

# ABSA JEWISH ACHIEVER AWARDS 2023

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**The Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2023**

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# Chairperson's message



## Decay or brilliance? We get to choose change

**W**e'll be defined not by our hopes and dreams, but by our actions! I recently hosted a delegation in Johannesburg from a large international foundation assessing whether South Africa should benefit from its funding largess. As I drove the jetlagged philanthropists through the potholed streets of Yeoville, abandoned heaps of rubbish were being burned on the sidewalks. Beggars lurched between cars, and dripping graffiti plastered the dilapidated buildings in the neighbourhood where once a thriving Jewish community called home. One of my guests described the scene as the aftermath of a Zombie apocalypse. This is what South Africa once promoted as "a world-class African city".

Amidst the poverty, drug dealers, and crumbling houses, we arrived at Victoria Yards, a vibrant, pristine haven of creativity, innovation, art, and design, an island of excellence nestled in a sea of decay. The Americans fell in love with the Yards, with its vegetable gardens, clothes designers, creatives, galleries, furniture manufacturers, vision, impact on the community, and showcasing of the potential of South Africa's promise.

Thereafter, as we made our way to Constitution Hill, we drove through the squalid ruin that once was Hillbrow, the area where I was born and where I *jolled* in the clubs of buildings long since hijacked and left to rot. People searched rubbish bins for food near the Hillbrow Police Station, where I used to take food and blankets to arrested political activists, the tarred roads now replaced with dongas, and filth strewn across a city that has been pillaged by its politicians for personal gain.

Arriving at Constitution Hill, the home of freedom and democracy, the place where our strong independent court saved the country from state capture and the excesses of the Jacob Zuma era, where the bricks of the court are taken from its former prison, and where a ribbon of light allows the judges to see the feet of the passers-by – a stark reminder that "we, the people" need to govern this country. The flame of freedom that sits beside the Number Four Prison illuminates the gloom of the city.

The juxtaposition of decay and brilliance challenges us every day in South Africa. Do we define ourselves by the ruins or by the creative and entrepreneurial genius that pulses through the veins of our community?

How we define ourselves determines our future!

This year, the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards tackles this paradox head on. We're more than our past, more than our history, more than victims, we are, in fact, the builders, the innovators, the healers, the creatives. In truth, we are South Africa!

Our blood has nourished the red, dusty soil of Africa. It's here that our ancestors landed as penniless refugees fleeing persecution and certain death in Europe. It's here that the pro-Nazi establishment demonstrated at the docks of Cape Town and tried to prevent our arrival in this country, because we weren't "European". It's here, that our community fought for freedom,

justice, and democracy, established farms, built businesses, fed the poor, healed the sick, and built banks, insurance companies, retail empires, factories, and a society of which we should be proud.

Over the past years, with political instability, crime, corruption, maladministration, and incompetence, many in our community have fled our shores. Today, we're one third the number we once were 30 years ago, yet we're not defined by our numbers. Our community is more vibrant than ever, our contribution to the building of South Africa remains unwavering.

In these awards, we focus not just on what we have built, but on the promise of what still lies before us.

**We need to realise that our country is worth fighting for. We cannot sit back believing that mending our broken nation is the responsibility of someone else.**

We're enormously proud to introduce, this year, The Rising Star Award. An award dedicated to the future leadership of our community.

At the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, we celebrate the remarkable and disproportionate contribution made by the Jewish community to South Africa, and the promise of more still to come.

I want to thank our dear friends at Absa, which has been the title sponsor of these awards for the past 20 years. It has allowed us to celebrate the uniqueness of South Africa and the triumph of the African spirit.

It's joined as partner by the Kirsh Family, The Lubner Foundation, Europcar, and Mann Made.

Five panels of judges adjudicate these awards. I thank them all, as I do the remarkable team that puts these awards together. People like Dina Diamond, Jodi Kramer, Dori Weil, Felicity Kantor, Britt Landsman, Peta Krost, Dylan Berger, and Sandy Furman.

For the past 24 years, the *SA Jewish Report* has been the glue that has held our community together. All money raised from these awards goes to support the free publication and distribution of the *SA Jewish Report* newspaper, read each week by 33 000 people in hard copy, 36 000 people via newsletter, and 80 000 unique people who visit our website. Our 161 live webinars have now been watched by four million people – all offered free of charge, innovated, created, and distributed in South Africa and around the world because of your generosity and support.

We need to realise that our country is worth fighting for. We cannot sit back believing that mending our broken nation is the responsibility of someone else. Each of us has to stand up, unashamed, unbowed, and take back our nation from those who have lead us to the brink of the abyss. That's the greatest role we can play as a community – reimagining the future promise of our nation.

That's the job of a true South African. Just as the Bokke took to the field in France, let no-one ever doubt that Jewish blood is green and gold.

**Howard Sackstein,  
chairperson, SA Jewish Report  
and Absa Jewish Achiever Awards**



# Title sponsor's message

## Embracing agents of change

**E**xtraordinary individuals don't sit back and watch as the future unfolds, they grab the bull by the horns, and write their own futures. They know they have an important role to play in becoming agents of change while motivating others to follow. They get together, and just get things done.

As Absa, we're inspired by these forerunners, and want to walk the road with them as we fulfil our purpose to empower Africa's tomorrow, together, one story at a time. We realise the potential within our business to take bold steps in making an even more meaningful contribution to the communities in which we live and work.

Aligned with our firm commitment to be an active force for good, Absa's association with the Jewish Achiever Awards has been built and nurtured for the past 20 years. It's a partnership based on a common commitment to recognise individuals who have charged ahead, leading the way in accomplishing extraordinary things, and it's one we cherish.

We know that every action we take has a consequence for a meaningful tomorrow, and we embrace the challenge of reimagining a better future.

Congratulations to all the nominees and winners!

**Faisal Mkhize, chief executive, Absa Relationship Banking**



# Sponsors' messages

## Youth are our future – let's equip them for it

In a world marked by rapid change and constant innovation, the future belongs to those who can adapt, learn, and thrive in a dynamic landscape. Nowhere is this more evident than on the African continent, which boasts the world's youngest population, with 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30. This youth demographic is a tremendous asset, offering boundless potential for growth, progress, and innovation. However, it also presents a profound challenge: how do we ensure that this burgeoning population is fully prepared for the complexities of an ever-evolving world?

At Afrika Tikkun, we recognise that the young people of Africa aren't just the future, they are the present. The fate of our continent hinges on our ability to equip them with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities they need to excel and lead. It's with this unwavering commitment that I proudly introduce you to our organisation's endeavours and vision.

South Africa exemplifies the urgent need for action. We're a nation in which a significant portion of our youth faces the stark reality of unemployment, where dreams are stifled, and where potential remains untapped. The statistics are staggering: out of 59.9 million inhabitants, about 20.6 million are young people. The population in Africa is projected to continue rising until 2050, and by that year, Africa's young population (0-24 years) is expected to increase by nearly 50%.

This demographic can be a driving force for growth but only if we empower it to realise its fullest potential.

Our commitment isn't just to reduce youth unemployment, but to enhance skills development and training that empowers young people to

navigate the complexities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We believe that the future belongs to those who acquire diverse and adaptable skills, and we're dedicated to making this a reality for the youth we serve. Over the past 30 years, we have developed a cradle-to-career model in which thousands of township children are given a platform to grow from early childhood intersection to an after-school support programme, ultimately introducing job skills and effecting placements. We serve more than 30 000 children and youth annually across South Africa.

Our ICT Academy, as one example, has already trained and created opportunities for 750 candidates, while our Agripreneurship programme is nurturing the next generation of environmentally conscious growers. These initiatives not only equip young people with skills but also foster creativity and innovation in fields that will be instrumental in the years to come. We operate in most of the sectors where employment opportunities still exist and growth is evident.

The responsibility for grooming and equipping Africa's vibrant, young populace for a dynamic global future falls upon all of us. The government, the private sector, civil society, and all stakeholders must join hands in this endeavour. Afrika Tikkun stands as a testament to what can be achieved when we work together with a shared vision, unwavering dedication, and a profound belief in the potential of our youth. The stories within these pages are a testament to the impact that can be realised when we invest in the future of Africa's youth.

As group chief executive of Afrika Tikkun, I invite you to explore these stories and join all organisations in shaping a brighter and more dynamic future for Africa and its young generation. Together, we can build a world where every young person has the opportunity not just to dream but to soar to heights they never thought possible.

**Marc Lubner, group chief executive, Afrika Tikkun**



Lubner Family Foundation

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## The power of Jewish women

Europcar has proudly sponsored the Europcar Women in Leadership Award for nine consecutive years. We have been privileged to be exposed to and learn more about an incredible set of individuals through the awards process. Our nominees continue to break boundaries, shatter stereotypes, and inspire us all.

In the worlds of business, corporate social investment, leadership, and entrepreneurship, Jewish women have proven time and again a unique blend of strength, resilience, and a deep-seated passion for making a difference.

In the realm of business, they excel in strategic thinking, innovative problem-solving, and the ability to navigate complex challenges with grace and determination. Their leadership isn't just about profit and loss, it's about creating inclusive, ethical, and sustainable business practices.

When it comes to corporate social investment, their hearts are as big as their ambitions. They have an innate ability to identify critical social issues and craft solutions that drive meaningful change. Their philanthropic endeavours uplift communities and empower those in need.

In leadership, these women stand as role models, paving the way for future generations. They shatter glass ceilings and set new standards for what's possible. Their courage, resilience, and compassionate leadership inspires others to follow in their footsteps.

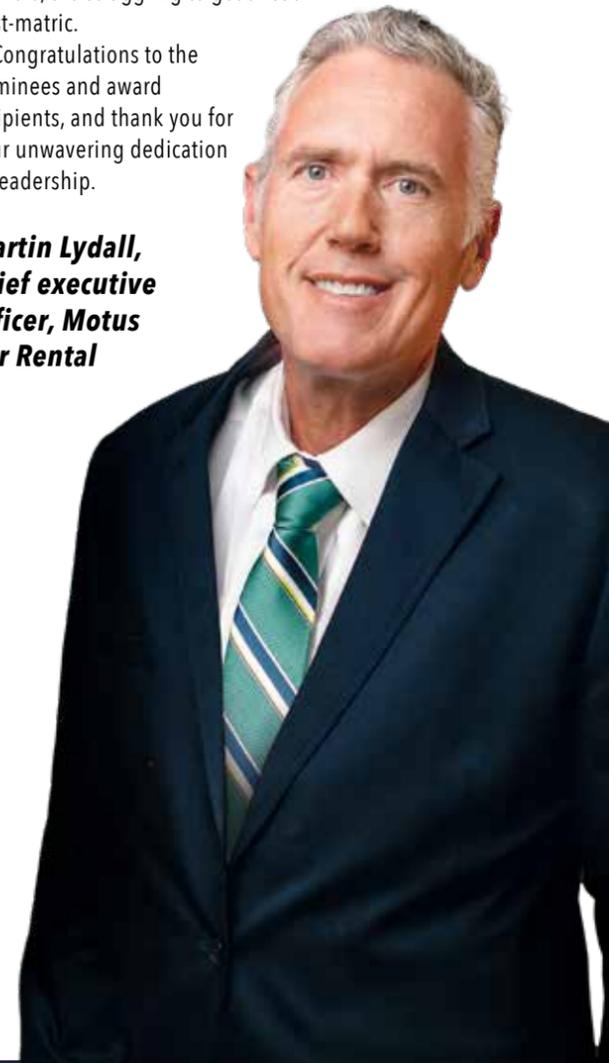
In entrepreneurship, they turn dreams into reality. Their innovative spirit, daring ventures, and unwavering determination brings fresh ideas to the forefront, creating businesses that not only succeed, but contribute to the greater good.

We honour these exceptional women, and we celebrate not only their individual achievements, but the collective strength they represent.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to our award winners, Mandy Wiener and Gia Whitehead. Mandy is one of the country's best known and most credible journalists and authors. Her authoritative, trustworthy voice in the media space and success in investigative journalism is truly inspiring. Gia, the chief executive and co-founder of TSIBA Business School, has made a significant impact in giving access to tertiary education through fully funded, tuition-fee scholarships, offering high quality business education to young people who, because of academic and/or financial barriers, are struggling to get ahead post-matric.

Congratulations to the nominees and award recipients, and thank you for your unwavering dedication to leadership.

**Martin Lydall, chief executive officer, Motus Car Rental**



## Mann Made celebrates power of community heroes

Mann Made is deeply honoured to sponsor the Community Service Award at this year's Absa Jewish Achiever Awards. This prestigious accolade is presented to a Jewish individual or organisation that has demonstrated unparalleled commitment and service to the Jewish and broader communities. As we gather to celebrate these remarkable contributions, we're reminded of the power of community and the incredible individuals who go above and beyond to uplift and support those around them. The nominees in this category are shining examples of dedication, compassion, and selflessness, embodying the values we hold dear, and serving as guiding lights for future generations.

Our roots as a family-run business have always been grounded in the importance of personal connections and community. We believe in the power of narratives to inspire, motivate, and bring about positive change. It's this very essence of storytelling that makes us so excited to be a part of sharing the journey of this year's Community Service Award recipient.

At the heart of Mann Made is a genuine love for people and an unwavering commitment to making a positive impact. Our association with Singularity University is a testament to our dedication to bringing ground breaking technology to Africa. We believe that every individual deserves access to the latest global advancements to enhance their lives and communities. In line with this vision, we have pioneered the introduction of Web 3.0 technologies in South Africa, proudly launching Africarare, the nation's inaugural metaverse.

When it came to choosing a suitable black economic empowerment partner, it was a no-brainer for Mann Made to partner with the incredible Maharishi Institute. This long standing partnership further underscores our commitment to nurturing the next generation of leaders for South



mann  
made

Africa. Established in 2007, this non-profit organisation aligns with our mission to empower individuals and drive positive change in our society. Mann Made is thrilled to be able to put multiple deserving

students through school each year through our work with Maharishi.

As we celebrate the 2023 Community Service Award winner and all the esteemed nominees, we're reminded of the boundless potential within our community. Their stories of service, dedication, and impact inspire us all to strive for a better tomorrow. On behalf of everyone at Mann Made, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to these community champions for their invaluable contributions. Thank you for lighting the way.

**Shayne Mann, Mic Mann, and Kevin Mann**



# Candice Kramer – yarmulke artist

“It’s a great honour to share my work and be acknowledged within the community. It’s wonderful to see one of my paintings being translated into another format,” says local artist Candice Kramer, whose artwork adorns the kippot at this year’s Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.

“The original artwork was inspired by my family’s connection to Johannesburg. The inspiration was a photo taken in the 1950s of the original Solly Kramer’s bottle store in Market Street, Johannesburg,” she says. “I’m intrigued by the memory that spaces hold and the passing of time.”

Her work is all about identity, she says. “In fact, my first solo show, titled Confluence, was based on old Lithuanian portraits juxtaposed against Johannesburg skylines. I’m constantly exploring and creating my place within the contemporary South African art world as a white, affluent, Jewish, South African female. I reference people, historic family photos, and



antiquated maps within Johannesburg’s inner city setting. It’s our transience that belies the seeming eternity of physical structures and the history they represent.”

Kramer has been drawing “ever since I could hold a pen”. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Fine Art from the University of the Witwatersrand, has had three solo shows, and has been part of numerous group shows. “I currently have work on show in group



exhibitions at the Melrose Gallery and Artyli Gallery in Nelson Mandela Square,” she says.

Her work has been acquired by private and corporate collectors including Spier, Nando’s, Rand Merchant Bank, and First Rand. She was also the recipient of the Multi and New Media Award at the Thami Mnyele Fine Arts Awards in 2018. And she’s resident artist at The Bag Factory Artists’ Studios in Fordsburg, “an amazing community of 17 practicing artists”.

Kramer is “first and foremost a painter, although my work has extended to print-making and sculpture. I use figures, maps, and architectural structures. I paint on steel and copper. I love interrogating these industrial materials.”

She ages steel, and uses the rust as a drawing tool. “I love the natural texture and marks that happen with rust and corrosion. I build fume tanks to create verdigris – the beautiful green patina seen on copper churches in Europe. I love the natural mark that occurs over time, further adding to the meaning of my work. I love to push the boundaries of traditional painting.”

She’s “intrigued by transience”. “I’ll often portray my figures as rusted images juxtaposed with painted industrial architectural structures. My practice invokes a sense of nostalgia and highlights the passage of time.”

The most challenging aspect of her work is the fact that she has “too many ideas, too little time” and the process involved. “It’s time consuming and layered,” she says. The most uplifting aspect is “when viewers just get it, and respond to my work. Being able to create every day is a privilege that I cherish – to be able to see an idea come to life and for people to respond to it.” Her goals are to “keep creating and keep pushing my boundaries, limitations, and ideas”.

*Cheryl Flekser of Shalom From Africa has taken Candice Kramer’s design to create the beautiful yarmulke for this year’s Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.*

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# “*The Voice*” – Vusi Mahlasela – comes to Absa Jewish Achiever Awards

Legendary South African guitarist, singer-songwriter, and activist, Dr Vusi Mahlasela contributed to making this year's Absa Jewish Achiever Awards event the best ever. Mahlasela is known for his distinct, powerful voice, his poetic, optimistic lyrics, and for songs which connect apartheid-scarred South Africa with a promise for a better future. He's also a deeply spiritual and humble person, who still uses his G-d-given musical talents to highlight key societal issues that need attention.

Affectionately known as “The Voice” of South Africa, he has performed with Sting, Dave Matthews Band, Paul Simon, and Josh Groban.

In February 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa bestowed the Ubuntu Arts and Cultural

Diplomacy Award on Mahlasela at the Ubuntu Awards South Africa. Mahlasela has also been

awarded the National Order of Ikhamanga in 2013, recognising him for “drawing attention to the injustices that isolated South Africa from the global community during the apartheid years”.

The South African Music Awards honoured Mahlasela with several awards over his career, including a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012.

Mahlasela was raised by his grandmother in Mamelodi township in Pretoria, where he still lives today. He taught himself to play guitar, becoming a singer-songwriter and poet-activist at a young age.

He later joined the Congress of South African Writers, where he met several other artists and poets who would influence his work, such as poet Lesego Rampolokeng, as well as the jazz and traditional music performed by artists such as Miriam Makeba and Philip Tabane. Mahlasela has also credited the work of Victor Jara as having a strong influence on his music.

Mahlasela experienced success with his 1992 debut album, *When You Come Back*, which he dedicated to those who had sacrificed their lives to the solitude and suffering of political exile.

He subsequently released the album *Wisdom of Forgiveness* in 1994, and was asked to perform at Nelson Mandela's inauguration that same year, and later Mandela's 90th birthday tribute in London in 2008, as well as Mandela Day at Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan in 2009.

The song, *When You Come Back*, was used as the theme song for the 2010 Soccer World Cup coverage on ITV in the United Kingdom, and Mahlasela performed at the FIFA World Cup kick-off concert at Orlando Stadium in Soweto.

Mahlasela has since toured the globe extensively, and has released 10 acclaimed albums over a career spanning the past three decades. His latest, *Umoya – Embracing The Human Spirit*, was recorded at Flame Studios at Constitution Hill, and is his first studio album of new songs in 13 years.

“I recorded the album during the time of COVID-19, and that was the time of a great test for humanity. To have it released now, it was a spiritual way forward for this album to acknowledge the supremacy of the Almighty and the undying human spirit,” he told the *Sunday Times* recently.

Mahlasela was a proud ambassador of Nelson Mandela's 46664 campaign, an awareness effort surrounding the HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa. He was nominated in the categories for Best South African Artist, as well as Best Music Video at the 1996 KORA All Africa Music Awards.

In 2003, he was signed to Dave Matthews' ATO Records, and began releasing his albums in North America.

Mahlasela also holds honorary doctorate degrees from both Rhodes University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

As celebrated Nobel Prize-winning author and long-time friend and supporter of Mahlasela, Nadine Gordimer, once said, “Vusi sings as a bird does, in total response to being alive. He's a natural, blessed with the gift of song. He is a national treasure.”



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# WINNER

Absa  
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# 2023

## Rewriting history through higher education

**D**r Taddy Blecher has pioneered affordable higher and vocational education in South Africa. His mould-breaking efforts have put 24 000 poor students through skills-to-work education, with more than 95% of them now having well-paid jobs. He's made it his mission to pull the most disadvantaged out of poverty.

"In 1994, people got the vote," Blecher says, "but they didn't get decent education, jobs, healthcare, or the ability to feed their families. Twenty years before the #FeesMustFall movement, we recognised that free primary and secondary education meant very little unless people could get post-secondary education and a decent job."

The list of innovative initiatives that Blecher drives is formidable. He's the chief executive and co-founder of the Maharishi Invincibility Institute, Imvula Education Empowerment Fund, and the Invincible Group. He co-founded the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship with Sir Richard Branson. He's the chairperson and creator of the E3 (E-cubed) initiative (entrepreneurship, employability, education) for the department of basic education. He also co-founded Tendrel, a global organisation for social entrepreneurs in more than 40 cities to support their peers. The Maharishi Invincibility Institute and its related organisations have won more than 35 international awards for excellence and innovation.

In 1995, Blecher, a successful actuary and management consultant, was poised to emigrate to the United States. "But I tore up my ticket and stayed up all night thinking about how I could make a difference in South Africa," he says. He spent four-and-a-half years working in schools in Alexandra township and Soweto from 1995 to 1999, when he hatched the idea for the first free university in South Africa. This became CIDA City Campus in Johannesburg. "We had no money, no buildings, no books, no accreditation, no teachers," says Blecher. He left CIDA in 2007 to start the Maharishi Invincibility Institute. Sadly, CIDA doesn't exist anymore.

Of the 24 000 students, 21 170 have been placed into jobs with combined salaries of R1.65 billion and estimated lifetime salaries of R57 billion. Thousands earn R500 000 to R1 million per year, and some earn much more. They are in professions like insurance, information and communications technology, stock broking, and green industries. The Maharishi Invincibility Institute caters for the most financially marginalised students, from families with a combined monthly income below R4 000. Seventy percent are women, many have their own children, and in a number of cases, come from violent, traumatic, and abusive circumstances. About 70% of them didn't receive a university entrance matric pass.

The Maharishi Invincibility Institute's educational journey starts with a bridging programme, stressing language, computer skills, and mathematics. Blecher calls his innovative approach "consciousness-based education", focusing on realising the full potential of his students and holistic human development. "It combines a caring approach with self-discipline," he says. Blecher hones in on leadership skills, ethics and values, kindness and integrity. They teach transcendental meditation and yoga every day, and provide nutritious, organic meals to develop healthy bodies and minds.

Students work while studying. They run the campuses – about 80% of Blecher's staff team are current and ex-students, and this reduces costs by about 40%. There are now eight sites in South Africa along with four others in Brazil, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Anglo American recently donated its former head office building in the Johannesburg central business district, a donation worth R230 million, to the Maharishi Invincibility Institute. It turned down offers to purchase it for more than R100 million in order to gift the youth of Johannesburg access to education in perpetuity. This is the second building Anglo has donated to the Maharishi Invincibility Institute. Blecher is creating an "education town" in the inner city, he says, pointing out that, "there's no great city without great educational institutions".

"We receive no money from the government, and little from students, yet we're 80% self-funded," Blecher says. "We have 22 income streams. This includes graduates who 'pay it forward' by paying for the education of another student. We have a stockbroking company for investments; a game reserve for tourism; call centres for Nando's, Ster-Kinekor, and Afrihost; an IT business; and placement companies. We have the highest black economic empowerment status, and we're obsessed with reducing waste and lowering costs. Through working with companies to help them with their broad-based black economic empowerment scorecard, getting many of them to Level 1, thousands of students have in turn been educated."

*Dr Taddy Blecher*

**Maharishi Invincibility Institute**

Blecher says his passion for education stems from his family and the value placed on learning in the Jewish community. "We were fairly poor growing up," he says, recalling how he and his brothers slept on mattresses on the floor, "and every cent my parents had went to education." His father taught him that the only way out of poverty was through education, putting more than 30 people – mostly his family and his staff members' children – through private schools and university.

A proud alumnus of King David High School Victory Park, he says, "The school had a huge influence in my life. And being Jewish has profoundly influenced me and this work. Jews are always giving and caring for others, as they know what it means to suffer. The principle of tzedakah – giving what you can to help others – is fundamental to me. The culture of caring for others and not accepting an unjust status quo is fundamental to my Jewish beliefs.

"When we created the first free university and subsequently multiple free access professional industry academies in South Africa, everyone said it was impossible." Blecher says. "We just got on and did it. We have proved it can be done 21 170 times and have helped people get decent jobs.

"As I've grown up, I've recognised that we can change history every single day. The history of South Africa isn't yet written, and we can still write it. I'm proud that there are so many Jewish people in this country making a difference – in business and in civil society. Though many Jews left the country, thank G-d many have decided to stay to build a future for one of the greatest countries in the world." Blecher says.

"The Jewish community contains mavericks and risk takers. They like to solve big problems and build something from nothing."

Blecher believes that almost all of South Africa's many problems are solvable. All the resources are there, he says – arable land, abundant water, sunshine, and wind, infinite talent in young people – but the schooling system is simply not supplying useful skills.

"Most of the problems are self-made, and we can overcome them. Our target is to train 100 000 young people so they can get quality jobs. We've proved that even those most marginalised have talent and can add value. Nothing is insurmountable. There's always a solution. We need to use our ingenuity, creativity, tenacity, and courage, and never, ever give up, and we will build the country we all long for."



