard work, dedication and commitment towards an end goal and I believe that will carry me in good stead throughout my life. I don't however see myself as a practicing chiropractor in the future.

■ ***As the director/owner of the super successful company, Alushi, did you ever think it would be as big as it is now?***

My aim when I started Alushi was always to be one of the most successful agencies in South Africa, but I am well aware of how blessed and fortunate I have been to get to this point.

■ ***What is the toughest thing to deal with when doing your job?***

Running an agency and representing over 350 models is tough, because often models don't realise that their behaviour and actions dictate a client's impression of the agency. We put a lot of work into making each model feel a part of the team and instilling a good work ethic.





Being in the spotlight and a fashion inspiration, what are some of your favourite brands?

I wear the clothes that I love and I try not to focus on a specific brand. I'd buy a blazer from Louis Vuitton if I liked it, but I'd be equally happy wearing one from Mr Price if it suited me.

What do you love about being a woman?

That I can do anything a man can do, but in stilettos.

Do you think it's important to have a month dedicated to women?

Of course it's important. Looking back on history and how women were so severely underestimated, I think a month devoted to women and empowering them is very important.

What is the role of feminism in South Africa in 2016?

I think the role of feminism in South Africa is ultimately to ensure women's voices are heard and equalize the power women have in society relative to men. If women and men are equally empowered, we can work together. I think that success needs women and men united in action.

▀ ***What is your message for Women's Month?***

One woman can make a difference, but together we can change the world.

▀ ***What are the plans ahead for Shashi Naidoo?***

My next big project is the opening of my own Laser Beautique in Menlyn, I am so excited to watch this grow and throw myself into entirely uncharted territory.

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ABOUT KIM LAWRENCE

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