

Kickstarting a love of science

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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Bathabile Mpofu, co-founder and MD of Nkazimulo Applied Sciences, believes that true innovation comes from the access of existing knowledge. Mpofu hopes to instil a love of science in rural schoolchildren by giving them access to their own mini-lab with her innovation, ChemStart.



Bathabile Mpofu

We chatted to 36-year-old Mpofu, who was also selected to take part in this year's Red Bull Amaphiko Academy, about her start-up.

■ ***Tell us a bit about yourself...***

I was born at Nongoma and grew up at Ulundi. I went to a boarding school for six years which taught me to be independent. I have been married for 12 years and have three children - two boys and a girl. I graduated with BSc Honours in Chemistry from UKZN. I am a registered scientist with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions, Reg. I worked at a university as a laboratory technician for five years before working in an organisation that provides resources: financial, business and technical assistance to entrepreneurs in science. In that organisation I worked as a research scientist, where I helped entrepreneurs develop their products. I obtained a post-graduate Diploma in Business Administration, which I passed with distinction at UCT in 2013 while I was pregnant. In 2016, I completed my MBA at UCT.

■ ***Tell us about your start-up and the inspiration behind it?***

I did not pass well enough to get into medical school and was advised to study first year BSc and reapply into medical school. For the first time in my life I had to do lab experiments every day and this was hard. Because I had to catch up with everything, I did not do very well, and wasn't accepted into medical school. Since the lab resources became available to me late in my studies, dealing with them at varsity was difficult.

After my studies, I worked at the university and could see many learners battling the same way. This is the evidence I observed to a well-known fact that our schools lack the resources required to inspire learners to pursue, understand, and enjoy science subjects. The initial response in addressing the problem was applying the mobile lab when I visited schools,

performing experiments to help them, but I realised that the impact was minimal as I went to schools once and performed the experiments myself. ChemStart was developed to allow learners hands-on experience over a long period so they may get understanding of science and confidence they need to handle lab materials.

▣ ***Where do you plan on taking it from here?***

I want to reach all kids in SA, then export to other African countries and beyond.

▣ ***How important do you feel it is to be introduced to entrepreneurship and innovation at educational level?***

It must be introduced at school level as much as possible, I believe every child should view entrepreneurship as another career option which they can pursue.

▣ ***How necessary are initiatives like the Red Bull Amaphiko Academy to the development of entrepreneurship in South Africa?***

I think they help clarify what entrepreneurship is and what a young entrepreneur should expect if they pursue doing this... these initiatives, though, must be strongly coupled with helping entrepreneurs access markets so that the training/mentorship journey is travelled in full circle. There's no point in helping me with business skills if I never have the opportunities to use them.

▣ ***What advice do you have for young entrepreneurs who are just starting out themselves?***

When starting out one may be tempted to try a lot of things and explore all opportunities available, but they must decide on what they want to focus on, perfect that and use the "winning formula" on other ventures to follow.

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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