**Bertie Lubner Humanitarian Award**  
*in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris*

# Grooming and preparing the young populace for a dynamic future



## The South African skills landscape

Africa is currently the only continent with the youngest population in the world. Seventy percent of sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 30. South Africa alone, out of its 59.9 million inhabitants, has a youth population of approximately 20.6 million. The population growth rate in Africa is projected to continue growing until 2050. It has been forecasted that by 2050 Africa's young population (0-24 years), will increase by nearly 50 percent. In most instances, a high number of young people is an opportunity for the continent's growth - but only if these new generations are fully empowered to realise their best potential.

In South Africa specifically, with its high rate of youth unemployment, the necessity for creating appropriate opportunities for employment and innovation is paramount. In population studies and Economics, having a youthful population has both positive and negative implications. One positive is that having a youthful population is a guarantee for an abundant supply of labour. Economists categorise labour as one of the forms of production amongst, land, capital, and entrepreneurship. However, the grim reality witnessed has been that countries lack adequate economic activities to realise this potential.

## Career Development and Placement Programme

Our Career Development and Placement programme (CDP) equips young people with the appropriate hard and soft skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. We provide unemployed youth, aged 19-35 years, with access to economic and entrepreneurial opportunities. We implement a Work Readiness training course for targeted beneficiaries to prepare them for work experience placements. Subsequent to this, we provide work experience and job placements within the economy and post-placement support.

This year, we have trained 3518 candidates in our Work Readiness programme, 1311 candidates through our Specialised Skills training, placed 3376 in job opportunities and registered 56 Entrepreneurship Businesses. In addition, we have an Alumni Network of 6046.

## Specialised Skills Training

In the words of Robert Greene, "The future belongs to those who learn more skills and combine them in creative ways". Thus, our Specialised Skills Training programme is focused on the following sectors: Agriculture, Automotive, Hospitality, ICT, Retail and Vocational. The current, and indeed future, Digital Age requires our young people to possess unique and creative skill sets that will afford them agility, sustainability and independence. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) demands that our young people are proficient in ICT skills and technology whilst global trends of a Green Economy are requisite for ensuring food security and simultaneously nurturing the environment.

In steadily growing and expanding our digital reach, our ICT Academy has trained and created opportunities for 750 candidates. On the other hand, our efforts to fortify our green footprint have yielded 40 learners ("growers") who have graduated from our Agripreneurship programme and who are currently undergoing further Agriseta Training. An additional 15 growers are being trained at our newly launched site in Diepsloot.

## Forging ahead into a dynamic future

There is a strong case for the government, private sector and all the relevant key stakeholders like civil society, to channel more efforts into having many young people educated and gainfully skilled. Indeed, it is a joint responsibility to groom and equip our vibrant, young populace to become formidable players and leaders in a global context and for a dynamic future.



For more info visit [www.afrikatikkun.org](http://www.afrikatikkun.org)

# WINNER

Absa  
Jewish Achiever Awards

# 2023



## Transforming lives, one child at a time

In a world often defined by privilege and fortune, some stand out by making it their life mission to uplift those less fortunate. Raelene Tradonsky, 56, this year's recipient of the Mann Made Community Service Award, is one such woman.

As executive director of the King David Schools Foundation (KDSF), Tradonsky has been at the forefront of this organisation to raise funds for King David schools, ensuring that as many Jewish children as possible have access to a world-class education regardless of their parents' financial circumstances. It's a role that demands *chutzpah*, tenacity, and passion, qualities she possesses in abundance, say those who know her.

An alumna and the chairperson of the KDSF, Discovery Group Chief Executive Adrian Gore says, "Raelene is unique, remarkable, and a force of nature. She has almost single-handedly raised R500 million for the KDSF and in the process, ensured that our brilliant school system has a strong balance sheet. She has infinite empathy for our children and infinite energy for raising money to assure their futures."

Born into a modest yet loving home, Tradonsky grew up with a beloved older brother, Cecil, who had special needs and was a day border at Selwyn Segal. Witnessing the importance of this communal institution for her beloved brother, as a teenager, Tradonsky was inspired to help raise funds for the home, later becoming its treasurer for several years.

Her father, a tough man with principles, often made her take Cecil with her to parties. Tradonsky's heart ached as she watched children at these gatherings use hurtful labels to describe him. Their cruelty cut deep, and Tradonsky felt torn between her desire to socialise with her peers and her deep affection for her brother.

At 12, Tradonsky, then head girl of Cyrildene Primary School, was determined not to carry on at a government school. "In spite of my parents' financial constraints, I felt it wasn't the right fit for me and I had to make a plan. So I sought out an uncle I hardly knew," she says.

She caught a bus to town to visit her uncle, an advocate at Innes Chambers. "I asked him to sponsor my education at King David High School Linksfield," she said. Moved by her determination, he agreed, and thus began Tradonsky's path as a "sponsorship kid".

Her dedication led to a scholarship that enabled her to pursue higher education, ultimately becoming a chartered accountant (CA) and ascending the corporate ladder with remarkable ease.

Throughout her life, Tradonsky encountered extraordinary people who played pivotal roles in shaping her into the woman she is today. One such person was Jack Shapiro, the chairperson of Selwyn Segal.

"He taught me the real meaning behind Mahatma Gandhi's saying, 'The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.'"

Her mother taught her about philanthropy and how to save, making every cent count. Others, from her uncle who recognised her determination and offered financial support, to her much-loved former Jewish-school headmaster, Elliot Wolf, who was also director of the KDSF, together with many others she has encountered, "helped shape my story and make me the person I am today", she says.

About 13 years ago, she was given the opportunity to join the KDSF.

"At the time, I was earning a proper salary with healthy future prospects at Dimension Data. I had no intention of leaving," she says.

However Tradonsky's past, her community-driven fundraising experience, and her business acumen made her the perfect fit for this role, although it meant leaving her well-paying corporate job.

"I ticked all the boxes," she said, "I was a sponsorship kid, an alumni, a CA, I could communicate with business leaders on their level, so I guess I was what the foundation was looking for," she says.

"The much-loved Elliot and his twin brother, Jeffrey, attended reunions and kept the spirit of King David alive but they weren't fundraisers as such, more like friend builders. What was needed was an active fundraising effort and someone to drive it," she says.

The decision wasn't made lightly. Her father initially opposed the idea, but a deep-seated desire to help families in situations similar to her own drove her forward. She remembered the heartache of not being able to afford a Jewish education herself, an experience still fresh in her mind.

As the offer became increasingly appealing, her commitment to the cause solidified. Stepping into her role as executive director of the KDSF, she was "totally overwhelmed" by the responsibility, and realised how little she knew about fundraising. "What have I done? I asked myself. I must be mad."

Nevertheless, she was determined to succeed, and set out to learn from other institutions like the University of the Witwatersrand and soak up everything there was to know about raising funds and interacting with potential donors and alumni.

She helped assemble a board of trustees, with Adrian Gore as chairperson, comprising "exceptional fund managers and top-level businesspeople and visionaries - spectacular individuals" who shared her community-driven passion for excellence.

"Working closely with Elliot Wolf, we embarked on successful world tours, reconnecting with alumni and raising millions for the institution," she said.

Describing Elliot as "a dear colleague, mentor, and a loyal and trusted friend", she said he had a passion for Jewish education, and particularly the underdog. "He believed that everyone should be afforded the opportunity of a Jewish education of excellence, irrespective of their parents' financial position," she says.

"We shared a passion for travel, and loved connecting with some of the wealthiest and most influential alumni to have come out of King David, many attributing their success to their time at school."

Over the years, Tradonsky and a dedicated team including the board of trustees and her staff have transformed the landscape of Jewish education.

"I started with a simple Excel spreadsheet - my 'nunu blanket' - and now we use sophisticated software and have created a proper fundraising machine. It's been a real journey," she says.

"Our schools are among the finest in the world. We have breathtaking infrastructure," she says.

"The strength of the foundation today combined with tight financial management has enabled the sustainable funding of those who have financial challenges while concurrently ensuring the schools have the best to offer in line with top global standards."

Once amazed at how other schools managed to build impressive infrastructure, she's proudly looking forward to the opening next year of a high-performance sports centre which will include things like an indoor gym, Padel courts, indoor courts, physiotherapy rooms, and a yoga studio accessible to all King David students.

"We've come a long way," she says.

Tradonsky's journey is a testament to the power of love, resilience, and unwavering determination, and the remarkable people she encountered along the way who helped shape her into the woman she is today.



*Raelene Tradonsky*  
King David Schools Foundation

## Mann Made Community Service Award

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# WINNER

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## Not chicken to make a difference

His name is synonymous with Nando's, but the real joy in Robbie Brozin's career is the work he does in changing people's lives for the better.

And for Brozin, accepting the award for Lifetime Achievement 2023 is all about an opportunity to inspire the Jewish community to join him in uplifting people and healing this country.

It's also about "keeping a sense of fun and optimism" while you do good. "The journey," he says, "is part of the reward, as is taking people along with you on the journey, whether it's fighting malaria or fixing the inner city of Johannesburg," two of his major projects.

Brozin had an "idyllic and healthy small-town childhood" growing up in Middelburg, where his late dad, Max, had been deputy mayor.

He went to high school at King David Linksfield, where, he said, "I was never the best student", before going straight into the army for his two-year national conscription.

Though friends might have avoided the army, Brozin said, "I was never an activist or politically minded, so I couldn't see why I shouldn't go."

Thereafter he did a BCom at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and he had a good idea what he wanted to do. "My grandfather and my father were traders, and so for me, it was obvious - I too would become one. I loved buying and selling," he said.

He went to work for his father at Teltron, which was the agent for Sanyo in South Africa, where he met Fernando Duarte who worked on the technical side of the business. Duarte and Brozin became friends, and would find tasty places to eat "street food" in the south of Johannesburg, which is where the Teltron offices were.

One of the places they kept returning to, Chickenland, offered Portuguese chicken, which they loved.

"My parents often took us to Mozambique as kids, and we loved the piri-iri chicken there. This was like that," Brozin said. "We bought the business, later renaming it Nando's. While I initially saw it as something of a sideline, I fell in love with it.

"I loved the restaurant business. I loved the energy of it and that it gave me an opportunity to express my creativity."

They then opened their second restaurant in Savoy, Johannesburg, before South African businessman Dick Enthoven bought into the business.

"He and my dad were my two massive influences in my life. Dick taught me the value of everything and the price of nothing, and my dad taught me the price of everything and the value of nothing. If you don't have money, you know how much everything costs, but having money doesn't mean you know the value of it."

Nando's, Brozin said, was built on the influence of these two men. "I'm only as good as the people around me. I get credit for Nando's, but if it was totally left to me, it probably wouldn't be around. I know how to surround myself with the best people."

He explained that back in 2010, as Nando's co-founder and the chief executive of 1 000 restaurants in 32 countries, he lost his "mojo" and didn't feel he had the energy to take the company to the next level. It was at this point, 23 years into the business's life, that Brozin took a step back in the running of the business, leaving it to a professional team under Robby Enthoven, Dick's son.

Close on a year later, one of the leadership team reignited Brozin's passion, saying, "Soulman, you have lost your soul. You better go find it because you're the person who gives us the soul and we need it."

It was about this time that Brozin began Nando's outreach work, focusing on changing people's lives.

Through this work, he entrenched Nando's new mission statement, "To have fun and make money, change the way

the world thinks about chicken, and change people's lives one chicken at a time."

Tackling malaria first in Mozambique and then in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa was his first project, called Goodbye Malaria, for which his team later received a United Nations award.

"This year alone [2023], 4.5 million people have been protected from malaria because of our work," Brozin said. "We work on the basis that Africa can sort out African problems. We used to be focused on malaria nets, but are now working with spraying as it's more effective." They have trained and employed thousands of local women to implement the project.

Brozin says that like Nando's, this programme is run in terms of healthy values.

He has got Nando's involved in several other programmes, like Harambee, a youth employment accelerator, which gives young people access to jobs and skills they wouldn't have had access to. "We need to help disillusioned youth who finish school but can't find work or pay for further education, which is what Harambee does, and we [Nando's] were early adopters of this. We have employed 2 000 of these youngsters."

In its young designer project, it nurtures young designers and artists whose work it showcases in its restaurants around the world. "A Nando's outlet won't open around the world without South African designers' and artists' work in it. The same goes for the music that's played and the clothes worn by Nando's staff. They are all created by young South African hands," Brozin says.

Today, Nando's employs 35 000 people in its 1 200 restaurants around the world in 23 countries. "It's now fitter and stronger than when I ran it, and it carries less weight. We also provide world-class African creativity."

When Cheryl Carolus, a former activist for the United Democratic Front and South Africa's former high commissioner in London, asked Brozin to join the Constitutional Court board of trustees a few years back, he agreed. "Until then, I'm embarrassed to say I had never read even read the preamble to the Constitution, which is now something I'm willing to fight for. It's the vision for South Africa, and fits perfectly into Nando's values.

"If we follow it, we can never stay lost. Reading it inspires confidence, pride, comfort, and security. Most importantly, it should inspire action. It demands of us to roll up our sleeves and do the work to make the vision real. I see it as the blueprint of our collective responsibility to our country, which has been born by the sacrifice of so many. We honour them by playing our part."

Brozin has created creative platforms at the Constitutional Court, including recording studios in the bowels of the building and a restaurant. He describes the Constitution as our "Lego" that citizens have to build together. "We, the people, can no longer sit back expecting the government to build the Lego, we need to do it ourselves."

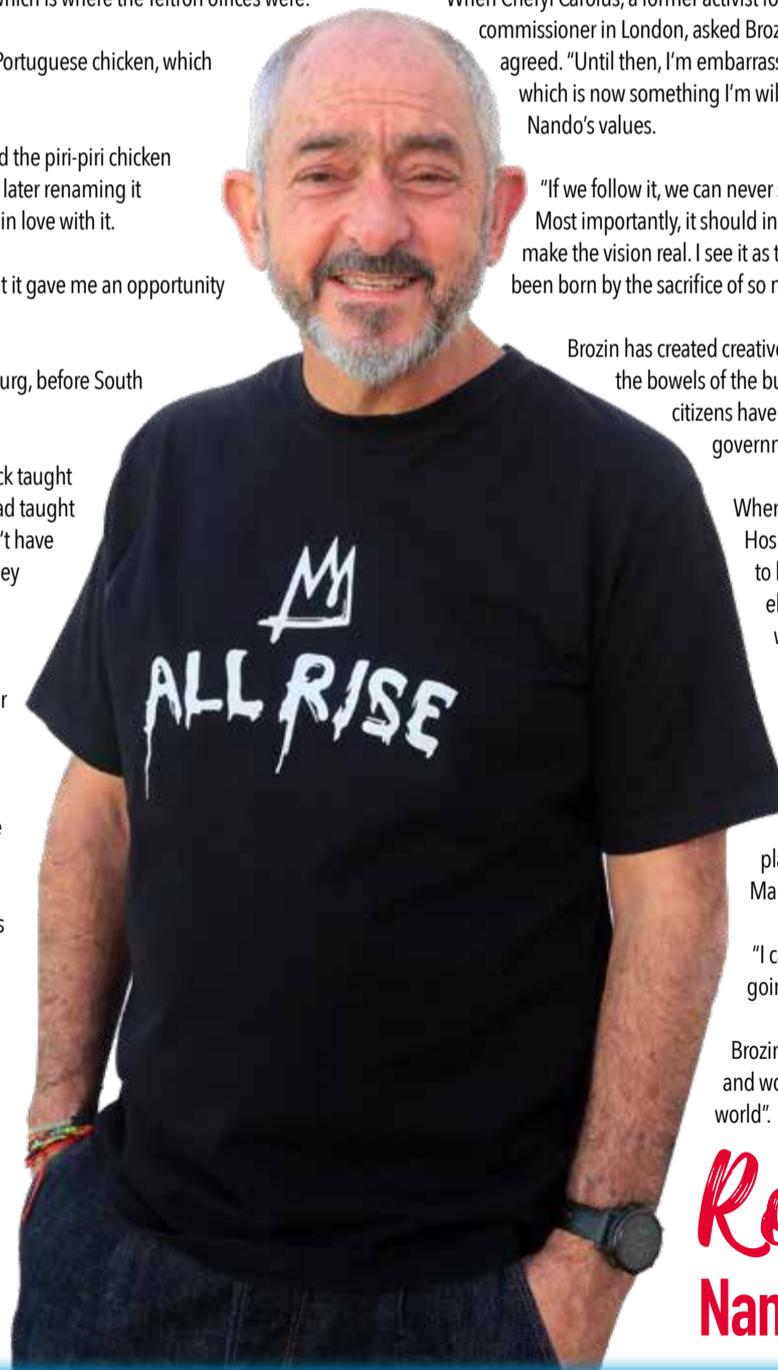
When Brozin was later alerted to the dire situation at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital (Bara), once a gold-standard public hospital, he contacted Wits to help improve its systems. That was two years ago, and now there's an electronic medical-record for clinicians called Surgeons for Little Lives, which is in its infancy and will later be rolled out throughout the hospital. It will be a massive improvement for the hospital and it will create a major data bank for research, according to Brozin.

And if you thought that was enough for one man, Brozin has now jumped into a new and even bigger project to fix the inner city of Johannesburg. Though this seems insurmountable, he has a plan which he believes is foolproof, beginning with fixing up the Nelson Mandela Bridge between the city and Braamfontein.

"I cannot wake up with more optimism. I know the job opportunities this is going to create. We can do this because if Joburg fails, we all fail," he said.

Brozin believes in South Africa. He wants to see his grandchildren at Wits and working at Bara "because they are the best university and hospital in the world".

**Robbie Brozin**  
**Nando's**



## Kirsh Family Lifetime Achievement Award

*in honour of Helen Suzman*

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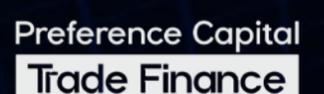
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## Hacking it in the world of football

From positions including as chief executive of the South African Football Association (SAFA) to playing key roles in various disciplinary and anti-doping committees, attorney and veteran South Africa football administrator Raymond Hack has devoted much of his life to his love of sport.

This year's Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award winner, Raymond Hack is one of South Africa's most senior figures in world sport. Among his prominent sporting experiences, working on the FIFA 2010 World Cup South Africa, where he headed up the local organising committee and served as chief executive of SAFA, was the most satisfying, he says. "Just seeing that it came off in spite of all the adverse publicity that we had through the English press was a highlight."

Having worked as legal advisor to the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee, Hack has also travelled to almost every Olympic Games in his lifetime as well as to all of the football World Cups through his involvement in FIFA. He now chairs the World Aquatics Ethics Panel, and has attended multiple swimming world championships. "Just being part of the world of sport is the most important thing to me," he says.

Growing up with a love of the beautiful game, Hack played football at University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) before sustaining an injury that sent him into the administrative side of football, serving as chairperson of the Wits Professional Football League for more than 25 years. He also served as chairperson of Maccabi SA, where he was later appointed honorary life member. Yet before he entered the international fray, Hack was a key role player in the formation of the Premier Soccer League (PSL).

"In the days of apartheid, we played in the National Football League white league as opposed to a black league, a coloured league, and an Indian league," he recalls. "Then, we joined the National Professional Soccer League, under George Thabe. Eventually Kaizer Motauung, Irvin Khoza, and I broke away and formed the PSL. That was a great creation. It was the right thing to do at the time and it's still going."

Hack's friendship with Khoza, the chairperson of the Orlando Pirates Football Club, goes back 55 years. It stemmed from Hack's association with Jack Sello, the former chairperson of Morocco Swallows Football Club.

"Sello took me to my first game in Orlando Stadium when I was 16 years old in the boot of his car because whites weren't allowed to go there," says Hack. "He was a policeman, and he used to buy second-hand boxes from my mother, and knew I was interested in the game. It was 1966, and I was probably the first white person to be at Orlando Stadium."

Throughout his life, football has been good to Hack. He's filled various leading roles on anti-doping and disciplinary committees, including working with the World Anti-Doping Agency and notably chairing the Confederation of African Football Disciplinary Committee for 20 years. He was also instrumental in creating the South African Institute for Drug-Free Sport.

Speaking of what keeps him going in spite of his considerable achievements, Hack says it's all about serving where he can best add value. "I'm motivated to ensure that people understand that sport is bigger than an individual, and no matter how big you are, there are rules and regulations and you need to stick by them," he says. "Everybody has their time in the sun. Unfortunately, in a lot of sports administration circles today, there isn't succession, people vegetate in their particular positions, and the sport suffers. You need to change over and have new challenges."

In line with this thinking, Hack feels he's served his time with football, and is now focusing on swimming administration and enforcing boundaries in this arena

especially when it comes to upholding integrity and stamping out sexual harassment. "As an administrator, you're the guardian of that sport for that particular time, and you need to uphold the values of the sport," he says.

An attorney by profession, Hack laughs as he explains how he came to study law. "When I finished matric, my mother told me to go and register at university for accountancy. So, my friend, whose father was an attorney, and I went to register for accountancy, but the queue was too long. We wanted to get to movies in town, so we went and registered for law instead."

His legal qualifications have not only helped him build an illustrious career in sports administration, but also in the legal field, where he specialises in sports law and estates.

Hack is grateful to have met unbelievable people including sporting greats on his travels. "I've been fortunate to meet probably every top footballer, every top swimmer, every top Olympian, and even though they are world champions, they are down-to-earth people. I've never met anyone who thinks that they are bigger than the game. For me, the most important thing is they always give back to the game. They all return and try and improve the world today. They are the heroes of sport."

His frequent travel has undoubtedly had an impact on his family, but Hack appreciates its ongoing support. "My wife has accepted that I'm a free spirit. My kids were involved with sport growing up - my son was a South African swimmer and my daughter played netball and used to work for South African Rugby and the Lions. She hates football and loves rugby," he laughs. "I was fortunate that my family understood that for me, sport isn't a job, it's a passion."

Hack has also been active in mountain biking, swimming, and road running, although he's now hung up his running shoes. "I always say that it's not about age, it's about immaturity," he says, "and as long as I can remain immature, I'll be young. I'll never retire."

There's nothing like the unifying force of sport, he says. "Everybody says, 'You're from South Africa, you're white, and you're Jewish?' But I've never faced one bit of antisemitism on my travels. Sport brings everybody of every colour, religion, and creed together. People accept you for what you are, and that's the main thing. That's what they should always do."

Hack says he's humbled by his unexpected Absa Jewish Achiever Award win. "You don't serve in something to get something out of it," he says. "You serve to be able to impart knowledge, to help other people to make sure that what they do is correct. As long as I can give back what I've learned, help people, and get them to love sport as much as I do, I've achieved what I wanted to," he says.



*Raymond Hack*

## Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award

# Rising Star Award Nominees and Judges

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Scan here for more about the Rising Stars

Grant Friedman (Director, Africrest Properties); Justin Blend (Director, Africrest Properties); Jade Kirkel (Co-founder, JoyJoy); and Dan Stillerman (Founder, Excel Academy)



**YISHAI BASSERABIE** Singer/Songwriter

**Y**ishai Basserabie is a local musician and electrical engineering student whose new song, *My Own Skin*, has been played around the world.

Basserabie grew up in Johannesburg, and matriculated from Yeshiva College. He's in his third year of electrical engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand, and started writing music as a "side hustle".

Music is a vital part of his life. "My most prized possession is my Apple Music library," he said. "Each section represents a time of my life - what I was thinking, feeling, and smelling. I can scroll through it and instantly be transported back to any version of myself. I make music because it speaks to something deep down in all of us."

He hopes his music resonates with the people who listen to it. "It carries a message that people relate to," he said, pointing out that the song's meaning is unique to each person who listens to it. "It's funny because I feel like there's a disconnect between the lyrics and the music of

the song. What you hear now isn't how it was originally written. It started off as a typical slow, sad, open-chorded guitar song, but it's morphed into sounding like what I think it would feel like if someone was going through the difficult process of feeling comfortable inside their own skin. It's quite uplifting in the end.

"I have had phenomenal teachers in the music world, and through many years of hard work and encouragement, I was able to get to the place where I can release music and play concerts," Basserabie said. His career highlight was being the opening act for Will Linley at a concert. "That was ridiculous, and I proved to myself that I could do it," he said.

The toughest part of his journey is "how difficult it is to put yourself out there". His advice to others wanting to do the same is, "If you like what you've made, you just need to trust that it will find the right people."

Aside from music and studying, Basserabie

works for an artificial intelligence (AI) company Elucidate AI. "I'm fascinated by AI," he said. "I see it as the field with the most potential to change the greatest number of lives in the greatest number of ways. The process of identifying a previously unsolvable problem, and applying a new algorithm to provide a solution keeps me incredibly curious in this fast-paced, incredibly malleable field."

For a Grade 9 Hebrew project, Basserabie and a friend taught themselves to code, built an app, and put it on the app store. From there, he "became fascinated with science, biology, and technology, and that guided me into the direction I'm following".

He's not sure whether he'll make music full-time. "At the moment, it's a passion project, just a lot of fun," he said. His hope for the future is to use AI and technology to make a difference in the world.



**GABRIELLA FARBER-COHEN**

African National Congress Women's League

**G**abriella Farber-Cohen, recently elected to the provincial executive committee of the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) and the youngest member of the committee, is determined to break stereotypes and create positive change in South Africa.

She's unapologetic about being *frum*, a Zionist, and an alumnus of Yeshiva College and, though this hasn't come without hostility, she has gained respect for standing up for her beliefs.

