

Mmusi Maimane - Master of communication

 By [Marion Scher](#)

12 May 2015

When in early 2011 Mmusi Maimane emerged on the South African political landscape as the DA's mayoral candidate, most people's reaction was Mmu who?

In fact, in one of his first live television interviews, seasoned journalist Jeremy Maggs sat opposite this engaging young man, slouched back in his chair with his clip board in front of him and asked in an almost amazed tone: "Why would anyone vote for you - no one knows who you are?" - or words to that effect.

Maimane, instead of being fazed by this almost dismissive question, looked straight back at Maggs and smiled broadly before answering, "Jeremy, let me tell you who I am." And proceeded to sell himself in a way few politicians have done before. Maggs, not to be outdone, did a favourite 'throw your guest' movement by looking down at his clipboard whilst Maimane had launched into his answer. Not to be outdone, Maimane's smile became broader and he carried on as though he owned the screen. And he did.

As someone who trains people to do just this for a living, I remember thinking, I've never heard of this guy either, but wow, I'm pretty sure he's going to go far.

His meteoric rise in South African politics won't in fact come as a surprise to anyone who knows this enigmatic young man. Not afraid to speak his mind, he also knows just how to handle the media. A rare gift.



On Monday morning, John Robbie announced that Maimane would be joining him just after 7am for an interview. Now

knowing the pressure of interviews he must be facing, I wondered if indeed he'd keep this deadline. Straight after the top of the hour news, there he was, ready to give Robbie all the time he wanted to answer questions.

Straight after this Twitter and 702's SMS line was jammed with listeners saying things like 'I've never voted for the DA before, but I certainly will now'; 'I didn't even bother to vote before but I'll definitely vote in the next election'...; 'This guy gives me confidence in South Africa again...'

He has a big job before him but he's certainly on the right track if he keeps up his relationship with his voters.

Without wanting to sound as though I'm punting any one political party you have to look at just who actually speaks to the media from our other parties or rather who doesn't speak, and you can see why the DA is quickly gaining ground in areas unheard of in their history.

It's all reaching people. What is the essence of news? According to a famous former editor of the English *Sunday Times*, Harold Evans, 'News is people, it's people talking and people doing.' That doesn't mean permanently denying and refusing to be questioned or appear on national television. Other parties should start shivering and shaking...

Personality, charisma and real actions behind words can create real change, just look at the unexpected results in the UK's general elections. Once again communication and charisma or lack of it, played a role, especially in the case of the leader of the Scottish National Party, Nicola Sturgeon, again an unknown quantity in politics, who managed through hard campaigning and clever use of the media, to take away over 50 seats from the Labour Party and knock them right out of the race for Number 10!

Spokespeople around South Africa, corporates, NGOs and anyone who wants a slice of the media should study Maimane and just how he's risen so quickly through the ranks. It's not random and it's definitely not luck. He's communicated his way there! All I can say is, 'watch this Mmusi space'...

ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher (www.mediamentors.co.za) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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