

# Advancing the cause of entrepreneurs



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**from the corner  
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*Bryan Hatting speaks to Itumeleng Kgaboesele, chief executive of Sphere Holdings and president of the SA Chapter of the Entrepreneurs Organisation*

**T**HIS is the first in a series of monthly articles we'll be publishing in which Bryan Hatting will speak to the captains of industry who steer business through choppy waters and the people who keep the economic machinery moving.

**How long have you been involved with the EO?**

I have been a member since the launch of the local chapter in 2005, and president since last August, a position I will hold until June next year.

I have nine members on the board to help advance the cause of entrepreneurs in South Africa.

We have a number of programmes to help entrepreneurs to grow both in their personal lives and in their business, and also to help the partners of the entrepreneurs.

**What is the make-up of your members? SMEs or large corporates?**

To become a member, you must be a founder or controlling member of your company; we do not accept professional managers.

Also, R8 million is the minimum turnover; some of our members enjoy revenue of R100 million or more



**Itumeleng Kgaboesele, the chief executive of Sphere Holdings and president of the SA Chapter of the Entrepreneurs Organisation**

The creation of an inclusive economy depends on a successful SMME sector. But not enough is done to equip entrepreneurs in school. What are your thoughts of equipping aspirational entrepreneurs for success?

Globally, EO has a number of programmes aimed at assisting emerging entrepreneurs.

For instance, there are competitions for entrepreneurs, which we aim to replicate in South Africa.

We have the Accelerator programme to speed up the development of local entrepreneurs.

This programme can help accelerate the development of entrepreneurs who are just below our minimum qualification.

We provide entrepreneurs with mentoring and classroom-based tuition in various aspects of business, such as marketing, finance and operations.

These are our members of the future.

**How do entrepreneurs get on to your radar?**

We go out and search for them. Potential members are identified and invited to join the organisation.

Word of mouth has also been an effective way of recruiting new members.

**What are your views on leadership, given the ongoing debate about leaders and managers?**

A leader's primary focus has to be on people. You need to focus on building solid relationships driven by the values you subscribe to.

If you can do that, even if you don't formally go by the title of leader, you will stand out.

Then the ability to execute or motivate others to execute is very important.

That and the ability to deliver results. Another big component of leadership is not just thinking about tomorrow, but thinking about the future.

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**The ability to execute . . . and motivate others is important**  
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A leader needs to be able to position the organisation in light of potential future scenarios.

We are talking about vision, example, consistency, authenticity; these are not things you learn in a textbook.

They are things you choose and are products of learning and experience from your parents and society.

A lot of these things are difficult to learn in the classroom; they come from your upbringing; they come from life experiences; they also come from being exposed to other leaders; and from having good mentors.

**Given the difficult local and global circumstances in which we live, and the often negative portrayal of events by the media, how do you personally remain positive and energised?**

By focusing on what is going

right, and looking at the positives, without being naive or oblivious to what is going on around us.

I believe in recognising and celebrating achievements, particularly in difficult times.

People sometimes have a tendency to forget results achieved in the past. In my own business, we recently celebrated our fifth anniversary. I have never been more excited and energised about the prospects for this business.

Despite the current challenges, we have built a fantastic platform and I think we can only get stronger.

It is important to think beyond today and take a long-term view. In the medium-term, things will come right in the world and there are opportunities that come about as a result of adversity.

We have been fortunate, or strategic, in that a significant portion of our revenue is derived from investments in companies which supply infrastructure.

**What is your observation with regard to the war for talent and skills?**

For all of 2007 and the first half of 2008 the South African economy was operating at full capacity, so there was a significant demand for skills across the board.

That has slowed. Our companies have had a constant focus on growing their skills through training and development.

So they are on top of the situation; I encourage other companies to look after their people and to continue to invest in skills.

**Your leadership style: how do you lead people, both at Sphere and at EO?**

First, leading by example. Secondly, I like creating space for people to occupy and to give them the opportunity to run with projects.

**What would you call your greatest achievement?**

On a business front, the formation of this company five years ago.

**What legacy do you want to leave?**

That I made a contribution, no matter how small, to people's lives.