Farber-Cohen is in her fifth and final year of an LLB at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). When she started at the university, she was "disturbed by the environment on campus, with black and white students having little to no interaction, and Jews being stuck in our little bubble".

She joined the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS), and became chairperson of SAUJS Wits Campus. "To my shock, many university students, clubs, and societies didn't want to work with us Jews, and had a hostile perception of what we stand for," she says.

To change this perception, Farber-Cohen got involved with the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA), which is made up of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League, the South African Students Congress, and the Young Communist League.

"I got involved with the ANCWL when there was a prayer session online during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I sent a message on Facebook asking if I could do a prayer on behalf of the Jewish community, being a student activist on the PYA and a religious Jewish feminist. The offer was accepted, I gave the prayer, and the rest is history."

Her philosophy for success is, "If we want something to change, we have to do it ourselves, otherwise don't complain. Whenever you progress in your journey, bring others up with you. When you respect your values and beliefs, others will respect them and you."

There are many challenges to being a religious Jewish Zionist in the ANC. "On a practical level, it's hard because of Jewish practices like Shabbos and kashrut and all the Jewish holidays," she says. "On an ideological level, it's hard because I'm constantly met with hostility because of my Zionist beliefs. I deal with it by not compromising."

Her greatest disappointment is "seeing so many people immigrate, who don't realise the beauty and potential of South Africa, and think that not having electricity and water is the end of the world. The end of the world is not having an incredible South African Jewish community and not being in a country with so much possibility. People need to start seeing problems as opportunities."

Farber-Cohen has hopes of going to Parliament and changing the justice system in South Africa, which she believes "doesn't fit or benefit the reality of the country". She wants one day to be minister of education or social development as she believes progress starts with education.

- On Monday 16 October, Farber-Cohen distanced herself from the ANC in its stance on the war between Israel and Hamas. She said she would leave the ANC if it did not condemn Hamas' massacre of Israeli citizens.



**SAUL FOX**

HandPrintSA

**S**aul Fox will never forget the moment he fitted the first 3D-printed prosthetic arm to Owethu (whose surname can't be printed), a young boy who lost his arm. "I'll never forget seeing the most genuine, excited smile in the world. It felt like I had brought a new, untouched brightness to the world. It was the best feeling," said Fox, 18.

This year, while in matric at Yeshiva College, Fox started a non-profit organisation which 3D-prints upper-limb prosthetics for those in need, giving it to them for free. In spite of the challenges of matric, he has dedicated his time to helping those in need.

Fox gets help from his father, mother, and sister, to measure, size, make, customise, and fit the prosthetics.

It started when Fox was in Grade 11, and someone donated a 3D printer to the school. "I'm a bit of a tech nerd," he said, "so I was allowed to learn how to use it." He found a Freddy Kruger-style Halloween prop which was a semi-controllable finger extension. "When I made it, I wondered, 'If I can extend my [working] fingers with this, surely a similar idea could work to give someone who has lost their finger a controllable finger?'" After doing some research, he found an organisation called e-NABLE, which creates the open-source designs which he now uses to print the prosthetics. "When I found out almost no-one was doing it in South Africa, I decided to start HandPrintSA."

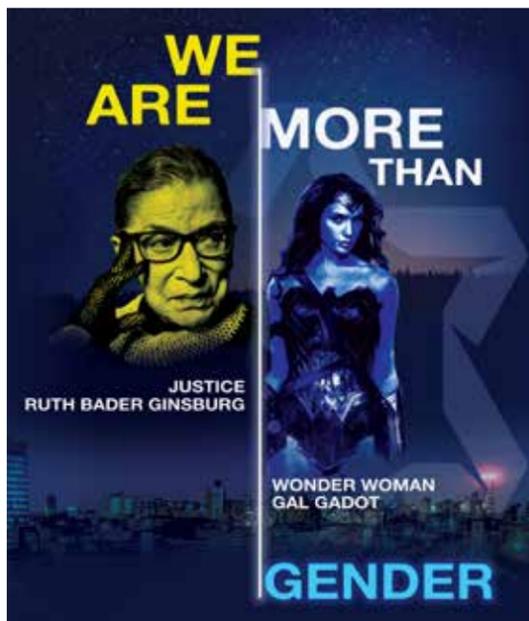
He consulted Michael Stevens from Jumping Kids, a non-profit organisation which provides mobility equipment for children, specifically lower-limb amputees or those with lower-limb deformities, who put him in touch with people from Hope School for learners with disabilities, where he met his first patient, Owethu.

Running HandPrintSA has come with its fair share of challenges, from loadshedding to faulty devices. "When our first device cracked after only a few months, it felt like I had failed. I said to myself, 'Crying about it isn't gonna help anyone, now fix it.' So I fixed it, and moved on."

For those without a medical aid, there's a three-to six-year waiting list for prosthetics in Gauteng, and they cost upwards of R60 000. Fox's 3D printed devices cost about R1 200 to make, and are provided free of charge.

He wants to expand this service to more patients, create more manufacturing sites, and improve his designs. "I would recruit more volunteers, try to make contacts in public hospitals and more places like Hope School, and I'm already working on a new design," he said. He's planning to study biomedical engineering and go to yeshiva for a year, while expanding his work for HandPrintSA.

"I hope I'll contribute to a better future for our nation," he said, and he hopes to be remembered for "the deeds I do, not for the challenges I face".





**SHALYA KATZEFF**  
Shalicious Nails

Shalya Katzeff is a full-time student as well as the founder and co-owner of successful nail salon Shalicious Nails. This mother-daughter-owned venture specialises in hand-drawn nail art. It offers manicures, pedicures, tips, nail art, and foot massages.

Katzeff matriculated from King David High School Victory Park, and obtained a Bachelor of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, majoring in psychology. "In the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, I embarked on a transformative journey that led me to discover a newfound passion for nails," she said. "With ample time on my hands, I decided to delve into the world of nail art and design, teaching myself the intricate techniques and methods that bring nails to life.

"Simultaneously, I began delving into the realm of psychology. Driven by a curiosity about the human mind and behaviour, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery. Engrossed in studying psychology, I began to unravel the complexities of human emotions, thoughts, and interactions."

At the age of 22, she has established and maintained a business that provides training, upskilling and empowering her employees. She stands out as an emerging leader in her ability to anticipate trends and introduce fresh ideas, train and empower a team of 12 employees in three years, all while adapting to continuous change in the economy due to the pandemic and using her background in industrial psychology to motivate her workforce. "I believe I've made a notable difference by elevating standards, fostering positive change, and pushing the boundaries of

the beauty industry," she said.

She takes pride in being a self-taught nail artist. "My dedication to mastering the art of nail design has allowed me to develop a distinctive style that sets me apart. At my salon, we specialise in creating captivating nail art that reflects individual preferences. Every design is a testament to my passion for self-expression and creativity. By choosing us, you're not just getting a nail service, you're experiencing a truly one-of-a-kind artistic journey."

Katzeff said the welcoming ambience, friendly staff, and personalised service at the salon creates a sense of comfort and belonging. "Clients aren't just customers, but members of an extended nail-care family which offers more than beauty. The joint ownership brings a personal touch that resonates, making Shalicious Nails a destination where creativity, warmth, and family values converge."

Shalicious Nails has just joined with a non-profit organisation to upskill a handful of ladies on the technical skill of doing nails. "It will help them build themselves a future," says Katzeff.

She hopes to combine her academic background in industrial psychology with the professional experience she has gained running Shalicious Nails. "This collaboration between the corporate and academic world has enormous potential to improve not only the functioning of the business but the overall satisfaction of our clients," she said.

Dean Goldblum is a freelance stage, screen, and voice actor. "I modulate my body, voice, imagination, and inner landscape using an array of tools to lend myself to different characters on film, television, theatre, and in voice-over work. I'm also at the forefront of an extensive business backend process," he says.

Goldblum matriculated from Reddam House Bedfordview and studied a BA (Hons) in theatre and performance, specialising in acting. He also obtained an Introduction to Performance Psychology certification from The Juilliard School.

He has played principal parts in American feature films and European cinema, as well as on almost every major streaming service in the world, including Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Amazon Prime, National Geographic, and Showmax. He's known for playing the parts of Todd on the Hulu original feature *Darby and the Dead* (2023); Sean on the SAFTA (South African Film and Television Awards) winning SABC 1/Netflix mini-series *The Kingdom* (2021); as well as Jason on Showmax's series *Tali's Joburg Diary* (2023).

He began his screen career at the age of 13 on SABC's *Little Stars*. From there, he performed gigs for many organisations. "I was learning how to roll cables and operate sound equipment, and travelling across the country to do various corporate shows in Grades 8 and 9," he said. In Grade 9, he played Danny Zuko in *Grease* at the Theatre of Marcellus, which cemented his love for the craft. The following year, in 2015, he was a

contestant on *South Africa's Got Talent*.

Goldblum is involved in various non-governmental organisations, including What About the Boys, a programme to prevent gender-based violence. "We engage with boys aged 13 to 18 across the country to help them re-imagine what it means to be a good man, and raise a generation which doesn't abuse and which uplifts itself as a means to uplift the communities around it."

He owes his success to his dedication and the people around him. "I am because my mom is, and she's extraordinary," he said.

"I filter every encounter I have through the following lens: life is very, very short," said Goldblum. "I was born part of a twin, and I came out alive and my brother, Ryan, was greeted at Heaven's gates. This encounter has always had a profound effect on the way I perceive the world. My dad passed away when I was seven, and my grandparents at a similar time. Death is important, tragic, and beautiful. It's a part of life, and a reminder that we need to cherish every second we're here, and we have one chance to do something great."

His goal is to "invest in as many people as possible, and show that being a working actor in film, television, and theatre in every country on the planet is completely attainable. At 23 years old, I have already proven it."



**DEAN GOLDBLUM**  
Actor

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## RACHELI MARKS

TangledTheHairSalon and Mr Fudge

At only 22, Racheli Marks is not only the owner of TangledTheHairSalon, she's also a partner in gourmet fudge company Mr Fudge. In her Johannesburg-based, one-woman boutique salon, Marks predominantly works with sheitels, specialising in realising each client's vision in less than 24 hours. She also does hairstyles for weddings and other events.

Operating since 2018 and selling kosher and chalay Yisrael fudge in Johannesburg and Cape Town, her other business concern, Mr Fudge, recently took a hiatus for structure and product re-assessment.

"We reopened in June 2023 with a new fudge factory, selling more than 3 500 blocks in the past three months," says Marks. "Mr Fudge has a small management team, each with our own responsibilities. We operate effectively independently and together."

Marks considers building relationships with her salon clients to be her greatest business achievement to date, but says she's just getting started. "Even though I'm still in the beginning stages of building my business, I'm taking a big step by accepting this nomination in the hope that I can be nominated again with new achievements and new goals. It does intimidate me, but as the saying goes, 'If your dreams don't scare you, they aren't big enough.'"

"This isn't just a nomination," she says, "it's an opportunity to get to know myself, meet new people, create new bonds, and hopefully help someone out there struggling to believe in themselves."

Though she's been styling hair for weddings and events on an ad-hoc basis since 2016, Marks officially launched TangledTheHairSalon in June 2022. "The business is self-managed, and I have had to stay disciplined to ensure a professional and thriving environment." She hopes to grow the business by selling wigs and eventually fuel job creation and skills development for future hairstylists and entrepreneurs.

Her business philosophy has helped her to navigate challenges. "I believe in acceptance," she says. "Whatever happened yesterday doesn't need to affect today, and today doesn't need to affect tomorrow. Today, I choose to accept."

Speaking of how she maintains a balance between work,



family, and community commitments, Marks says she tries to stick to a schedule. "It's difficult, but if anything, giving back to my family, friends, and community is the whole reason I follow my dreams – so that I can emotionally show up in other sectors of my life."

Marks says her husband, Gavriel, is a particular source of inspiration. "He has taught me the importance of self-worth and that no matter what, your opinion of yourself is more important than that of someone who may not actually know you," she says. "He's encouraged me to share that empowerment with others, and to share love and create beautiful friendships and relationships."

She also considers beauty entrepreneur Shalya Katzeff of Shalicious Nails to be a mentor. "She has taught me so many things that I wouldn't have thought about without her guidance. I'm so grateful to her."

• Racheli Marks was also nominated in the Entrepreneur category.

## ERIN LAZARUS

Investec

"When someone is faced with an amputation, most people expect the individual to break down, hide from the world, and lose their positivity," said Erin Lazarus, who developed a blood clot in her left calf due to undiagnosed Lupus, which ultimately led to her having her leg amputated below the knee. "For many, it would be a cause for despair and depression. However, for me, it was the start of a new life."

Lazarus matriculated from King David High School Linksfield and was a top athlete at school, winning sportswoman of the year in 2016, captaining both athletics and first-team netball that year. She was a student leader and the head of the school's sports committee from 2015 to 2016.

She captained the 2016 Under-18 Northern Gauteng Indoor Netball team, represented Gauteng gymnastics five times, and played netball at the Maccabi Games in 2013.

She went on to obtain a BCom in finance and insurance, and honours in



business finance in 2021.

In January 2022, she was about to begin working at Investec, when she had to have her leg amputated. Now 25, she's a client support banker at Investec, and has been working with Jumping Kids, a fund that provides access to prosthetic equipment, schooling, and more for children from previously disadvantaged backgrounds living with lower-limb amputations.

Her situation made her realise how important it is to give back, Lazarus said. "I was introduced to Michael Stevens, who runs Jumping Kids and is also an amputee, and I felt compelled to help. Jumping Kids not only provides prosthetics for those who aren't able to get them themselves, it places underprivileged kids in better schools and gives them aids which will improve their life. These kids will have a better chance of going to university and finding employment. I hope with my attitude and reach, I'll be able to change the lives of many people by giving them the same freedom I received when I got my prosthetic leg."

She was also asked to speak at various schools and shuls, which she found therapeutic. "I've been able-bodied for the majority of my life," Lazarus said. "I know what everyone thinks when they are faced with a disability. There's so much room for learning. I hope to show everyone that disability is 'normal!'"

"I've chosen to joke about Stompy [the name given to her amputated leg] because my life can still be full and happy. I never hid from the world. I've put myself out there, and I think people are attracted to positivity." She lives by the motto, "Suffering is universal, victimhood is optional."

Lazarus said she wanted to be remembered as "someone who inspires others to be the best version of themselves. I hope to influence them to rise above their challenges and embrace their quirks. I want to learn and grow in the business world, give back to and inspire my community, and push myself athletically," she said.

## SIMON LIPSCHITZ

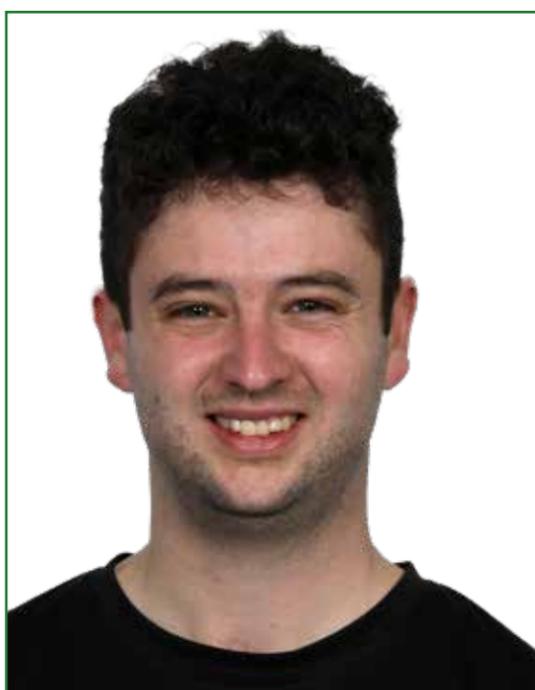
JustTT

Offering a revolutionary table tennis experience for enthusiasts of all levels, JustTT focuses on building the sport through innovation and sustainability. For co-director and founder, Simon Lipschitz, establishing and growing JustTT while working full-time as an engineer is his greatest business achievement. The fact that he's only 25 makes this accomplishment that much more impressive.

What sets JustTT apart is the fact that it has broken away from the traditional sports-club model and has a holistic approach which covers skills development, outreach, social engagement, and building a community.

Establishing a business that encourages social interaction during COVID-19 required innovative thinking from Lipschitz and his business partner, Luke Abrahams. "We had to come up with ideas about how we could run fun and interactive sessions while adhering to regulations."

Their success is testament to the strength of their



partnership. "Luke is tough but has a way to charm the pants off customers, while I'm more technology driven and focus on strategy and development," says Lipschitz. "We complement one other, and always speak openly."

Though he believes in maintaining a positive outlook, Lipschitz is frank about the need for change in South Africa, which he believes must be driven by active citizens. "South Africa faces many challenges, but I

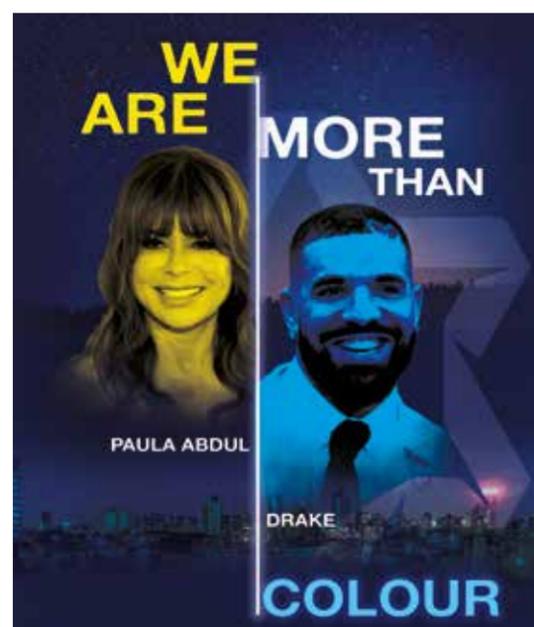
believe the main issue is a cultural problem," he says. "Young South Africans feel stuck and have a sense of entitlement, which is the enemy to self-improvement and growth. Once we have enough people breaking the norm and striving for more, we'll make serious changes."

With a business philosophy rooted in the idea that there's always room for improvement, this young entrepreneur strives to lead by example in bettering the country and encourages others to do the same. JustTT's outreach work is driven by sustainability. "We've already provided jobs and training to coaches," says Lipschitz. "We've also partnered with a French nongovernmental organisation to build the sport in Africa, and are starting to make tangible changes in our field."

Though he's fast establishing a reputation as a successful entrepreneur, he has faced failure along the way. "I started a company called JustTech Electronics which featured an online electronics and software course that failed," he recalls. "I shelved the course and didn't waste further time as the issues were structural and couldn't be overcome. I realised that failure was a learning opportunity."

Juggling a demanding job with running a business means that for Lipschitz, personal time is limited. Yet he's clear about his priorities. "I've set a hard rule that my fiancé comes first, which ensures that my values are aligned correctly," he says. "Shabbos has always been my saving grace, as I drop everything on Friday evening until Saturday night. This gives me precious time off every week."

• Simon Lipschitz was also nominated in the Entrepreneur category.





**GABRIELLA ONAY**  
Picnic & Thrift

At 18, Gabrielle Onay started a small business to pay for her university studies and begin funding herself. Now 24, she and her business partner, Ruby Lee Prager, are the owners of a thrifting empire that has taken the youth of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Centurion, and soon Cape Town, by storm.

Onay matriculated from King David High School Victory Park, and went on to obtain a degree in sociology and Portuguese, and honours in sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2018, she founded her small business, Crybaby Thrift, which sells thrifted and custom pieces. In 2019, she co-founded Picnic & Thrift, an eco-conscious thrift market that supports small local businesses. She also gives classes in small business development, entrepreneurship, and marketing at Lefika Children's Art and Therapy Centre.

Her work for Crybaby Thrift entails designing new products, creating content, producing new stock, and doing all online and digital marketing and artwork. "I also handle all the little day-to-day jobs in the business such as responding to customers, packaging and sending off parcels, and general social media advertising and engagements. I source and make all of my products myself, and do extensive research on the ethics and sustainability level of the products being developed," Onay said.

For Picnic & Thrift, she takes on a more administrative role, managing and organising the event. "Picnic & Thrift works for multiple reasons," said Onay. "It's a community of like-minded and open individuals who are interested in socio-contemporary causes

and advocacy, fashion trends, and supporting local businesses. In many ways, the Picnic & Thrift community are the future of the Johannesburg art scene, with many of our attendees and stall owners being creatives who are coming up in the broader Johannesburg creative industry. Picnic & Thrift creates an environment that's holistically safe for all those wanting to explore their ideas, selves, and practices."

Picnic & Thrift has worked with more than 650 stalls and has hosted more than 180 events in four years including film festivals with SAUFF (the South African Underground Film Festival); music and thrift festivals called Howzit; and more than 45 themed nightlife events and First Thursday artist exhibitions aimed at making space for local artists and musicians to showcase their wares and skill.

"I have a passion for small business development in South Africa, especially with the high rate of skills and the dually disheartening matching rate of youth unemployment. My success is linked solely to that of others such as the vendors at my market, who are the real stars. I provide the platform for them to grow their businesses and get an income, something I can proudly and with much gratitude attribute to my passion for the future of South Africa, and dually, the future of fashion and sustainability."

What makes her an emerging leader is her ability "to adapt, improvise, overcome, and progress in the right directions. I'm constantly strategising and planning, but a large part of my leadership skill can be attributed to my genuine love for what I do."

Bethia Milner witnessed the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) floundering after the COVID-19 pandemic, and was determined to reinvigorate it.

"It was a dying organisation, and it had no real impact on student lives," said the 21-year-old SAUJS national chairperson. "Instead of joining my peers in complaining that it wasn't catering for Jewish students, I decided to take over and make it an impactful and powerful organisation."

Milner has an overriding optimism and passion for the community that has rubbed off on her peers at universities around the country.

"At a time where there's a lot of fear and doubt about the future of the Jewish community in South Africa, I have an infectious love and hope for our strong community," she said.

Milner matriculated from King David High School Victory Park, and is in her third year BSc at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), majoring in maths and economics. She's also involved with Habonim Dror as a S'gan of a *shichvah* (age group), and is the vice-

chairperson of the Zionist Youth Council.

"Success is difficult, and requires persistence in the face of hopelessness," she says.

Though she has given SAUJS a new lease on life, it still has a long way to go, she says. "We need to be more consistent on campus, and we need to make sure that every Jewish student is involved and feels that they can be involved."

Working with the student representative councils of Wits, the University of Johannesburg, and Tuks (the University of Pretoria) has given her a unique perspective on the problems facing South Africans. "It has also taught me how to work with up-and-coming South African leaders, and this is a skill I have no doubt will be essential in bringing about a South Africa defined beyond its challenges," Milner said.

"Volunteering for community roles and giving them my all isn't what most students enjoy doing in their 20s, however it's clear that someone needs to do it, and if not me, then who?"

Recently, SAUJS held a seminar/Shabbaton for the first time in about eight years, something Milner was proud of. "More than 100 students attended, and everyone said it was a fantastic, meaningful, and enriching experience. Putting together this weekend away in which I witnessed the connection and love between Jewish students was inspiring."

Her role model is her mom, Karen Milner, the chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. "From her, I learnt two key things. First, Jewish leadership is important, especially in times of pessimism and lack of hope. Second, always do the right thing, even if it isn't the popular choice. These lessons have defined me and my involvement."

As for the future, Milner is sure of one thing, "I will always play a part in community organisations."

"I try to empower those with the same passion for our community," she said. "Making use of a team and working together makes success possible."



**BETHIA MILNER**  
South African Union of Jewish Students

## Serving the community with distinction **S**

As we acknowledge all the worthy nominees for the Mann Made Community Service Award, we pay special tribute to our Executive Director, Raelene Tradonsky, who has led the King David Schools' Foundation for over a decade. Her tireless work is funding our Jewish future, by ensuring the King David schools offer an outstanding Jewish, academic, sporting and cultural education, while our doors are open to Jewish children in need.

Thank you Raelene!



King David Schools'  
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**NATANYA PORTER**

Sydenham Shul, SAUJS, Bnei Akiva, SASCO, Education School Council

Sydenham Shul youth director and Batmitzvah teacher, Natanya Porter, believes being deeply involved in her community “isn’t a choice, but a calling driven by a passion for a bright and connected future”.

And while she’s studying towards a Bachelor of Education in the Foundation Phase, she’s also involved in student activism, having been elected to the University of the Witwatersrand’s (Wits’) student representative council deputy secretary general’s sub-committee, and as Wits School of Education council grievance officer. She’s also involved in the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA), South African Student Congress, and African National Congress Youth League. She’s Wits South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) vice-chairperson, and she runs the SAUJS Wits education campus office.

Outside of university, she was selected to represent Stand With Us to advocate for Israel, and has been closely involved with the South African Jewish community through her work with the shul and with the Division of Informal Jewish Education and Bnei Akiva.

“I’ve spent the past four years after high school doing everything I can to ensure I contribute to the South African Jewish community and South African society in general,” said Porter.

“I’ve been involved in diverse organisations because I believe there are many ways and places where I can make an impact on society. I’ve often heard that South Africa has no future, however its complications are an opportunity to get involved and make a difference. South Africa is a beautiful country, rich in culture and community, and it’s up to us – the next generation – to contribute.

“As a 23-year-old, my enthusiasm, dedication, and fresh perspective contribute to my emergence as a leader,” she said. “I’m eager to learn from those who came before me while also introducing innovative ideas that resonate with my peers.”

