

The Suits & Sneakers mindset

 By Leigh Andrews

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Thoroughbred entrepreneur and founder of the Suits & Sneakers events, Mark Sham says the best approach to upskilling yourself and your staff is a combination of both formal (suits) and informal (sneakers) learning platforms. He lets us in on the importance of constantly growing and educating your workforce.

With artificial intelligence expected to be in full swing by 2030, making the average employee obsolete within the next 14 years, the worst thing you can do is stagnate or insist on 'business as usual' while the world around us changes.



Mark Sham

This is the driving force behind Suits & Sneakers. Its founder Sham says he's been lucky to have a really interesting set of entrepreneurial highlights in his short career: He started presenting a social media workshop that really became commercially successful at the age of 26 and once managed to get the former CEO of Coca-Cola worldwide out to South Africa to do a talk for him after reading his book and reviewing it to business people for commercial gain. He has also managed to successfully start small businesses like a CrossFit gym and a bar, but it's Suits & Sneakers that gets the most recognition.

Sham calls it "my shot at fixing South Africa". While some see the ever-changing world and pace of technological development as scary; something we've never seen before, Sham sees the opportunities: "If we choose to, we can use our mobile devices to change our world and the world of people around us thanks to global internet connectivity."

So at its heart, Suits & Sneakers is about educating the masses that they can educate themselves to become anything they want and then having that positive impact snowball. For example, if we go back a 100 years, you'd have to be an emperor of an empire to affect a million people. "Today, you can do so while in your pajamas, sitting in your garage."

That's entrepreneurship for you, and highlights the fact that formal university isn't the only option to get ahead anymore: especially with all the protest action over fees and Western patriarchy. He goes so far as to call it: "a slow-moving dinosaur that is being disturbed as we speak."

More than that, many don't bother upskilling themselves once they finally enter the workplace. That's why Suits & Sneakers aims to take the modern-day employee through the importance of self-development and how to remain relevant in an unpredictable workplace by unlocking their entrepreneurial spirit.

Unlock your entrepreneurial spirit and start upskilling, or else...

Sham feels the only thing stopping a person from starting their own business is the demons in that person's head, and the only difference between the person who does it and the person who doesn't is confidence and resilience. Naturally, some people have more ambition and drive than others so we tend to believe entrepreneurs are born but those characteristics as well as many others are just habits learned over time.

Informal learning is a game changer because of the speed at which technology is bringing about change in the world. "We can't stop work every six months to go back to university but we can use the internet, YouTube, podcasts, TED talks, blog posts and more to keep updating our internal software. The flip side of the coin is that if you go about life without seeking to learn every day, soon you'll become redundant. So the sooner everyone moves toward continuous, everyday learning, the better."

Going one further, he says the sooner that companies start taking full responsibility for their staff's education, the quicker

this country will thrive. That's certainly a good reason to participate.



Speakers for the fourth Suits & Sneakers event.

As to what you can expect from the sessions, Sham simply picks speakers he likes. Speakers that have great story-telling abilities and who can teach you something by just listening to them for 20 minutes – think Ted talks, but localised and live. For Suits & Sneakers 4, speakers include theoretical physicist Adriana Marais, one of the remaining 100 contestants of the [Mars One](#) – Human settlement of Mars mission; entrepreneur Ran Neu-Ner who serves as [co-Group CEO](#) of The Creative Counsel with school friend and local [Shark Tank shark](#) Gil Oved; marketing and communications maverick [Khaya Dlanga](#); and *Esquire* magazine journo Calvin 'Cal' Fussman.

Tony Leon explains Sham's persuasive power below and what led to his talk at the previous session of Suits & Sneakers:

In addition to gleaning insightful, practical entrepreneurial nuggets they can take back to the office and polish to their own benefit, attendees also get to sit in network pods near the end of the session, which consist of a facilitator and nine attendees. Each is given a minute to explain who they are and what they do, and you can attend more than one session.

The events are also recorded and published online afterwards for free viewing – that's how I'll be getting my fill of Suits & Sneakers. If you'd prefer to attend the fourth Suits & Sneakers live, it's taking place on 16 November at the Sandton Convention Centre, from 6pm to 10pm. There's free registration [here](#) – Sham doesn't believe in hosting events packed with info that's inaccessible to those who need it most – but you can also upgrade your ticket for premium round table seating,

preferential seating or even customised Converse sneakers. Visit www.suitsandsneakers.co.za for more info and book your tickets if you haven't already done so, stat! Follow [@suitssneakers](https://twitter.com/suitssneakers) on Twitter for all the latest updates and ideas.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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