

Creating our own entrepreneurial opportunities in Africa



By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

26 May 2017

When Abiot Mahlatse Ledwaba was nine years old, he moved from Limpopo to Johannesburg in search of a better life and today he owns his own PR agency. He is the biggest distributor of the MoFaya energy drink in the Limpopo province and is an inspiration for many young people, presenting regular motivational talks. Abiot talks to me about the importance of the 'hustle', finding yourself and how to stay "magnificent, whilst still improving"...

■ ***Tell us about yourself and your journey from being a young boy in Limpopo to starting your own PR company, Magnificent Communications.***



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I came to the City of Gold when I was nine years old. My father had to move back to Limpopo and left my sister and I behind to get a better education and possibly live a better life. I couldn't speak a word of English and thus resorted to bullying others but when I started learning how to speak the language I got comfortable which contributed to me repeating the fourth grade. I was only nine years old when this happened but it changed my perspective on life and I vowed to never get comfortable but to always strive to improve hence when you ask me how I am, I will say "I am magnificent but still improving."

In grade 9, I began to understand my leadership qualities when I got appointed as a member of the Representative Council of Learners at Midrand High School but this was for rebellious reasons; to help my friends get away with breaking school rules. Joining the RCL was a blessing in disguise as this was my way of finding my purpose. My presence did not go unnoticed because in grade 11 I was appointed public relations officer for the school's senior council. I started managing artists, doing events at school and hosted a few of my own events. Thereafter I went to Varsity College in Waterfall Midrand to study PR. I applied to be a part of their marketing team. I was appointed and for two years organised every event that was hosted on the campus.

Like most people in varsity, I wanted to get a good paying job when I completed my studies to gain experience. But when I got rejected after applying for numerous positions, I decided to start my own agency. I based my agency on building African brands. My goal is to create and build African entrepreneurs and that is exactly what I am doing with Skinny Sbu Socks, Tshepo The Jean Maker and Creative Mind Space. These people were people I looked up to during my high school and varsity years but today I am helping these brands escalate to greater heights. I do social media for Creative Mind Space, Tshepo The Jean Maker, Skinny Sbu Socks, Massiv Metro and Mofaya.

■ ***You are extensively involved in the distribution of the Mofaya energy drink in Limpopo. How did this come about?***

I met DJ Sbu in matric and he was hosting a seminar but I did not have money to attend the event. I tweeted DJ Sbu telling him that I wanted to attend the event and Sbu's response was, "Hustle it", which is exactly what I did. I sold oranges at school to try and raise the money but it was not enough. I then decided to contact the sponsors of the seminar and sent them my story about where I was from, what I was about and my attempts to raise enough money to attend the event. The first sponsor replied and said they would handle half the amount of the ticket and just as I was about to respond saying that I did not even have the rest of ticket fee, another sponsor responded, by the grace of God, and I was told to just give my name at the entrance and I would be let in. My friend, Sizwe Mbiza gave his last R50 so that I could get to the venue.

At the event, innocently dressed in my school uniform and my broken spectacles, I stood up during the Q&A and told Sbu that I was the guy he told to go and hustle the money to get to the event. I then went on to share my story. Sbu gave me his

business card and since then I have been working at his events, working for his foundation, attending events/seminars hosted by Leadership2020. I also familiarised myself with people that work with Sbu and that opened up doors for me.

I got an internship at Massiv Metro, an online radio station founded by DJ Sbu, which enabled me to start distributing Mofaya out of my own pocket until I built trust with the brand and now I am the biggest distributor of Mofaya in Limpopo and possibly quickly becoming the biggest in Southern Africa, even internationally. Sbu is my mentor but hard work and determination scored me all these gigs.

■ ***Tell us more about your company? Any big brands in the pipeline that you can share with us?***

For now, we can only mention Skinny Sbu Socks, Tshepo The Jean Maker, Creative Mind Space and Mofaya as brands working with Magnificent Communications.

■ ***You host regular talks called, 'A Conversation with AML' in which you speak to young people, empowering them. Please tell us more. Where can youngsters go to listen to your talks?***

For now, these events are all held in Naboomspruit but anyone who is interested, can follow me on social media. I post and tweet on a daily basis about my life and thoughts which I hope inspire and motivate others. I also share podcasts, whenever I can, on SoundCloud and aim to inspire on all platforms.

■ ***What drives and empowers you?***

I am driven by three things; myself, family, and my hometown. Myself in that I never doubt or limit whatever I set out to do or put my mind to. I never play it safe or take no for an answer. I believe I will build the first skyscraper in Naboomspruit and that's exactly what will happen. My dream not only scares me but also those that are around me. Whenever I meet people, I always ask them how they will make me a million. I believe in myself and whatever dreams I have. Family drives and empowers me because everything I do is a step toward keeping them happy. Sometimes we may have clashes and it may not make sense at the time but in the end, all I do is for them. I wish to see my whole family retire all because of what I started. I wish they find hope and see that all is possible. My hometown because, like said previously, in order for Naboomspruit's potential to be recognised, I need to become something magnificent.

■ ***Any exciting and important projects in the works?***

There are magnificent plans in the pipeline for Mofaya, which I can unfortunately not share with you at this moment. But I can share that we will be doing events with TheHookUp Dinner, Creative Mind Space, Skinny Sbu Socks and Tshepo the Jean Maker. We also have exciting things coming up like campaigns with big brands and well-known brands that we will be partnering with.

■ ***Where do you see yourself and Magnificent Communications in ten years' time?***

Still doing what I am doing but on a bigger scale. I don't want to get comfortable. International brands better watch me.

■ ***What do you think are some of the challenges facing young entrepreneurs living in Africa?***

Family! Family! Family! That's a challenge on its own. Trying to sell them a vision, but they will always try to play it safe. It's sad what families do to young people with big dreams. We get more support from outsiders than we do from our own families.

■ ***What opportunities do you think Africa can offer in terms of job creation for young people and young entrepreneurs striving to make it big?***

Africa doesn't offer you opportunities. That kind of mentality leads to people feeling entitled to a lot of stuff. We create those opportunities for ourselves. We are about to start distributing in Botswana because of our trip to Zambia then to Zimbabwe. I had a Mofaya can with me and people took me to Botswana to go and sell Mofaya. Go out there and get it! Stop feeling entitled. You say you want a ML or a G-Class but you don't look the part, you don't wake up early to work. You're watching too much TV. You are wasting time just speaking about your dream. You also need to act on it.

For more information on Abiot's motivational talks, keep an eye on his social media pages: [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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