Judaism can seem unappealing to teenagers, Porter says. This is why she works to make Judaism fun and uplifting at Sydenham Shul. “Additionally, my involvement in my university as a member of the PYA and ESC [education school council] meant I’ve worked hard at helping a community separate from my own to deal with cross-cultural problems. Though we’re often afraid to enter protests and hard conversations scare us, I’ve done what I can to help fellow university students when they are being financially excluded from university.

“Sometimes we feel inclined to choose between making a difference in the Jewish community or the larger South African community, but there’s a way to do both. I’m proudly Jewish and religious while still being deeply involved in broader society.”

Her philosophy for success centres on authenticity, continuous learning, and collaboration. “Success is achieved by staying true to one’s values, embracing growth, and working alongside others towards a common goal.”

In the years to come, she hopes to teach as she believes that “education solves most problems”.

At 23, Jessica Smerkowitz is the chief executive of a boutique digital marketing agency which “crafts tailor-made solutions that empower businesses to conquer the digital world”.

Smerkowitz matriculated from King David High School Victory Park and has certifications in PPC advertising and data analysis. She launched the company, Do it Digital, at the beginning of 2022 as sole proprietor, with 100% equity in the business.

“I’m founder and chief executive, however I have a hands-on approach to everything that goes on in the business,” Smerkowitz said. “From sales to project management; campaign conceptualisation; customer service [client relationships]; team relationships; to the financial aspects, I carry the business with immense care and attention to detail.”

She always knew she wanted to work with technology. “At first, I saw myself becoming a software and/or website developer. But, towards the end of matric, I had so much curiosity and wanted to explore other careers as there were so many skills I wanted to master.

“The digital marketing sphere is extremely saturated, so when I decided to bring Do it Digital to life, I knew we had to provide a unique service that cares deeply about our clients and their success. My business thrives from shared success, creating motivation for myself and other team members to push our capabilities to the next level. If we succeed, our clients succeed, and if our clients succeed, we succeed. It’s a wonderful and healthy mutually dependent relationship.”

Do it Digital works with sub-contractors and freelancers to “aid our company’s sustainability, and mitigate against operating at a loss, while empowering freelancers and providing them with work opportunities”. The company works with more than 20 sub-contractors.

The team consists of artists, software/web developers, copywriters, advertising professionals, and inbound marketers. It provides services such as website development and search engine optimisation; graphic design and business branding; social media management and advertising; online advertising and lead generation; email marketing; copywriting; photography; digital consulting and strategy; and data analysis.

“By giving our clients custom-made solutions, we invest in their success, giving them a competitive edge using marketing intelligence. We amplify our clients’ brand awareness, lead generation, sales; and revenue, placing their business on the online map, thus increasing their profitability and return on investment.”

Do it Digital is ahead of the curve, Smerkowitz says, as it “follows trends in the United States, which enable us to stay ahead of the competition. It has been a thrilling journey to incept the South African market with my craft as there are a lot of businesses and other agencies that aren’t performing digital marketing the right way or at all, enabling us to become emerging leaders in the space.”

As a proud member of “Generation Z”, Smerkowitz is inspiring other young people to enter the digital marketing space. “I lead by example, encouraging youth to believe in themselves, hone their skills, and make an impact.”



**JESSICA SMERKOWITZ**

Do it Digital

Noah Stanger considers himself a “serial entrepreneur” and, at the age of 22, he’s managing director of an enterprise that encompasses various ventures, from private equity to podcasting to corporate finance.

Stanger Enterprises is the holding company which represents Noah and Ben Stanger’s current ventures: Modern Media, Stanger Talks, Sovereign All Sports Africa, Forth Capital, and Millennium Equity Partners.

While building these ventures, he hosts the growing podcast, *Stanger Talks*, for which he has gained 12 000 followers on Instagram, 19 000 on TikTok, and more than 1 000 on YouTube since its launch this year.

Stanger matriculated from Michaelhouse, and went on to study a Bachelor of Arts majoring in business management at Belmont Abbey College in the United States.

“The majority of my peers choose to go down the corporate route before eventually diving into the entrepreneurial space,” said Stanger. “I’ve decided to go right into the deep end with a sink-or-swim mindset. I believe in putting yourself out there without fear of being judged or failing.”

Stanger has grown up surrounded by “hyper-successful” entrepreneurs, which is the inspiration for his belief that “there’s opportunity all around us, and if you don’t take advantage of it, someone else will. In the same breath, I believe in not spreading yourself too thin, which is where my partnership with my brother is advantageous. We split the workload, and are each other’s sounding board and motivator. We take on only those opportunities we believe will succeed and that allow us to remain in control of our endeavours.”

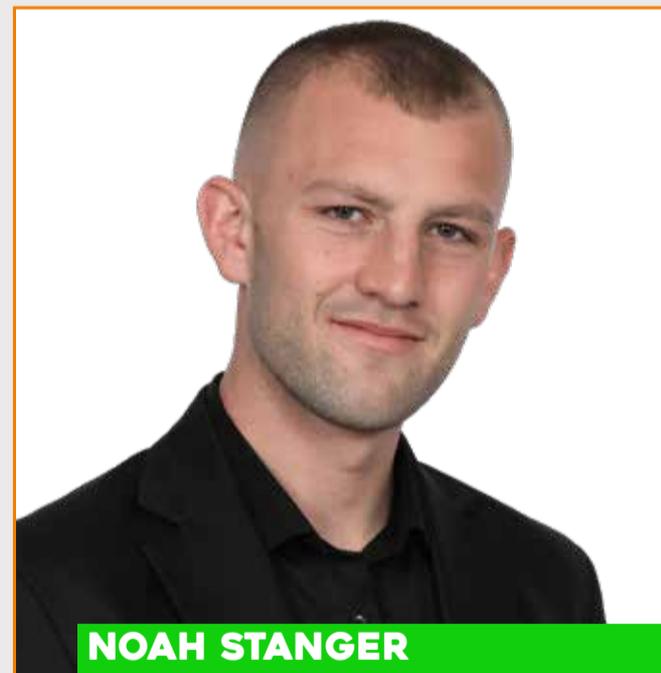
With his podcast, he said, “I wanted to create a platform where I could grow my personal brand, meet fellow business people, and provide value through their messages. I’ve successfully managed to achieve all three, and the rate at which the platform is growing at is exceptional.”

Stanger was a promising soccer player, having won a scholarship to play at university in the United States. “I gave up my passion that I worked on for more than a decade to come home and build a future. Though I was disappointed, I’ve come to realise that I made the right decision,” he said.

He does well because he optimises collaboration and connections, and he believes people skills are the secret to success in business. However, he’s trying to do better at delegating, which he finds difficult. “It’s hard to trust others to do work on my behalf because I know how high my standards are,” Stanger said.

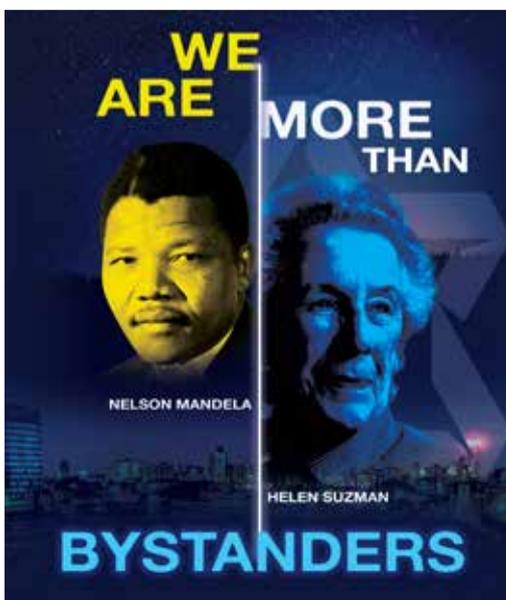
Stanger starts his workday at 04:00, when he gets up, goes to the office, and works for two hours before training at the gym for two hours. “By 09:00, I have done two hours of work, had a workout, and am prepared for the day.”

His philosophy for success is to surround himself with individuals who challenge him. “Like-minded people who are more skilled, more successful, or even more ambitious than you pushes you to raise your game and enables you to achieve more than you would on your own,” he said.



**NOAH STANGER**

Stanger Enterprises



# WINNER

Absa  
Jewish Achiever Awards

# 2023

## Scoring a hat-trick

**D**avid Teeger says being announced captain of the Proteas Under-19 cricket team to play Bangladesh has been his greatest achievement so far. "The feeling of leading your country is indescribable. No words," says the 18-year-old who is the winner of the Rising Star Award 2023.

Teeger, who is head boy of King Edward VII School (KES) in Johannesburg, has never let his cricket or other commitments get in the way of his religious observance, even if it meant not being able to participate.

The 50-over series in Bangladesh in July was Teeger's first international cricket tour, and it was an outstanding experience for him. Captaining the team in three of the five matches, he was also the top run scorer in the series.

Although Bangladesh won the series 3-2, this modest teenager says the experience was full of "great learnings", and served as good preparation for the 2024 Under-19 Cricket World Cup in Sri Lanka.

"Throughout all the challenges around kashrut and Shabbat, I have stuck to my beliefs and missed out on certain events as a result," he said. "This wasn't easy, but my strong beliefs are key to my success and the respect I have been given."

When Teeger went on the Bangladesh tour with his dad, former Transvaal wicketkeeper James Teeger, they took two suitcases, one for clothes and one for kosher food. They kept Shabbat in the hotel. "My dad and I had a little laugh about it. We were probably the only two Jewish people in Bangladesh," Teeger says. "I was lucky that we played on the Friday and Saturday was mostly a rest day, so I didn't miss out on too much other than an outing."

Teeger has played for KES first XI cricket, Central Gauteng Lions Under-19A; Central Gladiators teams; and brought home the Maccabi SA Junior's gold medal for cricket.

He follows in the footsteps of several famous Proteas players such as AB de Villiers; Mark Boucher; Makhaya Ntini; and Kagiso Rabada to have played for the Under-19 side for South Africa. He has also walked in the same shoes of cricketers who have captained the Under-19 team such as Hashim Amla; Dean Elgar; Quinton de Kock; and Aiden Markram, who all went on to captain the Proteas in at least one format.



"I started playing cricket at the age of five, and in spite of not being too keen initially, I soon fell in love with the game," said Teeger. He went to the Jimmy Cook Cricket Academy throughout his time at Hirsch Lyons Primary School. "Mr Cook suggested I move to KES, but this seemed difficult due to my religious obligations. A few discussions were had between my parents, Mr Cook, and the school, and an agreement was made on how we could make it work."

He moved to KES in Grade 8, where he would walk to all the home games and play only on home ground. When he broke into the first team, he started sleeping at nearby bed-and-breakfast establishments to play away fixtures. "From that, one thing led to another. I now view this as the greatest decision of my life."

Teeger was elected head boy of KES in 2023, and is chairperson of the public speaking team. As head boy, he ran an anti-abuse initiative "to equip the students to deal with and report abuse and foster an environment that doesn't tolerate an institutionalised culture of silence and bullying. It also made boys aware of the difference between bullying and initiation practices in all-boys schools. Additionally, we raised R20 000 for the Teddy Bear Clinic as part of this initiative."

Teeger excelled in academics, being in the top 10 for academics throughout his time at KES, gaining full academic colours. He has also achieved accolades as chairperson of KES's trophy-winning public speaking team, and he is in the school's first team for hockey."

He balances his various commitments by setting aside time for training, then factoring in his academics and other responsibilities. "It's stressful, but it goes back to my philosophy of success: if you want something done, give it to a busy guy. I like being under time pressure."

Teeger owes his success to "my loving family's support and the support structures I have in place; my fierce determination to achieve in all aspects of life; and the fact that I enjoy being pushed outside my comfort zone".

His role model is his school cricket coach, Mr Adriaanse. "His advice is that one element can only be 20% of your life. At times, it will be more and at times less, but on average, 20% is a good mark. Friends, family, etc fill up the rest."

A significant challenge for Teeger was when he struggled at the interprovincial and CSA (Cricket South Africa) Cubs week in January this year. "I had already been selected for SA Under-19 but I couldn't get a run," he said. "I felt as if all eyes were on me, and I was letting my coaches down. I did a lot of introspection, and even dived into my character to uncover what the problem was. Hundreds of hours in the net and some tears definitely helped. Admitting that I was struggling definitely helped solve the problem."

Family is everything to Teeger. "I'm a brother, friend, and son before any of my achievements," he said. One day, he wants to be remembered as "a good brother, son, friend, husband, father, and role model - who played cricket on the side."

"I was nominated because of my unique journey," he said. "I've managed to excel at high levels of cricket, while still keeping kashrut and Shabbat. I've shown that our Jewish faith doesn't stop us from following our dreams."

Teeger has a strong belief that sport has an "incredible power to unite people. Hopefully, I can inspire young kids to follow their dreams, and rejoice in our cultural differences."

His goal in the next few years is to become a professional cricketer while qualifying as a CA/SA (chartered accountant).

*David Teeger*  
King Edward VII School  
Central Gauteng Lions  
Proteas Under-19

## Rising Star Award

# Entrepreneur Award Nominees and Judges

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Daniel Taitz

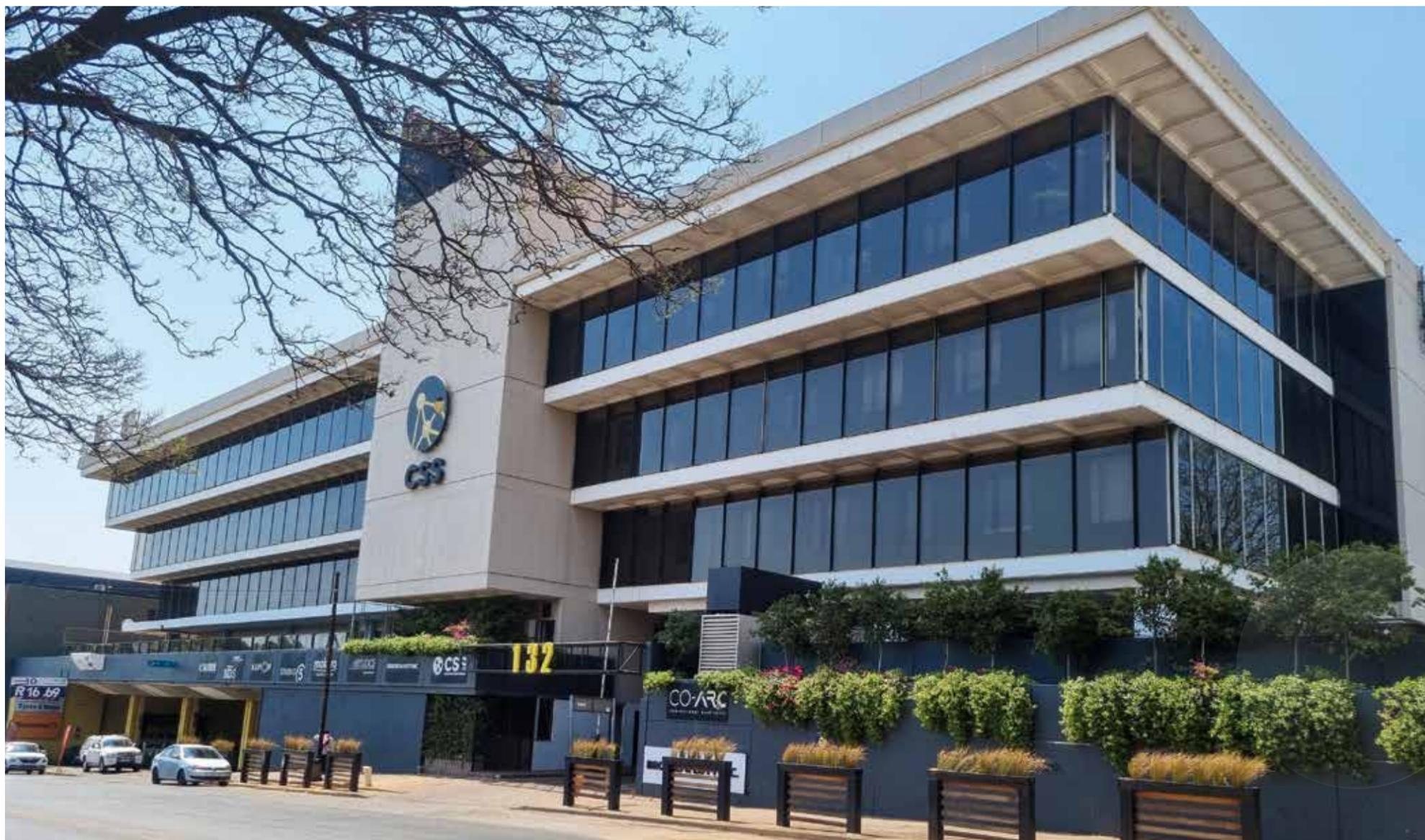
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Jonathan Goldberg

*Scan here for more about  
The Entrepreneurs*



Heidi Brauer (Consulting Brand Mama); Barry Swartzberg (CEO, Vitality Global and Co-founder, Discovery Ltd); Romeo Kumalo (CEO, LLH Capital); and Avi Mishan (MD, SMD Technologies)



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**DAVID AKININ** Jabu Logistics

David Akinin is the founder of two innovative, community-changing companies: Jabu and Atenu Developments. Jabu has revolutionised e-commerce for spaza shop owners, providing them with the means to order the products they sell and then get them distributed straight to their shops. Jabu's software is operative in 11 cities, and streamlines everything, from warehousing to merchandising, ensuring same-day delivery to thousands of spaza shops.

Akinin and his team also recently introduced Jabu Wallet to encourage savings among communities by offering 6% interest; JabuConnect, the "Uber" for deliveries; and the Jabu Academy, cultivating talent across different trades by training future leaders and professionals. "At Jabu, I'm surrounded by people I admire who come in every day to work on a combined mission," he says.

His other company, Atenu Developments, which is now under the leadership of his brother, Samuel, has transformed Namibia's landscape by using innovative construction to address the dearth of affordable housing, quality education, and health. In its relentless effort to uplift communities, the Atenu team has built 25 schools, two clinics, many warehouses, and countless homes.

Atenu also partners with philanthropic entities like the Kirsh Foundation and the Palms for Life Fund to improve the learning conditions and possibilities for marginalised communities.

"Every school we built started with a meeting under a tree, and every house we put up commenced with a coffee in the living room of the buyer's current home," says Akinin.

Akinin is optimistic about South Africa. In spite of the challenges, there's an undeniable spirit of resilience and innovation here, he says, and "the entrepreneurial landscape is buzzing with potential". Atenu is expanding in South Africa, building its first ECD (Early Childhood Development) centre a few hours from Johannesburg.

Akinin is committed to his family, saying it shares his vision. One of his role models is his father, Ysaac Akinin. "When I was a kid, we were in a thousand-people conference, and the speaker showed us a paper clip. He asked the audience to write down as



many uses as one could find for it. My father was the only person in the room who could come up with more than 100 uses, and he probably would have come up with more had he not been limited by time. He taught me that time is our only limitation."

At just 33 years of age, Akinin has undoubtedly used his time to leave a lasting legacy.

"My driving force is an unwavering belief in the potential of human stories," says Akinin. "Every interaction, be it with Inge, who built her house from her shop's earnings, or with Othilie, who sold her home for her daughter's education, fuels my motivation to create impactful change. These stories inspire the core ethos of Jabu and Atenu."

• David Akinin was also nominated in the Business Leadership category.

**DORON GAVRONSKY**

Kosher Africa/Chef En Route

Starting his entrepreneurial journey in 2015 with Chef En Route, which provided private chef services to clients in the comfort of their own homes, Doron Gavronsky soon found himself catering larger events such as Barmitzva's and engagement parties. His passion for the bush and commitment to ensuring that guests could keep kosher while enjoying authentic African adventures fuelled the next phase of his business.

And so, Kosher Africa was born. "I've always had a vision to open as many kosher certified kitchens across Africa as possible to allow kosher guests to enjoy their travels with ease and peace of mind," says Gavronsky. Planning bespoke kosher safari experiences, Kosher Africa has brought kosher clients from around the world to exclusive lodges in game reserves around Africa.

"I've completed about 50 kosher trips, accompanied by mashgiachs, to

Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Namibia, and Uganda," he says. Gavronsky has been invited to provide kosher chef services around South Africa and in other parts of the world, but it's his core kosher safari offering that sets him apart.

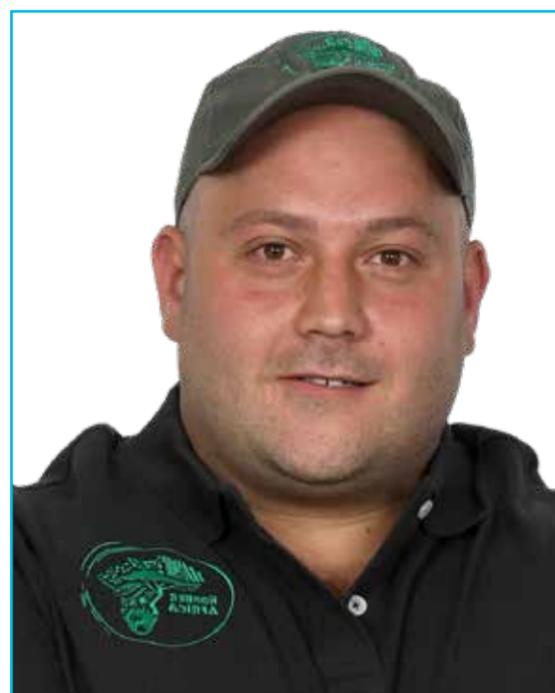
"Being able to offer a fully kosher fine dining experience in the middle of the African bush is a unique opportunity," he says. "It's a niche market, one that I have worked extremely hard to capture. I strive to offer a five star service, from plated kosher cuisine to impeccable customer service."

Gavronsky is working on realising his vision of opening as many kosher certified kitchens across Africa as possible. "We've built and opened three kosher certified kitchens in lodges across South Africa, and plan to open another three kitchens in the near future," he says.

Passionate about driving tourism into South Africa and the broader African continent, Gavronsky's work benefits the economy and helps to create jobs. "Our company has also trained staff at many lodges to help them provide better service to their guests," he says. "We've also educated the staff at these lodges about Jewish customs and dietary requirements."

His dedication to boosting the service and offerings of the lodges with which he works is in keeping with Gavronsky's optimistic view of South Africa's prospects and his faith in its close-knit and supportive Jewish community that ensures the security of its members. That's not to say he's blind to the challenges the country faces. Addressing these begins with improving our education system, he says, which is key to the betterment of the country. "Maintenance of the infrastructure, especially in schools, should be a priority for the government."

Gavronsky is inspired by the example of Chef Philemon, a chef he employed who passed away in December 2021. "Chef Philemon was my mentor for many years," he says. "He was so kind and was always happy to help where he could. This is something that I try to emulate. Philemon's motto was "never give up". I have adopted this, and I persevere no matter what."



**CODY GORDON**

CG Technology Group

"When I was in my matric year, just before my final exams, my father passed away suddenly from lung cancer," recalls Cody Gordon, now 26. "Within a week of him being diagnosed, I had to say goodbye to my best friend and mentor. This event shook my world and changed my life forever."

A few years later, still struggling with this trauma and its impact on his mental health, Gordon knew he needed to find a way to heal and to become a better version of himself. "It led me to co-found CG Technology Group (CGTG) at the end of 2018 with my partner, Michael Dukes," he says. "My business is unique because from my greatest struggles were born my greatest gifts."

Developing its first enterprise software called It'sOk, which focuses on developing emotional intelligence and making mental health a priority in schools, CGTG soon made its mark. Widely adopted by top schools across South Africa, the app is designed to engrain



positive daily habits into students' lives. As part of making a social impact, It'sOk has also provided its technology free to The Tomorrow Trust, a non-governmental organisation that assists more than 500 orphaned and vulnerable students.

It'sOk encourages individual students to "check into" their feelings regularly and start asking why they feel that way. Tracking their emotions over time, it includes teachings on the range of feelings people experience, and provides life skills like gratitude and self-love.

"It has panic buttons, enabling in-app chats to school counsellors,

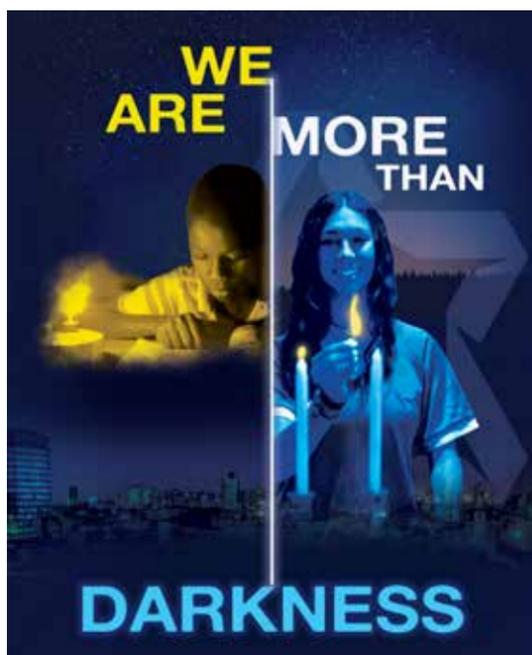
and has alerts to key people in the school when the emotional rating is below an acceptable level," Gordon says. The app's red flag feature automatically notifies key members of school staff of students who express risk of self-harm. It'sOk also offers emotional-support tools and resources such as guided meditation.

"When we started our journey, we said that if we could just help one child improve their mental health, our whole journey would be worth it," says Gordon. "In 2022 alone, our schools received 174 red flag notifications, allowing teachers and counsellors to get in touch instantly with their students and assist them with their mental health battle."

