

## Don't forget the SMME community during lockdown

Workshop17 continues to support the SME community, the backbone of the country's economy, and calls on the country to support entrepreneurs and local small businesses in the formal and informal sectors and their employees who may face an uncertain future.



Paul Keursten, CEO and co-founder of Workshop17

“The global Covid-19 crisis is a bolt out of the blue for us all with serious implications as it is rapidly changing the way we live and work. Not only does it threaten the health of our people and our way of life; it will have far-reaching consequences for our economy as well,” says Paul Keursten, CEO and co-founder of Workshop17.

### **Nurturing the growth of local entrepreneurs**

Workshop17 is known for its passion for entrepreneurs. The company's first coworking space opened in 2012 in Maboneng, Johannesburg. These days the company offers an extensive portfolio of collaborative workspaces across the country that host over 1,700 members – SMEs, freelancers, nomadic workers and a growing number of corporates. The brand believes its success is not just linked to the quality and cost-effectiveness of its workspaces, but also its focus to creating thriving communities of supportive and like-minded people.

The South African SME sector employs about 47% of the country's workforce and contributes more than 20% to gross domestic product (GDP). As the National Development Plan optimistically anticipates for SMEs to contribute to about 90% of new jobs in South Africa by 2030, the survival of small businesses is key and, now more than ever, of paramount importance.

Encouraged by Government's efforts to support entrepreneurs throughout and post lockdown, Workshop17 further calls on communities to continue embracing the ubuntu-mentality with the outpouring of solidarity and compassion for SMEs and entrepreneurs.

### **Navigating challenging times together**

The company is trying to do its part by talking to its members who are in financial pain. Even though the flexible workspace provider is temporarily closed and facing a loss of revenue, they are trying to see whether they can help members in distress with membership costs where possible. A digital hub has also been created to help members and other coworking communities stay connected through networking.

"Our Entrepreneur Toolbox provides members access to useful resources such as apps, relevant webinars and podcasts, and shares tips on how to be productive when working from home. In addition, we are providing support sessions and have introduced 'online blind dating' where we are matching members from the same industries and letting them blind network without having previously met each other. These sessions are aimed at bringing a real sense of community and support during this stressful time," adds Keursten.

The company has also created WhatsApp groups for all their sites to keep the coworking community spirit and momentum going which sees the sharing of blog posts, helpful information, learnings, motivational playlists and insightful podcast episodes from The Workshop17 Show.

### **Fuelling the next wave of innovation**

To try and help keep morale up, Workshop17 aims to encourage the business community to try and consider the lessons that can be learnt from the unprecedented situation we all find ourselves in.

"We'll also be using our Entrepreneur Toolbox and other virtual resources to remind our community that situations such as these provide an opportunity for innovation. It's clear that this disruptive period in the long term will change the way businesses operate in the future. Those businesses that can meet the needs of the public in a changing world will find a way to thrive in the uncertain economic future," says Keursten.

As workspace and community platform, we are also looking at how this forced and impactful experiment in remote working will impact the workspace of the future. We are embracing this change and preparing for the work-life of the future.

### **Entrepreneurs will be key post-Covid-19**

Keursten adds, "Given our country's high unemployment rate over the years, many individuals have turned to self-employment. Following this pandemic, we will see even more people needing to put on their entrepreneurial hat in order to survive. Securing a sound support base now is crucial for current and future entrepreneurs in developing sustainable businesses; essentially aiding job creation and economic stability in the future."

### **Support local**

Some tips as to how you can help support local small businesses and entrepreneurs during COVID-19:

- **Purchase gift cards:** Some local businesses offer gift cards online for various products and services. Or enquire from your favourite small local business whether they can provide gift cards. By purchasing these online gift cards

now, your gesture provides the business with desperately needed cash flow to make it through these hard times. It also provides some hope for the future.

- **Reschedule, don't cancel:** While it is uncertain how long the current situation will last, instead of cancelling appointments rather reschedule in an effort to show your loyal support. Having the reassurance that they have business appointments lined-up when the situation ends will go a long way to boost morale.
- **Spread the word:** Tell your friends, colleagues, neighbours and family about your favourite small business and their services and products, especially if they are operating remotely during this period. By spreading the word, you can create interest and future support. If possible, share details about your experiences with the business and promote their website, and relevant social media platforms with your network.
- **Share a positive review:** Take some time to leave a positive review online of your favourite small business. This will be a boost of confidence for the business owner and help spread the word of the business offering.
- **Communicate and connect:** Stay in contact with your favourite small business owners and entrepreneurs that you know well. Check-in on them, offer to listen, or simply say thank you – this can go a long way.

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