Realising their vision of delivering impact at scale, Gordon and Dukes introduced a corporate offering, Be Frank, in 2022. "Be Frank is a software platform and an industrial psychology service that focuses on improving team performance by uncovering the intangible dynamics that exist within teams," Gordon says.

"Entrepreneurship is about so much more than material success," he says. "It's about the impact that you can make." For Gordon, this starts with employees. It's about fostering a positive culture, creating an environment for people to prosper personally and professionally.

Assessing the societal impact of one's business is also vital, he says. "What matters is that because of something that you and the people around you created, other people's lives have been improved."





**LUKE JEDEIKIN AND CLAUDE HANAN  
BASH.COM**

Having co-founded and later exited Superbalist.com, the then largest online fashion retailer in the country, childhood friends and business partners Luke Jedeikin and Claude Hanan took a one-year hiatus and then founded Bash.com in June 2022. An omnichannel platform, Bash.com aggregates all of TFG's (The Foschini Group's) brands into a single mobile first shopping experience.

"We want to create a platform that makes it easy for people to shop for fashion, homeware, and other lifestyle products, whether they're online, in-store, or through a combination of both," say Jedeikin and Hanan. "We're also committed to using technology to create a more personalised and engaging shopping experience for our customers."

While the two achieved considerable success with Superbalist, within six months of Bash.com's launch, it exceeded Superbalist in downloads. It thereby became the leading fashion and lifestyle app in the South African market. With almost 15 years of leadership in the online fashion retailing space, Jedeikin and Hanan's experience and dominance in the sector is unrivalled.

They consider their greatest business achievement to be twice established as the leading business in the sector in which they operate. "With Superbalist, we bootstrapped a start-up and scaled it to the sector's leading brand. With Bash.com, we modernised and transformed a sprawling, federated organisation into a top-tier platform business. In both instances, we materially contributed to the digital transformation of the South African retail sector at large."

Though Jedeikin and Hanan have never been dealt a killer blow, they have made their fair share of mistakes along the way, from making the wrong hires to investing in too much inventory. "During these times, having a co-founder partnership has been a game changer," they say. "We go through these lows together, which is a unique and lucky position for both of us."

Their partnership has also helped the two to navigate the challenges that come with working in a nascent industry, with little institutional domain knowledge on which to draw. "We've leaned on one another's resourcefulness and first-principle approach to breaking down problems. Our dynamic has thrived on collaboration, deep ownership, and specialisation and in so doing, each of us has honed our expertise in distinct facets of the domain."

Jedeikin and Hanan are dedicated to making a positive impact on South Africa. "This is our home," they say. "We're passionate about creating a work environment that attracts South Africa's best talent and acts as a form of defence against the 'brain drain'. We hire the best of the best by global standards, and have managed to beat out numerous international firms like Amazon and Meta - where candidates have chosen Bash.com over emigration or relocation to those firms."

"Luke and I are proud matriculants of Herzlia High School and members of the Cape Town Jewish community," says Hanan. "We're passionate about continuing the proud entrepreneurial track record of the community, and winning this award would be a huge honour."

• Luke Jedeikin and Claude Hanan were also nominated in the Business Leadership category.

**GILAN GORK - INFLUENCE INSTITUTE**

As a bestselling author, speaker, and executive coach, Gilan Gork has worked with leaders in more than 40 countries, from Fortune 500 companies, governments, the military, and organisations like NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization).

"My unusual background as a mentalist helps me work with people to unlock their inherent potential to lead themselves and others more impactfully," he says. Gork is the founder of the Influence Institute, the research and training arm for his projects with global clients.

"By providing leadership development and training services, we're fostering a global community of clients and influential leaders who are dedicated to making a positive impact in their organisations and the world," says Gork, speaking of his corporate offering. "We're creating a brighter future where all leaders are driven by high performance and the desire to make a difference."

Gork also caters to individuals through his "Deep Happiness, Peak Performance" online programme that helps people find inner peace, joy, and fulfilment without fear

of sacrificing their performance or success. "The common thread between my work with companies and individuals is my calling to amaze people by showing them things about themselves they've never seen before so they can access their full potential to make a positive impact on the world," he says.

Tapping into this philosophy, Gork managed to pivot his offering when the COVID-19 pandemic wiped out an entire year of planned local and international conferences and training. Understanding that everyone was facing trauma and strain, he developed a 14-day online programme called "High-Performance Mentality", and offered it for free.

"It comprised short lessons and mindfulness exercises to help people deal with crises as well as equip them mentally and emotionally to be able to perform," he says. By offering a further six-week paid programme, Gork not only managed to sustain his own business, he helped other entrepreneurs to do the same while also helping individuals to handle the emotional impact of the pandemic.

"I've come to understand, in both business and life, the transient nature of success and failure," he says, explaining why he sees challenges as opportunities for growth and learning. "As long as my problem-solving, grit, and resilience is based on how I'm growing through each challenge, I'm able to allow things to unfold without becoming a victim."

Speaking of his approach to finding a work-life balance, Gork says that though he used to be a "productivity enthusiast", he has accepted that we have finite lives and will therefore never get everything done in a day. "There will always be important things to say 'no' to, and important things left on my to-do list which I haven't managed to get to," he says. "Having this perspective helps me not feel guilty when I spend time with family and community."

Striving for work-life integration, rather than balance, Gork says the two cannot be separated. "By aligning my purpose with my work, my sense of purpose feeds my life and work, which is how they are integrated."



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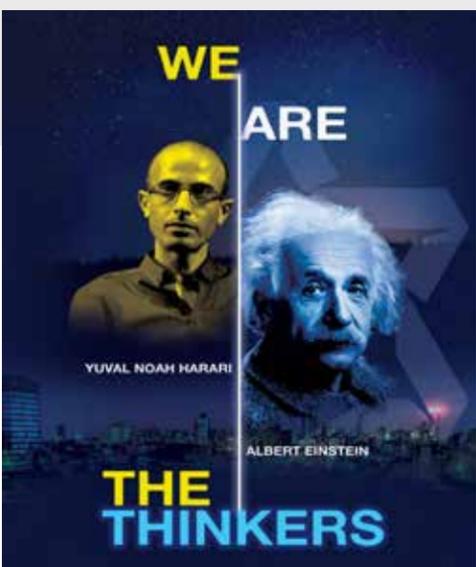
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**NICHOLAS INGEL - EMET GYMS**

**I**n our gym we sell 'happier,'" says Nicholas Ingel, who founded Emet Gyms in 2009. "We make sure that when our clients leave the gym, they are happier with what their bodies can do than before they started training."

Emet Gyms, an internationally reputed strength and conditioning gym, focuses on physical, mental, and emotional wellness. Understanding that mental health comes before physical health when it comes to quality of life, it uses physical training to improve clients' self-belief, mental tenacity, and resilience.

Emet Gyms offers outcomes-based training. "Our clients come to us with an objective, and we design a training programme for them to reach their goals while constantly monitoring and adapting their programme along the way," Ingel says.

Another of Ingel's business concerns, Emet Media, offers live streaming of national and international powerlifting events, and produces a podcast. "Here, we leverage our expertise and network within the wellness community to showcase young and up-and-coming athletes and coaches as well as international champions," he says.

Emet Gyms seeks to multiply the positive effects of each action the business takes. As such, Ingel makes upskilling his teams a priority, which not only empowers employees but also boosts the growth potential of his business. "Our goal is

to empower and uplift as many individuals and groups within our country by sharing skills and knowledge, and to empower our clients to join us in doing so," Ingel says.

Through its mentoring programme, Emet Gyms works to develop and empower coaches from disadvantaged communities who impart the skills they learn to subsequent generations of coaches. Coach development goes hand in hand with the training of clients, who enjoy being involved in this process of empowerment.

"We rate our business' profitability based on the number of lives we can positively affect," Ingel says. "Our goal this year is to increase job creation, and improve the education and development of those in our country by partnering with effective partners who have the financial resources and expertise to assist in making this happen."

An alcoholic who has been sober for 16 years, Ingel has spent his years of sobriety focusing on being "more than" he was yesterday in as many areas of life as possible. "Within my business life, this shows through the expansion of the companies and offerings to the wellness industry," he says. "Being 'more than' means seeing areas that are slowing down and looking for other areas to grow to counter this slowdown."

Ingel has an optimistic view of South Africa's prospects in the year ahead as he feels we have normalised our challenges and can now focus on business growth within this new norm. "We're facing one of our best potential growth opportunities in recent history," he says. "The challenges of the past have empowered us with tenacity, mental toughness, resilience, and a profound belief in self, which we perhaps didn't have before."



**MICHAEL LEVIN - BNI SOUTH AFRICA**

**"T**he most important element of success is passion," says Michael Levin, the national director of BNI (Business Network International) South Africa. "If you're not excited about what you're doing, how can you be successful?" Levin is living proof of this philosophy. Before he discovered BNI, Levin loathed the work he did and was often sick and confined to bed in intense pain, escaping the world through painkillers.

One day, inspired by his young son, he decided to make a change. "It was enough," he says. "I had to get up and do something about it."

Soon afterwards, he travelled to London for the Barmitzvah of his friend's son. During his trip, he was introduced to BNI, a business and professional networking organisation that allows one representative from each profession to join.

He pledged to bring the business to South Africa. "I raised the bar way out of my comfort zone, and I was going to help change the way the world does business in South Africa," he recalls. Twenty-five years later, Levin oversees 15 franchisees throughout the country.

"BNI provides an opportunity for businesses to grow through word-of-mouth networking," Levin says. "Each person has the opportunity to talk about their business each week for one minute. During the year, they get a 10-minute slot to better educate the chapter and expand on their business." Attendees share referrals and testimonials, and so their businesses grow.

**ARYE KELLMAN - TILT**

**H**aving ventured into entrepreneurship during his high school years, Arye Kellman co-founded innovative content creation and influencer marketing agency TILT at the age of 27. Now 33, Kellman is also TILT's managing director.

"At TILT, we craft and execute tailor-made marketing solutions for exceptional clients, harnessing the transformative power of digital influence," he says.

"Our team specialises in creating impactful branded content in collaboration with influential personalities and thought leaders, igniting meaningful conversations that effortlessly integrate brands and their core values into the forefront of our cultural zeitgeist." TILT's many notable clients include Virgin Atlantic, Colgate, and Investec.

In July this year, a majority stake in TILT was acquired by the Mohau Media Group. "It's incredibly fulfilling to witness the transformation of a ground breaking idea into a flourishing company with an even brighter future within just six years," says Kellman.

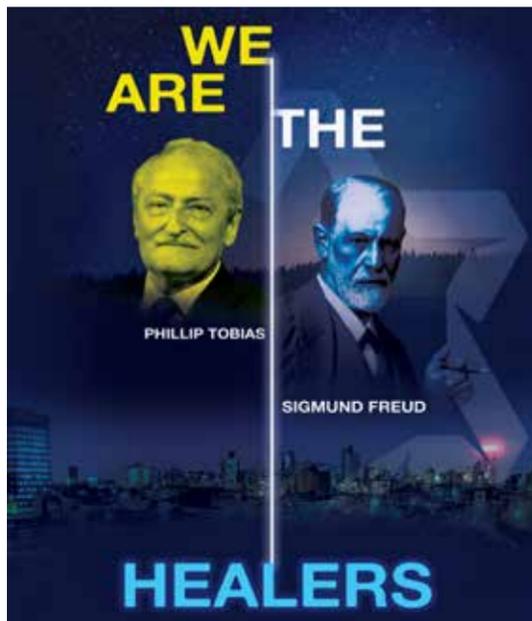
Though Kellman has had many mentors and sources of inspiration along his career journey, Mohau Media Group Chief Executive Neil Jankelowitz has recently become a role model because of his integrity and principled approach to business. In the early stages of his career, Kellman was also inspired by Rina Broomberg and Jason Levin, his colleagues at CliffCentral where he worked first as a creative director and then as a show host.

"They have had a profound impact on my professional journey," he says. "Rina's adept handling of CliffCentral's innovative media model during its nascent stage left a lasting impression on me. Similarly, Jason allowed me to replicate that success at TILT, and I continue to learn from him every day."

TILT is committed to nurturing South Africa's creative economy, recognising it as an investment in our future. As such, it collaborates with the Youth Employment Service through the Youth Content Collective. "Through this platform, we connect talented young black South African content creators with businesses, enabling them to earn a meaningful living from their creative talents," Kellman says.

Kellman's refreshing approach to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and loadshedding also serves as inspiration to up-and-comers. "There's always going to be something that comes along, something that no-one saw coming, and the instinctive reaction might be fight, flight, or freeze," he says. "But at TILT, the instinctive reaction I seek is invariably, 'How can we help our clients navigate this? What role can we play? How can we turn this into a net positive for our client?' So, in that way, sudden challenge always becomes a creative impetus."

Kellman says his Absa Jewish Achiever Award nomination goes deeper than simply being acknowledged by his community. "I was fortunate to attend King David High School Victory Park through the King David Schools' Foundation," he says. "So, being noticed and recognised by the very community that helped my destiny is a moving 'full circle' moment for me. It's gratifying to be able to show a good return on their investment, so to speak."



## JONATHAN SHAPIRO - LESCO MANUFACTURING

A social entrepreneur with a passion for people and problem solving, Jonathan Shapiro, 32, began his career at family business Lesco Manufacturing in 2009 as a warehouse operations assistant. Swiftly climbing the corporate ladder, he went from salesman to sales director before assuming leadership as chief executive in 2015. Today, he has successfully pivoted the company's business model twice when faced by challenges, increasing profitability, job creation, new contracts, and top-line revenue growth.

A social-impact manufacturing company, Lesco Manufacturing makes residential and consumer electrical products such as double adapters, multiplugs, USB adapters, and distribution boards.

"Our unique design process enables us to provide meaningful work for people living with disabilities," Shapiro says.

"This has been at the heart of our business for 24 years. About 40% of our staff have some form of a disability ranging from being deaf, physically disabled, intellectually disabled, epileptic, and having mental-health disabilities."

Not one to run from a challenge, Shapiro believes in always showing up and going the extra mile for the benefit of both the company and those it serves. "I've experienced challenges personally and professionally,

but with grit and resilience, push on and make the most out of the opportunities we create," he says.

An innately solutions-driven person, Shapiro is positive about the prospects for his company and the country in the year ahead. Marketing Lesco as a "proudly South African" business has helped to grow customer support, he says, and has furthered its efforts to create jobs and upskill employees. "Being a high-volume business, the more support we gain, the more jobs we create."

Lesco's various skills development initiatives include its relationship with Glenoaks School, in which they provide work experience to students for three years with guaranteed employment when they graduate. "We offer on-the-ground training for people with various types of disabilities," Shapiro says. "With that, we train our workforce how to engage and interact with those with other types of disabilities."

Shapiro has recently started working with a business coach, and he's also guided by the example his parents set for him. "My late mom was a role model. Her ability to put her children first regardless of the medical problems she faced has always been inspirational," he says.

"My father had to restart a business from scratch with a young family and a sick wife. At the same time, he built a business model that gives back to marginalised communities, which is something I constantly learn from."

Balancing work and family commitments has sometimes been a challenge for him. "My biggest lesson has been the regret I felt as a result of prioritising work over family," Shapiro says. "Now I try to prioritise what serves me and 'fills my cup', which is travelling to see my sisters who live in Israel and London." Learning how to say no has also been beneficial in maintaining a work-life balance.



## DANIEL TAITZ - BERELO INNOVATIONS

Berelo Innovations is an agency that specialises in the development, deployment, and management of incentive-campaign programmes, with a focus on customer data and behavioural change. Together with his partner, Ricci Miller, Daniel Taitz founded the company in 2011. Today, it has 12 employees and counts brands such as First National Bank and McCain among its clients.

Taitz believes the company's core values, "seichel, be nimble, and own it", are unique selling points. "We live these values in everything we do," he says. "Empathy is also key - really caring for the needs of all stakeholders is how we differentiate ourselves." His business philosophy is rooted in these values. "Have empathy and seichel, and the rest will work itself out."

Among Taitz's greatest business achievements are providing a stable income and benefits for his team, and pivoting from a services to a technology-driven business. He says empowering his team within the business environment and inspiring them to overcome their challenges is a work in progress. "We're working hard with coaches to inspire and build a culture of caring, drive, and success."

Taitz admits that the year ahead in South Africa is unlikely to be easy. Yet, he points out that this can be to entrepreneurs' advantage, as our challenges mean the future is also filled with opportunity to "fill the void of government's failure to deliver".

Berelo Innovations can help South Africa become a country that's more than its problems, says Taitz, by hiring people, training them well, paying them fairly, and paying taxes on time and in full. "I believe that improving the country is simply about giving our people opportunities," he says.

"It all starts with skills - educating people by providing them with the skills that are needed in the world. The government should start doing its job, and the South African people will do the rest."

To equip his business to face loadshedding and the country's other existing and future challenges, Taitz says it's all about having faith in your team and ensuring that everyone has laptops. "Trust in people, give them space and skin in the game, and they will make it happen," he says.

The Padel-obsessed King David Victory Park alumni says that though maintaining a work-life balance, especially as a father of a two-girl-old girl can be difficult, he prioritises family time.

Taitz has gained perspective and inspiration from the many mentors and role models he's encountered throughout his career journey. "I was in the Entrepreneurs' Organization for two years," he says. "The value that others who have walked this road bring is immeasurable, and I've learnt from many of them." Like many a humble entrepreneur, Taitz admits that though it may not be obvious to those he deals with, he often suffers from imposter syndrome. Considering the successful business he's built, it's safe to say that this concern is unfounded.



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# WINNER

Absa  
Jewish Achiever Awards

# 2023



## Changing economy one business at a time

**A**bsa Jewish Achiever Entrepreneur Award winner Jonathan Goldberg's vision is to help home-grown businesses transcend average performance and outcome.

His company, Preference Capital, provides growth capital and other financial services to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa, and by doing so, it aims to help improve the economy.

"Creating jobs and growing the economy is core to our business. It's what we do all day, every day," says Goldberg. "We help businesses grow, which in turn creates more jobs and uplifts the country."

"Our intention is to achieve a sustainable positive effect on the SME market and broader economy, reducing barriers for SMEs to access capital, and supporting local job creation and retention in the process."

Goldberg is a chartered accountant by training, and completed his articles at Kessel Feinstein Accountants and Auditors in December 2000. Surprisingly, he got just 22% for accounting when he was in Grade 9, and his teacher told his mother that if he continued to take accounting, she wouldn't teach him. With hindsight, he acknowledges, "The problem was more me than the teacher."

He has long since learnt the importance of striving for excellence in all aspects of his journey. He believes it's important to "consistently push your boundaries, surpassing expectations, and leaving a lasting impact on your industry and community. Through your actions and accomplishments, you can convey that settling for mediocrity is never an option."

Goldberg successfully started, built, ran, and then sold Knox Titanium Vault Company, which rents safety deposit boxes; Zanifin, an asset and trade finance company; and Mobile Macs, which supply delivery bikes, before starting Preference Capital.

One of his greatest business challenges turned into one of his best career decisions. "I was released from my role as chief executive of a company. During my tenure, we carried out two acquisitions that didn't unfold as anticipated. As the ultimate responsibility rests with the chief executive, I had to take accountability for the outcome. If this sequence of events hadn't occurred, I wouldn't have initiated Preference Capital."

Preference Capital has nine lending and financial service products on the market, which include asset finance, trade finance, and single invoice discounting. It also has two subsidiaries, BizCash and Change Financial Solutions.

Even though Goldberg says the process of starting and growing a lending business has been an extremely difficult journey, he persisted in creating and establishing the company, believing in the cause his business represents.

Though loadshedding has been challenging all around, it created opportunities for Preference Capital, such as the financing of power solutions. "In addition, we have mitigated our risk by trading in industries that have benefited from loadshedding," said Goldberg. "For example, it's difficult to cook at home during loadshedding, so this benefits the quick service food delivery business. So, we tried to pivot our business into these industries."

The COVID-19 pandemic was extremely challenging for the company's clients, causing a lot of financial distress. So, Goldberg and his team used an entrepreneurial and relationship-driven approach to help them to manage their cashflows and "reboot" their businesses.

Goldberg says there are no other SME financial service businesses that offer clients multiple lending and financial service products. This, he says, allows the company to analyse the clients' business needs and give them the most suitable lending and financial services products available. "For example, you don't want to give a client looking for asset finance a short-term working capital loan as this will be detrimental to their business," he says.

"Our commitment to individual service and direct engagement with clients gives us the ability to support them in expanding their businesses through avenues beyond mere financing," he says.

Goldberg sees being an entrepreneur as representing a "commitment to surpassing conventional expectations and limitations". He believes it signifies dedication to transcending average performance or outcomes, instead striving for excellence in all aspects of one's journey. To do this means being ambitious, adaptable, determined, leading by example, ensuring measurable achievements, and enhancing relationships.

Goldberg considers himself a "below-the-radar kind of person" who attributes his success to his team, saying it deserves the recognition for its hard work, which is ultimately what got him here. "Recruiting the correct individuals is key," he says. "If you get it right, most of the job is done. I'm fortunate to have my management team comprised of exceptionally intelligent and vastly experienced professionals."

His business philosophy is to strive to abide by the principles of integrity, accountability, transparency, and professionalism, and believes that if you stick with that, you can't go wrong.

Goldberg is also a devoted husband and father, as well as a member of the South African Board of Jewish Education. His favourite pastimes include running, riding, gym, and watching his kids at sporting events.

Though it's difficult to find a balance between work, family, and community, he says, "there's always time if you plan well and prioritise". And he makes sure to fit in exercise at least six times a week, which "generally means early mornings and late nights".

Leading by example is a quality he treasures, as is ambitious determination, and he hopes his own journey to success will encourage others.

Goldberg remains hopeful about South Africa, and believes South Africans should work hard and be part of the solution. His goal for Preference Capital is for the company to be one of these solutions.



*Jonathan Goldberg*

**Preference Capital**

**Jonathan Goldberg was also nominated in the Business Leadership category.**

## Entrepreneur Award



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# Europcar Women in Leadership Award Nominees and Judges

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*Scan here for more about  
The Women in Leadership*



Taryn Marcus  
(Business Reimagined and Change Consultant);  
Dorianne Weil (Clinical Psychologist);  
Martin Lydall (CEO Motus Car Rental);  
Johanna Makgalemele (Group CEO, Travel with Flair);  
and Dawn Nathan-Jones (CEO, Over the Rainbow)

# CONGRATULATIONS

The 2023 Europcar Jewish Women in Leadership Award winners!



**GIA WHITEHEAD & MANDY WIENER**

and Mazeltov to the nominees

**ANDREA | ANN | BEVERLEY | CAROLYN  
CHARLENE | CHAVA | DELORES | DONNA  
FELICIA | JANINE | LARA | Yael**

Europcar is once again proud to honour the inspiring contribution that these remarkable women have made to South African society through exceptional leadership in their businesses and communities.

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**CHAVA ALTER** Nutun

Describing herself as “an energetic catalyst for growth”, Chava Alter brings her vibrant personality to her role as head of the global sales team at business process outsourcing company Nutun. Providing outsourced customer services and collections for international brands including Breville, Lacoste, and Gap, Nutun operates in Johannesburg, Durban, and Melbourne and is a recognised top employer for 2023.

Overseeing a team of 27, Alter was instrumental in shaping Nutun's sales division and driving its growth. “My enthusiastic and compassionate approach to leadership has driven me to invest not just time, but my heart and soul into developing my team's potential,” she says.

Dedicated to making a positive impact on South Africa, she harnesses the power of sales to create meaningful employment opportunities. This is in line with Nutun's ultimate goal of creating 10 000 jobs by the end of 2026. “By consistently closing successful deals, my team and I are directly contributing to job creation,” says Alter. “In 18

months, we've already created 1 000 jobs.”

Passionate about addressing the country's literacy crisis, Nutun has also teamed up with Mellon Educate to create the One Agent One Child initiative. “For every agent we hire for an international campaign, we're committed to teaching a child to read,” Alter says.

Her collaborative and caring leadership style has helped Alter to build a unified team. “I'm there for my staff on a professional and personal level, and hire people I believe in and want to see succeed. I regularly sit with each team member to ensure that they're adequately supported and that they're actively engaging in self-growth.”

That's not to say that Alter hasn't faced challenges of her own, especially when she returned to work after having her first child. Juggling minimal sleep, breastfeeding challenges, and inescapable “mom guilt” didn't make for an easy adjustment.

“To top it off, I've always been a competitive achiever, and that year, I certainly didn't perform at

my best,” she says. “Not only did I feel like a failure as a mother, I felt like a failure at work. In order to move past this, I had to accept the reality as it was and forgive myself.” Though it took close to a year, adjusting her work role and implementing a solid support structure made all the difference.

Today a mother of two, Alter believes there's no such thing as a perfect solution when it comes to maintaining a work-life balance, which changes in every stage of life. “Every choice is a sacrifice of another,” she says. “We must be able to accept this.” She's grateful for Shabbos, which is always dedicated family time.

Though her career achievements belie her 32 years, Alter says she's just getting started. Asked about her greatest achievement, she says she's still in the process of achieving, and is focusing on the journey rather than the destination. “I celebrate the small wins and the big ones, but I don't feel nearly accomplished enough,” she says.



**ANDREA BEN**

King David Ariel

“Being in remedial education is a gift,” says Andrea Ben, the head of King David Ariel. “Every day, people are faced with challenges, yet my positive attitude ensures that I take on those challenges and make a difference as I believe they make one stronger.”

Ben has a clear vision of what she wants to achieve, and plays an integral role in creating a positive and effective learning environment for students and staff at King David Ariel.

Since its launch in 2018, King David Ariel has grown exponentially. “Our very first cohort of Grade 7s mainstreamed last year, and every year, we witness the success of our students mainstreaming,” says Ben. “King David Ariel has certainly been put on the map as a top Jewish remedial school in Johannesburg.”

Having started out as a teacher at the school, Ben was soon promoted to head of department of the school's foundation phase and then to principal in July 2022. She considers this role to be one of her greatest career achievements. “From teaching in rural areas, townships, government schools, and a state-of-the-art school like King David Ariel, my teaching experiences have made me who I am today,” she says.

Ben's innate understanding of the teachers and children at her school ties into her collaborative and student-centred leadership philosophy and helps her to cultivate a supportive, empowering, and harmonious work environment. “I make my staff feel important, and encourage their growth daily,” she says.

Her brand of strong leadership was inspired by her late mother, her “number one supporter”, who passed away from cancer in 2019. “My mom always encouraged me to strive for the best no matter what life threw at me,” says Ben. “Her courage, faith, and strength through her cancer battle has made me the incredible leader that I am today.”

Ben says she'd like to remove the stigma that's often attached to children in remedial school systems. “A remedial child is capable of so much,” she says. “People need to be educated about what the term ‘remedial education’ means. This could be done through parent talks and more collaboration with other mainstream schools. I'm blessed to have King David Primary School Victory Park on my doorstep, where the integration of our children happens daily.”

Having lectured at the education department of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Ben is also passionate about training future teachers. In continuing to foster skills development in South Africa, she often conducts teacher workshops for underprivileged schools and visits them to offer advice and guidance.

“I played an instrumental role in lecturing a cohort of Limpopo students at Wits for three years, which was a life changing experience,” she says. “I'm still in contact with some of my students, offering support and advice with regards to their teaching.”

**ANN BERNSTEIN**

Centre for Development and Enterprise

Ann Bernstein's life has been spent, in her words, “trying to make South Africa a better place for all of its citizens”.

As the founder and executive director of the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), she plays a unique role in bridging the ideas and policy divides between business and government, and academia and public policy. “We speak truth to power, and we're heard at the highest level,” Bernstein says.

She started CDE, an independent policy think tank, in 1995 after the closure of the Urban Foundation, where she had been working for many years. At the foundation, she was instrumental in pushing the apartheid government to abolish influx control. She also ran the foundation's Private Sector Council on Urbanisation, which targeted the key pillars of apartheid and involved leading chief executives.

When she started CDE, she said, “I didn't know much about our new democracy, but was convinced that the country needed independent people thinking about how to deal with the big challenges apartheid left us: poverty, exclusion, homelessness, bad schooling, segregated cities, and not enough jobs.”

“I'm an optimist. I believe we can build a great country, even today. We can consolidate our democracy and make sure that it delivers for everyone.”

Bernstein was “raised” in Helen Suzman's parliamentary constituency, running her youth movement and later working with her in parliament.

She's proud that the CDE, which develops policy proposals based on sound local and international evidence and experience, is respected and heard by many. It also briefs cabinet ministers, senior officials, business leaders, and has a database of about 15 000 decisionmakers who receive its publications.

Bernstein believes “far too many people keep silent when powerful governments do terrible things. Those of us who see and know better must speak out.”

CDE was the first to put together a growth strategy in 2016, which had a big impact on business leaders, politicians, and nongovernmental organisations.

“We were the first to focus on youth unemployment and in 2017, we launched three reports on our studies on 20 hotspots around the country where youth unemployment was at its worst,” she says. “We were the first organisation to speak about the affordability of the basic income grant, indicating that our research showed it would bankrupt the country. We tried to strengthen national treasury in the battle within a divided government, and cabinet to hold the line on fiscal prudence.”

Bernstein also authored *The Case for Business In Developing Economies*, published in 2010.

Being a voice for so many has required Bernstein to learn to talk and listen to many to understand as much as she can, and she believes that it's not just ideas that matter, but people.

“If the government is failing and corrupt, citizens must organise to throw the rascals out and let a new bunch see if they can do better,” she says.

• Ann Bernstein was also nominated in the Business Leadership category.





**DR CAROLYN FEDLER BATZOFIN**

**Ampath Laboratories**

**D**r Carolyn Fedler Batzofin is the first and only deaf woman to graduate as a medical doctor, and she did so in spite of opposition from those who believed she shouldn't become a doctor. She has since achieved professional and academic success, showing that disability shouldn't get in the way of one's dreams.

"I just knew I could do it, don't ask me why or how," she said. "I've been fascinated by human biology and genetics since school."

Today, she's a senior pathologist at Ampath, one of the largest pathology laboratories in South Africa, where she specialises in chemical pathology.

Fedler Batzofin was born with a severe hearing impairment and had to attend speech and hearing therapy from an early age. Through determination, she learned to overcome many obstacles to interact effectively with the "hearing world", as she calls it.

She went on to attend King David Linksfield, which at the time was the only private school which integrated deaf children with hearing pupils. Had it not been for the school, she wouldn't have had the opportunity to get to where she is now, she says. She excelled, passing matric with distinctions.

She wasn't initially accepted to do medicine, because "the faculty had no frame of reference for how deafness would affect my ability to study, let alone work with patients. It was still thought that a deaf person couldn't become a medical doctor."

She proved them wrong time and time again, although it took her longer than her classmates to get where she is today - a total of 14 and a half years to specialise as a chemical pathologist.

"I went through medical school borrowing notes from colleagues and working twice as hard as anyone else, just to make sure I hadn't missed anything," she says. Her profession incorporates her varied interests: genetics, human biochemistry, physiology, oncology, and palliative medicine.

Fedler Batzofin is an oral deaf mentor, dedicated to helping others born with a hearing impairment. She's still part of the first group of deaf mentors for the organisation Hi Hopes, and her research includes the study of genetic deafness in South Africa.

This same commitment is shown towards others in her profession. She's a friend and mentor to many, and helps train medical registrars and technologists.

Her innovative research in chemical pathology continues to have an impact. In addition to her research on genetic deafness, she's also researching familial hyperlipidaemia in the Ashkenazi Jewish and Afrikaner populations.

She believes courage defines her success. She has had to remain strong and concentrate much harder than most so that she can keep up with everything around her. Still, keeping her arms and expectations wide open, she has never let opportunity or adventure pass her by, travelling alone to places all over the world, including Cuba and Ethiopia.

Her other interests include pottery, Pilates, water aerobics, walking, gardening, reading, and travelling to the bush and beach. Her friends describe her as an "animal whisperer".

**DELORES FOUCHÉ**

**Food by Flavours**

**D**elores Fouché, the head of Food by Flavours, brings *simcha* and connection to people through food. "My offering has always been premised on the precept that food experiences imprint themselves on people's memories," she says. "Through my work, I have witnessed the transformative effects of delicious food on gatherings, events, and communities. Through catering and food, I've been able to offer hope and a temporary reprieve from moments of darkness, sadness, and unpredictability."

Having always taken catering for her children's parties to another level, Fouché, who ran a public relations business at the time, began providing cakes or latkes to those impressed by her party prowess. Launching Flavours from her home kitchen 26 years ago after catering a Batmitzvah lunch for 300, Fouché was involved in every aspect of the business from the very beginning and has maintained this strong work ethic even though she now employs 20 full-time staff and many more part-time workers.

Her dedication to working with staff at ground level ties into her philosophy of leading by example. "I do everything my staff do - from getting my hands dirty to packing a truck and getting home at 03:00," she says. Such demanding hours mean that her social life is basically non-existent, yet Fouché remains devoted to her treasured family and friends. "Balancing work and nurturing a tight and beautiful connection between my three sons is my greatest achievement and blessing," she says.

She's built her team by being attentive to their concerns and allowing for shared learning and creativity, where new ideas are cultivated and developed. Fouché is dedicated to empowering her staff, and invests in their personal and professional development.

"To watch them evolve over the years has been my greatest reward - from starting out as waiters or cleaners to being able to purchase a car, provide schooling for their children, move their families to safer areas, and develop a skill set."

She believes leaders are born. "I've always been a leader in that I've always been at the helm of every endeavour. I'm headstrong, while also being an attentive listener who picks up on nuance and taste. I'm approachable, have a calmness about me, and treat each customer's concerns and event with presence and attention - a rare occurrence in today's times."

Though she's based in Johannesburg, Fouché has catered for events around the country and even as far afield as Zambia, where she worked on a Barmitzvah - a career moment she'll never forget. "This was my first function outside of Johannesburg, and the logistical planning and preparation was of a complexity beyond conception," she says. "However, to have played a pivotal role in such a *simcha* was something I will treasure forever."

With plans to continue spreading her flavours across South Africa and beyond, Fouché is clearly on track to realising her dream of being remembered for creating "beautiful memories on a platter that live in the heart".



**Yael Geffen**

**Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty**

**Y**ael Geffen, the chief executive and shareholder of Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty, is the only female leader in real estate, and this is something she considers to be one of her biggest professional challenges.

"It boggles my mind because it used to be so female driven, with my grandmother, Aida, and Pam Golding," she says. "At first, I overcompensated by applying filters - being bold and more masculine. Then I turned my filters into foundations, and said, 'I deserve to be here.' I embraced my femininity, which had much greater impact, and became authentically me."

This ties into her leadership philosophy. "I realised that when we experience certain crises of confidence, as we all do from time to time, instead of covering them up with filters and fakeness, try to replace them with foundations like building a bigger network, finding a mentor, or upskilling yourself." Geffen is passionate about helping others to overcome their personal crises of confidence, something she calls a COC.

She believes that being authentic will always help you to stand out from the crowd. With Geffen, what you see is what you get. "I'm real and show all sides of it, not just the glamour," she says. That's why she's been so vocal in sharing her journey with Bipolar 2 disorder, assisting those suffering from mental-health conditions and her affected family members.

Her professional speaking engagements and mental-health advocacy have assisted many suffering from these conditions, giving them an outlet to express themselves and get support. She also writes a mental-health column in wellness magazine *Odyssey*.

It ties into the work she hopes to be doing in the years to come, which includes more keynote talks, finishing her book about her mental-health journey titled *My Brilliant Burden*, and launching a mental-health app that she says will change the world.

Geffen is also dedicated to the notion of 'servant leadership', develops women in leadership, and is a mentor and coach. "I have a unique voice and love to serve," she says. Through her company's in-house training academy, she helps agents to gain skills, consistently creating jobs.

Having won numerous awards, Geffen is thrilled to be featured in the 2024 *In Good Company Volume II* coffee table book alongside 35 other South African icons like Caster Semenya, Bryan Habana, and Adrian Gore. "This is a huge deal for me. I'm so thrilled about it," she says.

For Geffen, her accomplishments are heightened when they're shared with her beloved son. Having him join her to accept some of her many awards are career moments she'll never forget. "He was so proud of me, and the best plus-one ever. Having that support and admiration from your child for your hard work is pure gold."





**EMERITUS PROFESSOR BEVERLEY KRAMER**

University of the Witwatersrand

**"D**uring my pathway 'upwards' to more senior positions, I've ensured that I've provided opportunities for others to grow and develop," says Emeritus Professor Beverley Kramer. Currently Emeritus Professor at the faculty of health sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and president of the International Federation of Associations of Anatomists (IFAA), Kramer has educated thousands of South African health-science practitioners, and has assumed an international leadership role in the field of anatomical science.

With a strong belief in the power of education, Kramer is passionate about providing learning opportunities for others and giving them the best possible training, irrespective of their gender or ancestry. The first woman to be appointed head of department of general anatomy at the faculty of dentistry and head of school of anatomical sciences at the faculty of health sciences, as well as serving as president of the IFAA, she has held her own in environments dominated by strong, professional men.

"I've championed the appointment of women of worth and people from disparate backgrounds to more senior positions in management and leadership," she says. Nevertheless, when her own professional journey began, Kramer had to work hard to develop the confidence to speak truth to power. "Coming from a small town in a reasonably sheltered community and with very little experience of the 'big' world, in my early years at Wits, I was nervous and

cautious about speaking out on a variety of topics," she says.

"Experience over the years, a growing sense of inequity in the workplace, and knowing that if I didn't speak out, no-one else would, allowed me to find my voice." She was also inspired by her mother, who always told her that one needs to speak up in difficult situations, and later by the famous post-war poem by Pastor Martin Niemöller, *First They Came*, which says that if we don't speak out for others, there will be no-one left to speak out for us.

Though Kramer originally wanted to pursue a career in surgery, she fell in love with anatomy and embryology and diverged into science. "I enjoyed interacting with students and loved seeing the light in their eyes when they finally understood something complex," she says. "It has been a pleasure to see students from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve their degrees, in many cases being the first person in their families to achieve this status."

She's now semi-retired, but Kramer continues to supervise postgraduate students, mentor staff, and conduct research. When her term as president of the IFAA ends in 2024, by which time she'll be 75, she hopes to ease out of academic work and spend time on her artistic pursuits and on travelling overseas with her grandchildren. "However, I'll always be happy to continue with some research, particularly on the topic of ethics in anatomy and to continue mentoring staff," she says.

**JANINE LAZARUS**

Janine Lazarus Media Consultancy

**W**ith a trailblazing career ranging from investigative journalism to spearheading a successful media and communications consultancy, Janine Lazarus describes her journey as one of empowerment, transformation, and unyielding dedication.

When she started her media consultancy 28 years ago, Lazarus had no seed capital. "I used my gut, my instinct, and my determination to make my mark," she says. "It hasn't been an easy ride. I started at the bottom, and clawed my way up. But I did it."

Offering customised training programmes and interactive workshops that equip delegates with the confidence to engage effectively with the media, the Janine Lazarus Media Consultancy has revolutionised the way businesses communicate locally and internationally. "I've raised the profile of the businesses I work for through the power of words," says Lazarus. "My clients use my guidance to manage their messages and the reputation of their businesses."

Though the COVID-19 pandemic was a global crisis, Lazarus managed to pivot her training programmes into the virtual space. As a result, her business grew exponentially, reaching people and businesses around the world.

"I'd like to expand my reach even further to entrench my message that communication in the marketplace isn't a 'nice to have', but a 'must have'," she says. "My mission is to rewrite the script of my clients' successes one workshop at a time."

Leadership is rooted not in force but in effective communication, she says. "The success of a company is defined not just by its culture, but by the way that culture is communicated internally and externally." Her proudest achievement is fulfilling her dream of making a difference in the way businesses communicate, and she thrives on their positive feedback. "What fires my soul is when I see my clients flourish with confidence, and own their space," Lazarus says.

She prides herself on having remained authentic throughout her decades in the media industry. "I'm as feisty and fearless as I'm driven and determined," she says. "But I've learned to balance my no-holds-barred training methodology with deep empathy for the individuals I work with in business. My clients leave my workshops with a strong sense of self. They learn to step into their power, and own their space."

This is something she, too, has had to learn on her own professional journey. "During my first workshop, a delegate I was coaching made a scathing comment, and I burst into floods of tears," Lazarus recalls. "I couldn't redeem myself, as the tears wouldn't stop. I knew that from that day forward, I'd never allow myself to feel that helpless. It was the start of my journey to step into my power."

Having had such a demoralising experience and recalling how she felt in that moment has helped Lazarus craft her leadership philosophy. "I believe in inspiring my small team to work with me, to take pride in their accomplishments, and to embrace challenges head on. I prefer to build rather than to break."



**CHARLENE LEWISON** Birdi Golf Apparel

**"I**'ve always loved fashion and textiles," says Charlene Lewison, the director of sales and marketing, merchandiser, creator, designer, shareholder, and co-ordinator of Birdi Golf Apparel, which supplies the golf industry locally and internationally.

"Growing up in a family surrounded by garments, it was a no-brainer to join my dad in business when he purchased a box of golf clothing way back then. I began as a merchandiser for the brand, and over the years, started seeing the gaps and taking them."

Engineering her own designs, Lewison is innovative and futuristic in her approach. Having been instrumental in developing and producing the Birdi brand, Lewison has an innate understanding of her customers which enables her to deliver consistently in a unique way.

"I understand the personality of the South African golfer, enabling me to work with their needs," she says. "I relate to the emotional connections that happen around the garment - from fabric to colour. By believing in our brand, we have passionately stood the test of time."

Lewison has built her team through positivity. "I'm always sprinkling the magic," she says.

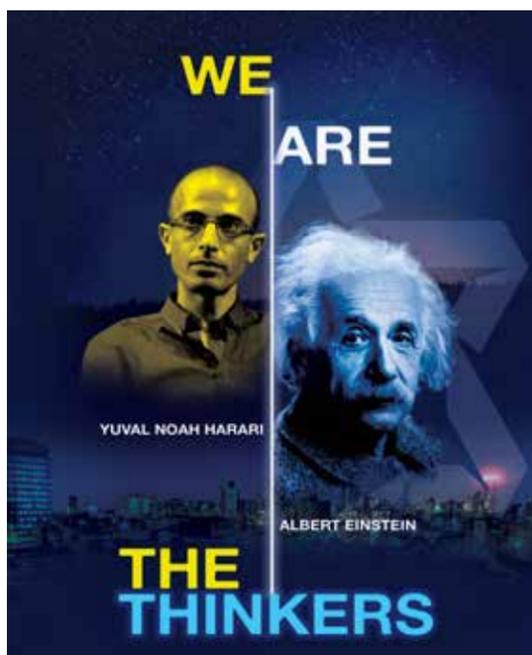
As a leader, she listens to her inner voice and believes in moving with the times. She's also dedicated to keeping her team healthy. "I've been the boss feeding the staff wheatgrass every morning and changing their diets to ensure wellness."

Being a finalist for two years running in South Africa's Most Influential Women in Business and Government Award, Lewison celebrates victories and works to overcome challenges. Though it was a significant business achievement at the time, selling the Birdi brand to a company on a five-year royalty contract in 2011 proved to be a mistake, she admits.

"As soon as the five years were up, we decided to take the brand back and reposition it in the market. We had lost face in the industry, and then the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. It was heart wrenching, as I had loved this brand and worked to get it to the top over the years. Yet, as soon as we were able to work again, we opened up all channels in the industry, and have been working hard since to restore our success."

For Lewison, regaining Birdi's place in the industry has been a passion project. But it's one she would happily take on again just to feel that sense of accomplishment. "I would endure building the brand again and again because it has taught me what success feels like - when you dedicate yourself completely to what you believe in. This has completed me as an achiever."

Throughout her career, Lewison has been inspired by the example of her father, Len, the chief executive of Birdi. "He's my role-model and mentor, and has instilled in me generosity, respect, integrity, compassion, patience, and balance," she says.





**FELICIA MEYEROWITZ SINGH**

**Engage Smarter/Hive Founders & Womankind Ventures**

Digital fintech, insurance, and wealth-tech leader Felicia Meyerowitz Singh focuses on growth, innovation, and disruptive change within financial services. Building on more than 25 years of experience in this area, Meyerowitz Singh is the co-founder of Hive Founders & Womankind Ventures, which supports female founders for fundraising and growth; and of Engage Smarter, which provides financial institutions with support in making financial decisions leveraging artificial intelligence. Both are primarily based in the United Kingdom (UK). She's also non-executive director of Platform One, a regulated investment platform.

Representing South African innovation in the UK, Meyerowitz Singh is a former winner of the South African Chamber of Commerce Innovator of the Year. Now sold, her companies continue to drive change in the financial sector, leveraging technology for maximum impact. "The common thread throughout ventures I have co-founded is that they have all followed a specific pain point that I have encountered," she says.

"I work with high-performing teams who thrive in innovative and high-growth environments in which we aim to leverage our deep domain knowledge together with technology and a clear understanding of regulations."

Her exemplary leadership is rooted in her innate optimism, Meyerowitz Singh says. "I'm passionate and focused, and aim to share this with others, inspiring a team or instilling self-belief in others so that they go out and conquer their own mountain."

Meyerowitz Singh has maintained her uniquely energetic approach through multiple personal and professional challenges. "I never give up, even on tough days," she says. "I follow a process of mindfulness - no one moment defines me, or anyone else. I follow my own guidance and set of beliefs in terms of progressing through life and believe strongly in the power of community."

From mentoring female founders to formal trustee roles on South African charity, the David Rattray Foundation/Khula Education and Global South charity leader BRAC, which drives broader participation in digital change and in environmental impact, Meyerowitz Singh prides herself on her extensive community and broader stakeholder involvement.

She considers her daughter to be her greatest achievement. "She inspires me every day, being brave and creative as a rock-climbing poet and inventor," she says. "Becoming a parent opened an entirely different dimension of life previously unknown to me. I had to learn about parenting styles, and understand how to fit in growing another person while simultaneously growing a start-up."

Having a daughter also increased Meyerowitz Singh's drive to empower future female leaders. "I'm constantly challenged to be a better example and to have an impact on society for the betterment of the next generation of young girls." In the future, she hopes to continue to support women and the role they play in society. "I also plan to focus increasingly on innovation and the delivery of solutions across financial services to broader segments of society."

**LARA NATHAN**

**Pam Golding Properties**

"On life's journey, I've not only weathered challenges but grown stronger, nurturing a spirit that seeks joy and beauty even in adversity," says Lara Nathan, one of Pam Golding's top-selling real estate agents. Adeptly balancing multiple roles as an award-winning agent, a wife, mom, and most recently, the author of a children's book inspired by her special-needs son, Nathan excels in all she tackles, consistently exhibiting effective leadership.

After attaining her technology marketing degree, Nathan spent a year working for Sky TV in London before returning home after the tragic loss of her eldest brother. "During this time, a friend's family extended an opportunity for me to explore real estate," she says.

Building on her long-held interest in property, Nathan soon realised that real estate encompassed much more than listing and selling homes. "It held the power to transform lives," she says. "Witnessing families thrive and understanding that they were embarking on a journey to create lasting memories gave me a profound appreciation for the impact of real estate."

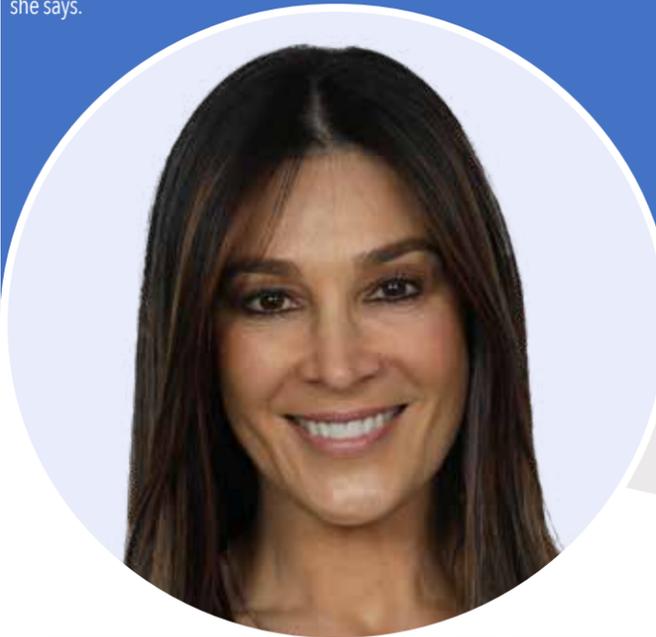
Leading committed client relationships, orchestrating complex transactions, and consistently surpassing sales targets, she drives team collaboration and contributes to the company's growth through unmatched dedication and expertise. She also recently reprised her role in *Listing Jozi*, a reality show centred around the property industry, a vehicle through which she hopes to inspire aspiring property practitioners.

Nathan believes in leading by example by living a life that transcends challenges and inspires others to achieve greatness. "I believe in demonstrating that life's complexities can be turned into strengths," she says. "I emphasise the importance of time management, open communication, and empathetic leadership. My goal is always to inspire others to navigate the landscape of their lives and careers with the same tenacity and grace that I strive to embody."

Here, Nathan is inspired by the example of her late mother, who she says effortlessly turned the ordinary into the extraordinary. "A true superwoman, she possessed the remarkable ability to surpass limitations, seemingly being present everywhere and defying the constraints of time itself," she says. "After divorcing my father when I was young, she gracefully embraced the role of bringing up my two brothers and me, embodying each role. Radiating love and warmth, she worked tirelessly, yet her dedication to us never faltered."

For Nathan, the loss of her mother and other beloved family members was devastating. Balancing these losses with her professional growth has been her most profound challenge, she says. "Coping with overwhelming tragedies, the delicate nature of life, and raising a special-needs child has demanded boundless resilience. I have faced this by nurturing patience, embracing fleeting beauty, and finding solace in small acts of kindness."

This approach underpins Nathan's value as a leader. "By being remembered as someone who empowered individuals, contributed to community growth, and exemplified the synergy between professional success and meaningful personal endeavours, I aim to leave a legacy that resonates beyond time," she says.



**DONNA RACHELSON**

**Ignite**

A tireless advocate for diversity and inclusion, Donna Rachelson is focusing on making Africa great by empowering women to "make their mark" in corporate and entrepreneurial spaces. Her latest initiative, Ignite, for which she's co-founder and joint chief executive, focuses on empowering women to unleash their leadership capabilities and step into their power.

Ignite was launched in 2020 with the first woman-development programme for a leading financial services institution. "The organisation has grown exponentially into a women's leadership-development movement that's a major force in the growth and advancement of women across the African continent," says Rachelson. To date, 2 000 women have participated in the programme across organisations, leading to higher promotion, lateral mobility, and retention rates.

"Throughout my corporate career, I have operated at management and executive levels in male-dominated environments - from explosives to chartered accountants to fast food and logistics/supply chain management," says Rachelson, discussing how she came to work in the area of women's empowerment. "I learned a lot, and after being called in to a few corporates to advise on women-development interventions and lecturing on it at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, I decided to combine my learning into my third book, *Play to Win: What Women can Learn from Men in Business*."

This bestselling book opened many opportunities for Rachelson in the female-development space. These included becoming shareholder and chief executive of Seed Academy and the WDB Growth Fund - focused on fast tracking the development of black women and youth entrepreneurs - and more recently, building Ignite with her partner, Inge Walters.

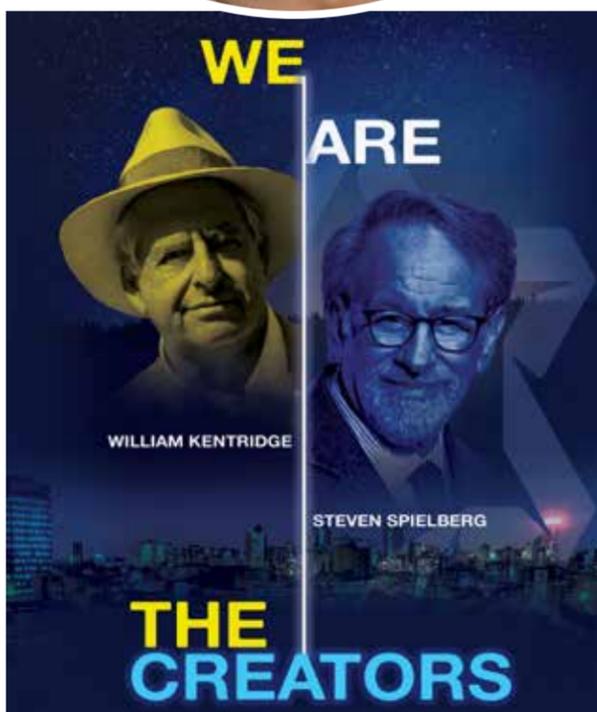
Though she's proud of her many personal and professional achievements, including a solid 23-year marriage, two well-adjusted children, writing two bestsellers, and founding and building three successful businesses, Ignite is a source of particular pride. "We're transforming lives and careers daily," she says.

Though she has endured failures alongside her many successes, Rachelson tries not to have regrets. "I work through issues believing that everything in your life happens for a reason at the right time with the right people. There is always learning."

She also does her best to adapt and grow when faced with challenges. Though the COVID-19 pandemic took a personal toll, Rachelson remained positive and instilled hope in her team, pivoted her business interests, cut costs, and stood fast in her decision not to retrench any staff or reduce their salaries.

"My focus in building the teams I work with is to create a positive work culture in which team members feel valued, respected, and supported," she says. She empowers her teams, provides honest feedback to enhance growth and development, and relishes the success of others.

"I believe in Africa and its greatness," she says. "I'm excited by those who join the journey, and work closely with them to unleash their leadership potential - be it my team members or the talent in organisations I work with."



## Changing fates, finding fortune

**"M**y passion is to change young people's attitudes towards their and South Africa's future," says this year's joint Europcar Women in Leadership winner, Gia Whitehead. "Unless people take charge of their own pathway and focus on gaining knowledge and skills to equip themselves as leaders and entrepreneurs with social responsibility in this challenging world, we'll never truly make significant progress."

Armed with this belief, in 2004, Whitehead – just 20 years old at the time – co-founded TSIBA Business School, a Cape Town-based, purpose-driven tertiary institution with the goal of lifting young black South Africans out of endemic poverty and into a life of opportunity, leadership, and influence. "Twenty years later, it's a credible, impactful organisation changing the lives of so many towards a better South Africa," she says. "I'm still passionately involved while grappling with so much complexity and the systemic realities of South Africa."

Not only is she the co-founder of TSIBA, Whitehead also previously served as its board chairperson and is the institution's chief executive. A social-enterprise organisation comprising a business school, Ignition Academy, and education trust working together to educate and prepare competent business executives and successful small-business enterprises, TSIBA seeks ambitious, purpose-driven people and emerging businesses to take their own interests, communities, and the nation forward.

Throughout her active involvement in TSIBA, Whitehead's primary role has been to raise funds and build strategic partnerships. Having undergone a process of profound change in the past year, TSIBA is on an intentional growth path.

"Its strategy lays emphasis on strengthening its academic, social impact, and business credentials," Whitehead says. "This will build its stature as a premium higher education business school, as well as ensure its sustainability in the future."

Whitehead says TSIBA was born through various instances of synchronicity. "In 2002, I was selected as one of South Africa's 100 'brightest young minds', and a facilitator at the conference introduced me to non-profit educational development organisation CIDA. Here I saw astounding people doing inspirational work with unemployed people. As a privileged young South African, I wanted to do something real, meaningful, and exciting, not simply aim for corporate employment."

Working closely with CIDA's chief executive for a year, she helped raise funds and awareness. Together with a colleague, Whitehead worked to bring the model of a free tertiary education institution to Cape Town, a dream enabled by funding from the Shuttleworth Foundation. "Again, through synchronicity, we met two credible academics and business minds in Cape Town wanting to collaborate," she says. "The project evolved as we spent a year in a tiny office creating TSIBA."

As a young female professional, Whitehead had to fight to win respect from older male colleagues, but she remained focused on her goal and triumphed by building a co-operative leadership team and setting up task teams in all subject areas.

"I'm passionate about people, finding solutions, and believe in the uniqueness of every human being to inspire and build positive change," she says. "I love growing and learning with my family, and role modelling to my colleagues and children that I'm a career woman committed to work-life balance."

However, Whitehead is frank about the toll that maintaining such a balance sometimes takes. "I'm literally on a treadmill. I do my best to be everywhere and there for everyone. It's perhaps overly ambitious, and not sustainable in the longer term. I wake up at 04:30 to run and strengthen my body and mind, then make sure I get my kids ready for school. After drop-off, I travel to work and do my best to be home to help with homework, cook dinner, and so on. I sit on other boards and external committees as a way to give back, add value, and keep learning. I try to keep weekends open for family and friends."

In spite of the challenges she faces, Whitehead has built a reputation as a powerful leader, change agent, and social entrepreneur. Anyone can be a leader if they have a clear sense of what they need to achieve, she says.

"Leaders must be open to understanding others' points of view, to being transparent, and being strong enough to have hard conversations and make tough decisions when necessary, even if it's lonely at times. Ask the right questions, and be brave enough to stand up for what's right. Ethics and purpose-lived leadership and bringing people together to create a shared vision is at the heart of my philosophy."

Whitehead is inspired daily by her colleagues and students, whom she believes embody the spirit of true leadership. "Some of my graduates have been through huge trauma and poverty, but through perseverance, resilience, and a drive to succeed, have made it into incredibly successful and powerful leaders and entrepreneurs," she says.

Witnessing the enormous impact made by TSIBA and its alumni has made Whitehead's journey that much more rewarding. "Seeing the tears of joy of parents watching their children graduate as the first ever in their families to get a university degree is one of my many unforgettable career moments," she says.

"The real moments are the ones in between, when students come to say thank you, and when I learn of their great successes once they are in the real working world. And when students 'pay it forward' for the advantages gained through their education, meaning that they intervene and change the trajectory and outcome for another deserving but underprivileged young person."

Whatever the future may hold, Whitehead remains dedicated to making a meaningful impact. "Other than my beautiful family, with three remarkable children of which I'm most proud, setting up TSIBA and raising more than R500 million is my purpose-lived achievement, and I'm still living it," she says. "I never imagined the ongoing learning, reward, and most of all, impact we have made on so many thousands of people. It gives me so much hope."

*Gia Whitehead*

**TSIBA Business School**



**Europcar Women in Leadership Award**

# WINNER

Absa  
Jewish Achiever Awards

2023

## True stories, real leadership

**M**andy Wiener, the joint winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award, is one of the country's best known and most credible journalists and authors. At the coalface of the news on a daily basis hosting the *Midday Report* on 702 and Cape Talk, she's also the director of her own media company, Mandy Wiener Media, which offers media training, investigative journalism, and keynote speaking. Through her talks, she has captivated audiences on stages across the country, and on social media, she has amassed hundreds of thousands of followers.

"I see the impact of loadshedding, the economy, maladministration, poor governance, failing infrastructure in a very real way daily," she says reflecting on the key role she plays amid the many challenges South Africa faces. "I've had to navigate followers and listeners through that morass with clarity and knowledge. My voice is unique in that I'm able to provide leadership to my community and my followers, listeners, or readers in times of confusion and crisis."

Her ability to steer South Africans through trying times proved invaluable during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the population was desperate for guidance. "I tried to provide that through regular social media updates and explaining 'family meetings'," she says.

Though she thrives in her role, Wiener admits that she would occasionally welcome a reprieve from the ongoing bad-news cycle. "It's relentless, and that means that many people feel overwhelmed by it. I wish the news wasn't so constantly negative, and that there was more balance - what I call 'light and shade' in the news."

Having established herself as an authoritative and trustworthy journalist, her innate news sense and ability to tell a story makes Wiener a leading voice in the media space. Attaining her Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism and English at Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), now the University of Johannesburg, Wiener began her broadcasting career on RAU Radio. She later interned at the 702 traffic desk, and screened listeners' calls overnight. Breaking into the world of reporting proved to be a dramatic but career-defining experience.

"On the first story I was sent out on as an intern, I was held up at gunpoint," she recalls. "I made a name for myself as a breaking news reporter, wrote a bestselling book, wrote several more books, and now host a daily radio show and manage various social media platforms. My investigative reporting has evolved into advocacy work and keynote speaking on whistleblowing, active citizenship, and supporting journalism."

Reflecting on her leadership philosophy, Wiener says transparency is crucial, which is why one must always be honest. Working with exceptional people, Wiener actively ensures that she expresses consistent appreciation and that each individual is acknowledged each day. "I strongly believe in empowering and validating your team," she says.

This is how she has built her radio team, of whom she's incredibly proud. "We're all women, and we have been together since I started on 702/Cape Talk," she says. "I trust them implicitly, and they are experts, the very best in the industry. We've faced many challenges, but have focused on delivering an excellent end product."

Wiener feels fortunate to have had inspiring female editors along her journey. The leadership of former *Eyewitness News* Editor-in-Chief Katy Katopodis was particularly notable in her career path. "A true leader is someone who is able to nurture and cultivate your talent, grow your confidence, and provide you with the skills to be able to flourish," she says.

Having benefitted from such leadership and by working hard to realise her own immense potential, Wiener says that holistically speaking, her proudest accomplishment has been to build a credible reputation in the industry. Other career highlights include having her first book, *Killing Kebble*, become a South African publishing phenomenon when it sold in excess of 100 000 copies, something she calls her "singular greatest journalism achievement". More recently, *The Midday Report* was named best news and actuality show on radio in South Africa in 2022, another source of significant pride.

Other standout career moments include being in Grant Park the night Barack Obama won the United States election; the 24 hours after Oscar Pistorius shot Reeva Steenkamp; being in the venue at both African National Congress elections when Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa were elected; and being in court every time Zuma was acquitted. "In 2007, I won the CNN African Radio Journalist of the Year award for my coverage of the shooting of a toddler in the Johannesburg central business district," she recalls. "That's a crime scene I'll never forget."

Among her considerable successes, Wiener remains mindful of each mistake she's made along the way. "The platforms I'm privileged to be on come with great responsibility, and to fail can be devastating," she says. "I deal with my mistakes by learning from them, and ensuring that I don't make them again."

Wiener is also aware of the need to evolve throughout life's journey. Becoming a mother changed the way she approaches her work. "Having children definitely had an impact on my career as an investigative journalist covering breaking news stories. I had to reinvent myself in my career, and I've done so over the past 10 years or so. I'm more risk averse, but I'm still able to be an authoritative, credible voice in the media space, write books, and speak truth to power."

Community is also important for Wiener, who supports various Jewish organisations and is active in the Community Security Organisation. She also has an insatiable obsession with Padel, is a voracious reader who colour codes her home library, and never misses a South African sports clash.

Speaking of what's to come Wiener says, "I hope to have the privilege of continuing to broadcast, write, and speak to audiences that continue to have faith and trust in me and my ability to bring them the news - and the truth."

*Mandy Wiener*

**Mandy Wiener Media**

**Mandy Wiener was also nominated in the Professional Excellence category.**

**Europcar Women in Leadership Award**

# Absa Business Awards' Judges



Back row:  
Garron Chaitowitz (Director and Audit Partner, BDO); Greg Solomon (CEO, McDonald's South Africa); Nerissa David (Regional Executive Private Wealth Banking, Absa); and Geoff Rothschild (Chairperson, Nepad Business Foundation)

Front row:  
Sharon Wapnick (Senior Partner, TWB and Partners); Dionne Ellerine (CEO, Eric Ellerine Trust); and Nomsa Moeketsi (Regional Segment Head Wealth, Absa)

# Absa Business Leadership Award Nominees

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Jason Morris

Scan here for more about these nominees



# WINNER

Absa  
Jewish Achiever Awards

# 2023

## Heart of the clothing business

**T**he K-Way brand might be one of South Africa's most iconic, yet Cape Union Mart Chief Executive Philip Krawitz says he doesn't feel like a "business icon". Though he's grateful and honoured to receive the award, he emphasises that he's "just a humble shopkeeper".

Krawitz is executive chairperson of the Cape Union Mart group of companies, which comprises about 300 stores in South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana. Cape Union Mart was founded in 1933 by Krawitz' grandfather, also called Philip. In the early 1950s, his son, Arthur Krawitz, adapted it, bringing international brands to South Africa.

The younger Philip had to step in quickly when his father fell ill in the 1970s. At great risk, he successfully expanded the business. Today, Cape Union Mart is a leading outdoor adventure store and the group's stable includes 260 stores, the highly successful Old Khaki and Poetry brands, as well as Sparks & Ellis, which was established in the early 1930s, South Africa's oldest and most respected supplier and maker of uniforms.

The group's manufacturing division, K-Way, named after Arthur Krawitz who was known as "Mr K", has been lauded for boosting the local clothing manufacturing sector, while its Green Thread Design Studio was launched in 2022 as the group's design and production hub for Poetry and Old Khaki to facilitate the growth of local clothing design and production.

"When I get to *Gan Eden*, I'm not going to be asked how big my wife's diamond ring is or whether I flew first class," says Krawitz. "I'm going to be asked one simple question: 'How did you treat your fellow man?' Please G-d, I hope to live a long time, but I'll be dead a lot longer, and during that period, I don't want to be an uncomfortable soul."

Therefore, underpinning Cape Union Mart's business ethos is putting people first, from the staff to customers. This was the philosophy that Krawitz inherited from his grandfather and his parents, who "worked 24/7, doing their best to build up this little business through numerous challenges". Amidst it all, "I saw how my parents treated their staff, and how loved they were in return."

For him, success is if "I can provide quality goods for my customers at a fair price and with brilliant service; if I can treat my suppliers with respect and pay them on time; if I can treat my staff fairly and help them to become the best that they can be; if I can invest in the environment to ensure that our planet is a good place for my grandchildren to live; and if I can

invest in society to help those less fortunate and change their lives in some way."

In a nutshell, the company's mission is to be "a world-class retailer, trusted for its family values and passion to improve lives". It's through this approach that he has built the business into what it is today. It remains a family business, with his wife, Michele, and their three daughters having all played crucial parts. From generation to generation, Krawitz has led the way in showing that profit, purpose, and people are all dependent on each other.

Contributing to the community goes hand in hand with building a successful business, Krawitz says. "I don't think anybody can ever measure the value of volunteering in community. What few people realise is that involvement in community lets you enter an incredible network of good people who will share their knowledge and be open to working with you. I have had such joy from my involvement of more than 50 years in the Jewish community."

The Cape Union Mart group is "absolutely passionate about creating jobs", he says, employing about 4 000 people. "Everybody tells you not to be a local manufacturer, but we do the opposite. We're absolutely committed to local production in South Africa."

In addition, "apartheid denied many people the most basic skills", he says. "That's why our company focuses a huge amount of resources on development and training, trying to help people move from where they are to where they can be. We also find that by investing in people, we gain their commitment."

Another people-first decision was when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, which Krawitz describes as the most challenging time of his career. "During the pandemic, we took the decision to take a huge loss, but not forcibly retrench any people. And we were fortunate to emerge with a passionate workforce, grateful for the fact that we looked after them in the toughest times. That ultimately translated to good long-term profitability in spite of short-term losses.

"You've heard the expression, 'Please don't bring your problems to work', but we have a different philosophy, 'Please bring your problems to work,'" he says. "If you've got a sick child at home, it's unlikely you'll be able to be at your best. If somebody's repossessing your furniture, don't tell me that you're going to be happily placing an order."

"So, if you've got a problem, we've got an outstanding human resources department that will help you. We've got free counselling. And, if you're having your furniture repossessed, well, maybe our head of legal can help you. Maybe we can phone the bank and say, 'Please give this guy a chance on his bond.' It's a great opportunity to help your employees solve their problems, and if you help them do that, boy, they're going help you solve yours."

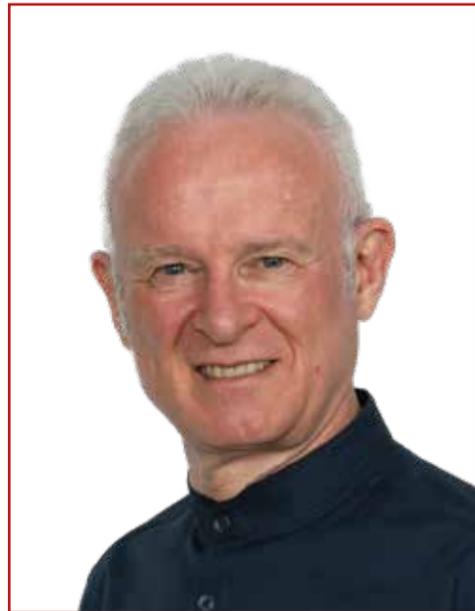
"Resilience is one of our absolute passions," he says. "Last year, our entire uniform company burned to the ground. The lady who runs that business, Sue de Wet, took control and by that afternoon, we were back in business. That kind of passion that our people bring ... well, I consider myself incredibly blessed to have the most wonderful people working for us."

"We're proudly South African in everything we do, and are completely committed to building a better future for our nation and its people," says Krawitz. In the case of the Jewish community, Israel's existence is a crucial part of continuing to live in South Africa and contribute to its growth. "Israel will always have our back, and there will never again be no place in the world for a Jewish refugee to go," Krawitz says.

To emphasise the point, he shares a series of photographs his father took at Cape Town harbour, where Jewish refugees tried to enter the Cape on the eve of the Holocaust. "They were turned away and all perished," says Krawitz. "I always keep these photographs on my desk, because knowing that Israel is always there means we can continue to be here, contributing to the incredible country."

*Philip Krawitz*  
Cape Union Mart

## Absa Business Icon Award



**ARTHUR GOLDSTUCK**  
World Wide Worx

Arthur Goldstuck has created a world-class, world-renowned high-tech market research organisation which uncovers the dynamics shaping business and consumer use of technology.

Goldstuck put himself at the forefront of the industry by remaining at the cutting edge of the five disciplines in which he established himself, namely market research, journalism, information and communication technology (ICT), professional speaking and training, and mentorship.

What's more, this founder and chief executive of World Wide Worx has won lifetime achiever awards in three of these categories in the past three years.

Goldstuck also publishes *Gadget*, the first online consumer technology magazine, now in its 25th year, which aims to demystify technology. He now has an offshoot, *GadgetWheels*, focusing on automotive tech.

Goldstuck was named one of the world's top innovators in 2022 by the global market research community. He also wrote South Africa's all-time bestselling ICT book in 1995.

This year alone, he led research on behalf of Amazon,

Dell, F5, Intel, Mastercard, Nashua, VMware, Vodacom, Xero, and Zoho. He has pioneered the use of digital tools, platforms, and processes to deliver large research projects with small teams at low cost and in time frames previously not achieved across the African continent.

The turning point for Goldstuck was, he says, a moment in 2000, when his tech start-up had been part of a Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed group for 18 months and the chief executive called him in to tell him that "the thing" that he was doing was "passe". Goldstuck resigned when he was informed that "the thing" was the internet.

"I spent a night brainstorming with my wife, Sheryl, and two weeks later, opened up a new start-up called World Wide Worx," said Goldstuck. "My short-lived employer also abandoned the short-lived magazine I'd brought into his group, *Gadget*, and I integrated it into World Wide Worx. Two decades on, in the past three years, it has been the fastest growing part of my business."

An award-winning writer, Goldstuck has authored 19 books on topics ranging from urban legends to business, and has been shortlisted for the Alan Paton Award for

Non-Fiction. His 20th book, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to AI - A handbook for all*, will be published by Pan Macmillan in November this year. He's also the writer of a weekly trends column for *Business Times* in the *Sunday Times*.

Goldstuck is also an accomplished speaker, having given talks on technology to audiences around the globe. In 2021, he was elected to the Southern African Speakers Hall of Fame, and this year, he was elected deputy president of the Professional Speakers Association of Southern Africa.

In his spare time - if there is any - he collects comics, die-cast metal character toys and whisky, plays football Fantasy League, and enjoys running, music, science fiction, and travel.

• Arthur Goldstuck was also nominated in the Professional Excellence category.

Lawyer Jason Morris, the co-managing director of Snaid & Morris and a director of the British Chamber of Business in Southern Africa, uses his legal expertise to help businesses thrive.

"I've always put myself, where possible, in the clients' shoes," says Morris.

Having been elected to the British Chamber of Business, he represents South African businesses at the British Chamber of Commerce Global Conference in London.

One of his biggest challenges has been to assist clients who have borne the brunt of the rand depreciation and its effect on their business. "I do my best to show compassion and offer a caring shoulder," he said.

Morris has a wealth of experience in different court settings: the high court, commercial court, magistrates' court, and various other tribunals. He has worked in all fields of litigation, and his experience is varied - including insolvency enquiries, arbitrations, and mediations. His knowledge of law is equally impressive, ranging from corporate, to personal, commercial, immigration, and entrepreneurial law, among others.

This extensive training and experience has prepared him for his current role uplifting South African businesses and helping owners and teams overcome limitations during tough economic times.

As co-owner of his firm, Snaid & Morris, he has harnessed his skills to assist South Africans transitioning during these tough times, and has handled many complex immigration matters for South Africans to the United Kingdom. He has also been the appointed attorney for many high-profile estates.

Morris is also the director of E & M Morris in London. He has been a board member and chairperson of various multinational companies.

Morris believes that while hindsight is important, embracing the future is the way forward for South Africans. He believes expertise in legal matters is one of the solutions for securing this future.

His legal career aside, he believes compassion is the way forward for the nation, and that's what characterises true success. Compassion is being present for those who need you, he says. As such, he makes a concentrated effort to be there for his family, and his favourite pastimes are reading and spending time with loved ones.

Morris said the death of his mother and the birth of his daughters made him realise that the legacy we leave shapes the destiny of those who come after us. Thus, he strives to leave a lasting legacy each day, in whichever setting he might find himself, whether it be in high court or with one of his children at home.

• Jason Morris was also nominated in the Professional Excellence category.



**JASON MORRIS**  
Snaid & Morris



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# WINNER

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Jewish Achiever Awards

# 2023



## Insuring way forward in uncertain times

Leading a health-focused business through the uncharted waters of the COVID-19 pandemic wasn't for the faint-hearted, but this year's Absa Business Leadership Award winner, Hylton Kallner, didn't hesitate to accept his role when appointed chief executive of Discovery SA just three months before the pandemic shook South Africa. In his mid-40s, he successfully guided his approximately 11 000-strong team through what was one of the most difficult periods in South African business history.

"Shifting the staff to work from home and leading the organisation through this was a challenge, but we were ultimately pivotal to the national response, which was one of my career highlights," he says. As was being able to take delivery personally of the first Pfizer COVID-19 vaccinations at the Discovery site during the peak of the pandemic.

Kallner, 48, says his greatest achievements include being appointed to the Discovery board at the age of 34, which was unique for a Johannesburg Stock Exchange Top-40 company at the time. "Being appointed chief executive of Discovery for the South African group was also a proud personal moment, as was the granting of Discovery's banking license," Kallner said. As chief executive, he oversees all of Discovery's South African businesses and operations, representing more than 75% of the group's people, profit, and assets.

Discovery SA is independently rated as one of the top-10 brands in South Africa and is a market leader in medical-scheme management, life insurance, long-term savings, short-term insurance, and most recently, banking.

Kallner also operates as chief executive of Discovery Bank, the most recent and largest investment in the group. The bank was recently recognised by *Fortune* magazine as one of the top five companies "changing the world" in its most recent listing. No other South African company received this recognition, Kallner says.

With the benefit of hindsight, Kallner says he believes "we should have entered banking sooner, given the scale of opportunity and the potential to have a profound impact on our clients' lives". However, "building a successful bank in one of the most competitive banking markets in the world is an obvious challenge, but we're disrupting the market through innovation and true product leadership".

Kallner feels honoured to have been a part of leading and launching all of Discovery's businesses over the past 27 years, having joined when there were only 100 employees. "Today, Discovery is the largest private healthcare funder in South Africa, with a leadership position in life assurance, long-term investment, and short-term insurance."

His career highlights have included qualifying as an actuary and being appointed to the company's leadership board. However, his proudest career moments have been around Discovery's innovations, such as launching the global Active Rewards with Apple Chief Operating Officer Jeff Williams; and presenting the Discovery Bank case study with Michael Porter to a Harvard Master of Business Administration class.

Kallner believes that leadership, especially in hard times, is about setting a purposeful and inspiring vision along with clear goals embodying the values of the business. "A great leader inspires every member of the team to do more than they believed was possible, and feels a sense of pride in others' success," he said. "We believe that the best businesses are built in tough times, and that's what we have been focused on - responding to the needs of our clients with unique products and benefits that are relevant to the current environment, particularly in the context of the interest-rate cycle and loadshedding."

*Hylton Kallner*

**Discovery Limited**



Though unlike manufacturers, for example, Discovery isn't directly impacted by loadshedding, Kallner's biggest challenge through the electricity crisis has been "managing the negative sentiment and narrative around loadshedding". The company has sought to assist its clients with energy solutions through funding and strategic partnerships for equipment and installation. It will also add significant capacity to the national grid by creating a platform for corporate clients, which will roll out over the next few years, according to Kallner.

Kallner doesn't believe in compartmentalising his life, saying, "I'm available seven days a week to my family and my professional commitments. I don't have 'balance' in the traditional sense, and it's not unusual for me to work 100-plus hours per week. But I also don't miss any important family commitments, which I prioritise over everything else."

Having said that, he believes the busier he is, the more focused he is on the areas in which he can have the most impact and which mean the most to him, particularly at home and at work.

The compromise he makes in his life is to not have any hobbies or personal interests outside of those two areas.

He believes it helps to have an excellent technical foundation as an actuary and an intense work ethic. "I'm generally the first person at the office and the last to leave, and I don't switch off until my last email or call is returned, regardless of the time," he says.

"I'm intimately involved in the detail of our businesses, personally signing off every product brochure. I also respond personally to every client escalation that I receive."

He maintains he's a "continuous student", being naturally curious and thriving on learning and reading for at least one hour a day.

"I have a remarkable team around me, but I have had the privilege of working closely with and observing Adrian Gore virtually every day for nearly 30 years. He's been a mentor and sounding board for every major and minor decision, inspiring and challenging me continuously."

Kallner's only focus outside of family and work is to have been an integral member of the South African Board of Jewish Education since 2006. He led the conception and building of King David Ariel, the remedial component of King David Primary School Victory Park, which he said was particularly gratifying because he has a child who went through remedial schooling.

At the end of the day, for Kallner, nothing makes him prouder than his family and children's milestones.

And the Jewish community is right up there too. "I'm proud of my Jewish identity and the role our community plays in South Africa. To be honoured by our community is the highest form of recognition and pride for me personally," he says.

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**BRADLEY GORDON**  
Investec Bank Limited

**B**radley Gordon was just 30 when he was appointed head of aviation finance at Investec in 2021. It was during the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic, when planes were grounded, borders closed, and the aviation industry was struggling to survive.

This King David Linksfield alumnus, 31, led the company's financial team in its pivotal role in helicopter, corporate jet, commercial passenger aircraft, and cargo aircraft financing. He has since led his team in helping airlines in South Africa rebuild their businesses, in turn helping to grow the economy through direct and indirect job creation in the tourism sector.

Gordon describes it as a highly skilled niche business, competing with the biggest and best banks and financial institutions globally.

"I try to act as a role model, adopting a lead-by-example approach," says Gordon. "I especially like to mentor colleagues, and am fortunate to train many interns and chartered accountant article clerks."

During the pandemic, he also volunteered to do credit assessment work for the Geshur Fund, a communal fund set up to help small businesses survive the lockdown.

Gordon's input has helped to establish Investec as a leading aviation finance business in South Africa and one of the leading aviation finance businesses in the world. His team has received a number of industry awards for its diligent work and success, including the African Commercial Aviation Finance Deal of the Year on three separate occasions; and the Financier of the Year Award for Africa on four occasions.

"We were honoured to win the global revolving credit deal of the year at the

Airfinance Journal Awards in London in June this year – our first global award," says Gordon. "Our competitors included the world's biggest banks and institutions from the United States, Europe, Japan, and China."

Though Gordon is the youngest member of the company's management committee, he believes that young leaders are important in all professions and walks of life as they challenge existing norms and thinking, bringing new energy.

He strives to encourage young leaders to follow his lead, and through his drive, motivation, and professionalism, has inspired respect from many in his field.

Gordon started work as a first-year article clerk at Investec, not having any idea that the world of aviation finance existed. "A chance meeting with a third-year article clerk who was working in the aviation finance business opened my eyes to what struck me as the ideal fit for someone who loves finance and travel," Gordon said. Ten years later, he considers himself so lucky to have a job he's "so passionate about and that makes work fun every day".

He regrets nothing, preferring to view stumbling blocks as opportunities. "I believe every action brings opportunity. We learn our most valuable lessons when we make mistakes, and the pathway to success is paved with obstacles."

**B**rad Kallenbach and his business partner, Anthony Townsend, are the first South African clinical psychologists to use psychedelic medicine in the treatment of mental-health conditions.

Though this 38-year-old King David alumnus runs a busy private practice in Hyde Park, he has also become the first South African clinical psychologist to run psychedelic-assisted therapy retreats around the world, having run 10 since 2021. He has also launched Equanimity Wellness, the first comprehensive evidence-based psychedelic treatment centre in Africa.

And he's building a proprietary therapeutic framework combining best practice in psychedelic medicine with traditional psychotherapeutic modalities such as cognitive behaviour therapy and psychodynamic therapy.

Kallenbach is the co-founder of Reach, a mental-health tech app which offers real-time, science-based tools for anxiety regulation and emotional mastery. Through the centre and the app, Kallenbach can address psychological

issues such as depression, suicide, addiction, and trauma, all of which are having a negative impact on South Africa's economy, the stability of family relationships, and the national psyche.

Kallenbach's own path was shaken up when he was 16, when he and a friend were held at gunpoint and assaulted in a secluded park by a river near his friend's home while studying for their matric art history final.

Confronted with his own mortality, Kallenbach decided never to take his life for granted. He has since helped hundreds of people living with mental-health concerns to heal and recover, offering them hope for a purpose-driven life characterised by peace of mind, meaningful work, and fulfilling relationships.

Kallenbach says that in post-COVID-19 pandemic South Africa, the society is languishing under threat of a mental-health crisis, with burnout alone costing the economy R40.6-billion annually.

Kallenbach's work is professionally recognised, and he

has worked with psychiatric units across Johannesburg, including Tara Psychiatric Hospital, and the Adult Acute Psychiatric Ward at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital.

Kallenbach is also a lifelong meditator and martial artist, who has competed at international level. He believes in living a life of balance, and leads by example through attentiveness to all facets of his life, from nutrition to exercise, to relationships, and his career. He calls his marriage to wife, Gina, his "greatest achievement to date", and says he couldn't have accomplished what he has without her wisdom, love, and support.

Having a Masters in clinical psychology and English literature, he combines literature in his personal growth, advocating "immersing oneself in the best thoughts written by the best minds through a deep course of reading".

One of the best thoughts he lives by is, "know yourself before you can truly help another".



**BRAD KALLENBACH**  
Equanimity Wellness

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**STEVEN KAPLAN  
- SOUTH AFRICAN  
INSTITUTION  
OF CIVIL  
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Having been a civil engineer for the past 45 years, Steven Kaplan, the president of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE), says he couldn't be happier. He tells students and young graduates under his mentorship, "If I had my life over again, I would be a civil engineer."

He's an advocate for important civil engineering issues and policies at SAICE. He has met decision-makers in local government, spoken publicly, published articles, and written opinion pieces.

SAICE is a voluntary membership organisation with about 16 000 members, and Kaplan was recently voted president-elect of the institution, having first joined SAICE as a corporate member in 1984. He says his vision for his leadership has never changed. "My agenda has always been to protect the interest of SAICE's members and the civil engineering profession as a whole."

In 2021 and 2022, Kaplan led his team in compiling the fourth SAICE Infrastructure Report Card (IRC), published in November 2022. This establishes SAICE as a thought leader in matters related to infrastructure. It focuses on the condition of infrastructure and its impact on service delivery; the effect of infrastructure on quality of life and economic development of the

nation; and the need for adequate repair and maintenance of the existing infrastructure.

Kaplan uses the IRC as leverage to focus on discussing the importance of planning infrastructure from design to construction to operation, and then maintenance.

No two civil engineering projects are the same, Kaplan says, and no two days in his life are alike. The highlights of his career include working as project leader on the prestigious Gautrain Hatfield Station parkade, station platform, and bus terminus; and being a pivotal part of the detailed engineering design of a 300km stretch of district roads in Uganda for the Uganda National Roads Agency.

He gets inspiration as a leader by encouraging others, and is a mentor to many young civil engineering students and graduates within the institution. In 2019, he developed the SAICE growing

forward strategy, which focuses on inclusion related to age, race, and gender.

"I hope the legacy I leave is my unwavering commitment to professional ethics," Kaplan says. "SAICE has a code of ethics, and the Engineering Council of South Africa, the regulatory body, has a code of conduct I've always adhered to."

Kaplan is a closet "Trekkie" (*Star Trek* fan), and loves walking, hiking, motor cars, home renovating, and watching sci-fi series. He's devoted to his wife, Helen. He remains hopeful about South Africa's future, saying, "There's no doubt in my mind that a positive change to the perception of the relevance or value of civil engineering professionals and SAICE is key to upskilling the profession and the creation of employment at all levels of the construction industry. This will undoubtedly lead to the improvement of infrastructure in South Africa, which will best serve the public interest."

**GRAHAM SHAPIRO - MYCCOUNTANT**

Identifying a need in the SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) sector, Graham Shapiro launched his own cloud-based accounting and advisory business, Myccountant, in 2015.

He noticed that most SMEs were using outdated desktop accounting software, and required high-level services from a chief financial officer but were too small to spend large amounts of money on these services. Myccountant allows SMEs to outsource their company's accounting using a cloud-based platform which gives business owners real-time access to information.

His contribution hasn't gone unnoticed. Earlier this year, he was named Xero's Most Valued Professional for South Africa for 2023. Xero is one of the world's leading cloud accounting platforms for small businesses. Myccountant was also awarded the Corporate LiveWire Award as the Accountancy Firm of the Year in its 2023 Innovation & Excellence Awards.

Shapiro's skills aren't limited to accounting, but encompasses the entire business operation. His team helps implement operational systems, which automate manual work and save time, allowing business owners to focus on the growth of their companies instead of mundane manual tasks. Shapiro and his team recently helped a group of 13 companies implement a fully operational system, saving them more than 10 hours each week.

He says being part of the move away from traditional accounting services and seeing the results with small business owners has been one of his greatest achievements.

It took leaving a terrible work environment, being jobless, and an expectant wife to get him to start his own business. "That was nearly nine years ago. Since then, having my own business has changed my life," Shapiro says.

He insists he would have started his business earlier had he understood that he was capable of going on his own. He hopes to give others the confidence to take this step, and believes being transparent and sharing knowledge and expertise will help others gain this confidence. One of the ways he shares with the professional community is through posts on LinkedIn.



Shapiro shows the same determination in his sporting and leisure interests as his career, and is passionate about soccer, golf, running, and reading. He has run the New York Marathon, and has represented his soccer club in an international tournament in San Diego. He has also been the Killarney Golf Club junior champion.

He's a committed husband and the father of three children, and says running his own business has given him the opportunity to attend every important family event and be a hands-on parent. He and his wife continue to have a date night every week, and he believes work should never take precedence over family. A devout Jew, he also served on his shul's committee for two years.

Shapiro believes in never taking anything for granted. "The world is changing at a rapid pace. We must be ready to evolve and change. I have to let go of petty things and understand that the bad things that happen aren't always bad. Don't be afraid of change. Embrace it."

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## MANDE TOUBKIN - NETCARE

Mande Toubkin recalls carrying a suitcase with a red cross on it as a little girl, telling the world that one day, she would become a nurse.

She has way surpassed those dreams, but hasn't strayed from her path as general manager of Netcare's trauma, transplant, emergency medicine, and corporate social investment divisions. "My entire career has been dedicated to the care of patients in need of healthcare, ensuring I make a difference to one person at a time," says Toubkin.

She believes her investment in trauma and emergency care in South Africa and the establishment of trauma systems has ensured the survival of many patients. And she has led the way in terms of transformation and compassion in emergency medicine and healthcare.

Toubkin believes compassion defines her as a professional, and that this quality has been the key to her team's achievements in health and emergency care. She's responsible for co-ordinating and implementing Netcare's response across all Netcare hospitals and relevant multi-disciplinary healthcare workers. This often requires strategic thinking, rapid decisions, and a fast response. Still, she believes the most important skills she has developed through leadership have been increased care and compassion.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, and with a new outlook on her profession, she was given the opportunity to attend an international course on compassion at Stanford University in the United States. The course had a life-changing impact on her, and she chose to share the experience with her colleagues on returning to South Africa. She now holds a weekly meeting, Compassion Matters, which has grown from about 30 attendees to more than 200.

She has since worked with Professor Feroza Motara, the head of emergency medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, to launch and facilitate the Centre for Compassion, Ethics and Safety in Health Care.

A former pupil of Waverley Girls' High School, Toubkin has a long list of awards to her name. These include a certificate of appreciation given to her by the Queen of England in 1999 for her work in the Lydenburg bus disaster. Then, in 2010 and 2013, she received certificates of appreciation from the United States White House; and in 2000, acknowledgement for work done in the Mozambique floods from the wife of the late Nelson Mandela, Graca Machel. In 2004, she was awarded a Netcare Hero of Hero Award; and in 2005, a Woman of the World Award.

Toubkin is also a member of various influential societies: the Trauma Society of South Africa; the Transplant Society of South Africa; Emergency Medicine Society of South Africa; the Academy of Nursing of South Africa; and the South African Medicolegal Association.

The committed nurse she once hoped she would be has devoted her life to the care of patients in need of healthcare, and she hopes to inspire many more young people to become nurses and dream big.



## PROFESSOR HEATHER ZAR - UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Professor Heather Zar, the chairperson of the department of paediatrics and child health, and the director of the MRC unit on child and adolescent health at the University of Cape Town (UCT), has dedicated her life to children's health.

She has been at the forefront of the development of clinical science, research, educational programmes, and capacity development in child health in South Africa, Africa, and globally. "My work is focused on developing strategies for better health for children, and on reducing health inequities to enable access to effective interventions for all children," she said.

It all started when she was at Baragwanath Hospital - now Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital - in Soweto as a medical student observing paediatrics. "I realised that I wanted to make this my life's work, to contribute to strengthening child health, and to make a difference to children," she said.

After specialising in paediatrics, Zar did three years of sub-specialist training in paediatric pulmonology at Babies Hospital, Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, New York, in the United States. She then returned to South Africa to pursue an academic career, including a PhD, at UCT.

She has since gone on to achieve great feats. Her most memorable include developing training programmes in child health for Africa and building and mentoring the next generation of African child health professionals; doing novel research to improve child health globally; and leading key organisations to develop strategies to strengthen child health across the globe.

Zar has worked on the most pressing problems concerning child health on the African continent, among these pneumonia, tuberculosis, and asthma. Often, it has meant working in resource-constrained environments and poor communities, where she and her team have contributed to new interventions and changes in global practice - for example, instituting the guidelines set by the World Health Organization (WHO) - to ensure better care for children. She and her staff recently built a library for a school in an underprivileged community in which they work. "For the first time, children could take a book home," she says.

Zar has also been at the forefront of developing clinical science, research, and capacity development in child lung health in South Africa and Africa. Most recently, she led the WHO technical advisory group for new interventions (immunisation) against Respiratory Syncytial Virus. For her work, she was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award in Paediatrics from the European Respiratory Society.

Committed to leaving a lasting impact on children's healthcare in the nation and Africa at large, Zar has mentored many PhD students and trainees throughout Africa to build a network of excellent child health specialists and the next generation of leaders.

"I've facilitated the career development of many of my peers through my work, and provided unique opportunities for their growth and independence," she says.

Her work and research have also created sustainable employment and skills development for many.

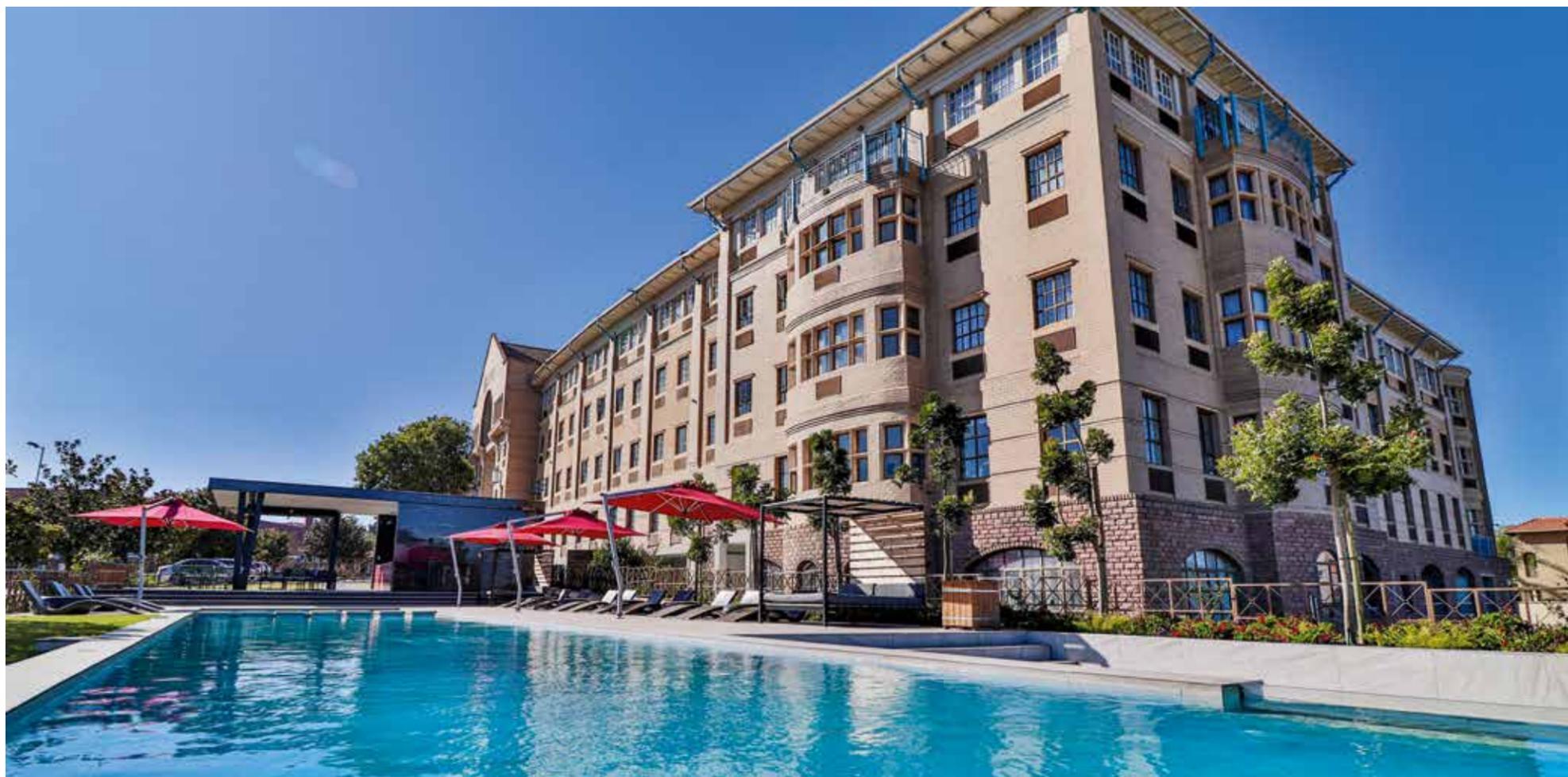


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## Medical detective in the mortuary

**F**orensic pathologist Professor Ryan Blumenthal has performed about 10 000 autopsies to date, helping to solve murders and other puzzling reasons for death. He was selected as part of an elite team of six pathologists called upon to perform the autopsy of a former president of state, and he was also among the respected forensic pathologists assigned to the autopsies of those killed in the Marikana massacre and those who lost lives in the Life Esidimeni scandal.

While many might recoil at the idea of working with dead bodies, Blumenthal believes his work's focus isn't death, but on finding solutions for life. As a true "medical detective", his professionalism and expertise haven't just separated murder from natural causes, but pioneered research into treatment and preventative measures.

Blumenthal, 49, speaks of being a forensic pathologist as his "calling, requiring absolute professionalism". He was drawn to this line of work because, he says, "there was simply no other discipline which could contain my unique kind of 'mindedness'."

From his autopsy table, he says, "I can tell a lot of what is happening in the world. I can tell if a new gang has moved into the neighbourhood. I can tell if there's a new or emergent drug or disease, and I can even get a good sense of the health – physical, mental, and psychological – of the nation without necessarily venturing outdoors."

Over the past 20 years, Blumenthal has been headhunted to work in four different international forensic facilities, but he refused because, he says, "this is my home country and I want to be a part of the solution. In spite of overwhelming challenges, this is where I choose to be."

Blumenthal has taken this highly specialised and complex discipline and, through his extensive writing and documentary series, communicated it in simple language to the public, enabling it to understand the importance of what he does. His work has "helped create awareness of science" and forensic pathology in South Africa.

His book, *Autopsy – Life in the Trenches with a Forensic Pathologist in Africa*, published in August 2020, became a non-fiction best-seller in South Africa. It made the long list for the *Sunday Times* Book Awards and the short-list for the SA Booksellers Awards.

His latest book, *Risking Life for Death – Lessons for the Living from the Autopsy Table*, was published in July this year and has already attracted media attention.

He has also written novels, including, *The Seed; The Rain Beetle; Mentalist Martial Arts: Conflict Resolution Through Misdirection; and The Butterfly*.

His eight-part documentary series, *Lightning Pathologist*, on DStv in November 2021, was viewed by more than 2.2 million people.

"This series resonated with ordinary South Africans, many of whom had their own personal lightning stories," Blumenthal said.

He has earned acclaim and a large online following because of his expressive, informative style of relaying information and evident passion for the scientific field of forensic pathology, as well as his simple way of explaining complex subjects.

Everyone benefits from the work of forensic pathologists, he says, who have no vested interest in the outcome of the autopsy, simply reporting on their findings. "We present it fairly, scientifically, and objectively. We're apolitical and care only about the truth."

And though he believes it's fascinating, he says, "The hours are demanding, the pay is terrible, the conditions are terrible, and you are underappreciated, unsupported, disrespected, and frequently physically endangered – but there's no better career!"

Blumenthal, who is one of the founding members of LIGHTS (the Lightning Interest Group For Health Technology and Science), is also deeply involved in lightning research, and authored and co-authored lightning and electrocution chapters in the world's leading forensic reference textbooks. Even the Springbok rugby team has benefitted from his lightning research, as he co-drafted the lightning safety awareness guidelines for [www.boksmart.com](http://www.boksmart.com), which affect rugby in South Africa. He has also launched the Lightning Pathologist website, focusing on nature's most prolific serial killer, lightning.

His fascination with lightning was inspired in 2001, when he was called to the death scene of an adult woman in the *veld*. "Initially, it looked like a rape-homicide case. Her clothing was tattered and torn. After a thorough forensic examination, it turned out that her death was caused by lightning."

The lightning had destroyed her clothes, he said. This led to intensive research into lightning deaths, studying 90 lightning victims. It motivated him to do his PhD at the University of the Witwatersrand, which took eight years, being conferred in 2015. His thesis was titled "On the sixth mechanism of lightning injury".

Blumenthal is a founding member of the African Forensic Science Academy, which was established in 2002. He also helped win the bid for the African Society of Forensic Medicine conference, which will be held in 2025.

He sits on the editorial boards of the *American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology*, and the *Academic Forensic Pathology Journal*, and has published more than 39 articles in peer-reviewed journals as an NRF-C2 rated scientist. He has also assisted many of his colleagues in publishing academic papers.

He believes in living life to the full. "The antidote to exhaustion isn't necessarily rest. I believe extreme work is rest. The secret is to keep busy," he says. "Have a game plan. Wake up early. Have tea or coffee. Do sport. Keep reading, keep learning. Encourage the discouraged. Energise the exhausted. Be of service to your fellow human beings."

Blumenthal is concerned about the shortage of forensic pathologists in South Africa. "The number of pathologists is substantially inadequate to compensate for the number of pathologists who are retiring in the next decade and a half," he says. "We'll need to look at net additions to the workforce, like pathologists' assistants. As medicine rapidly changes, we'll see rapidly evolving demands for forensic pathology services."

Over the past 20 years, he has managed to procure more than 300 indigenous trees for the Forensic Pathology Services gardens in Pretoria, with the assistance of Jason Sampson from the department of botany. He arranges tree-planting in the gardens on Spring Day, Arbor Week, or Heritage Day, when he recognises his peers by having a tree planted in their name and they get a certificate in recognition. In his own office, Blumenthal has a display of beautiful plants because, he says, he "chooses to be surrounded by life".

This avid birdwatcher and mountain biker, who regularly goes on hikes to unwind from his daily work, is well known for being a highly-skilled sleight-of-hand magician. He has done magic shows for many years, maintaining his fascination and constantly learning in this field as well.



*Prof. Ryan  
Blumenthal*

**University of Pretoria /  
Forensic Pathology Services**

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