

K Insights



PROFILING AFRICAN INDUSTRY LEADERS

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Meet Thabo Molamu

Founder of Primitive Native

An African rich brand turning her history into colourful design pieces

When The Vision Is Clear - Time Is Not A Deterrent

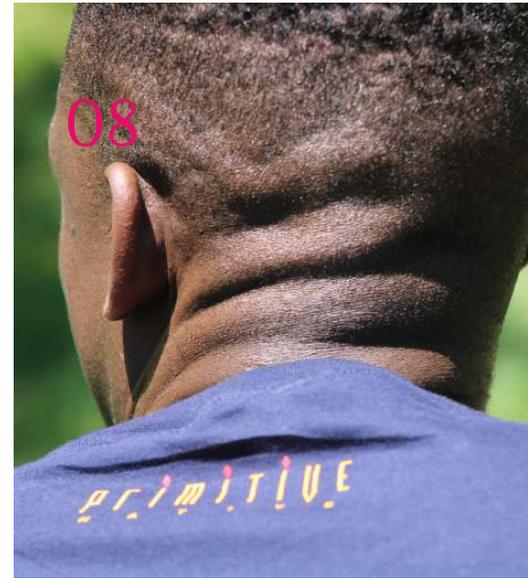
How do you hold on to your dream when there is no clear entry to market or resources at your disposal to bring it to life?

"Failure Motivated Me To Focus"

Getting Up More Times Than You Fall

Read how this Soweto born and raised Entrepreneur defied all stumbling blocks to create a thriving and growing brand in image of the beauty he sees in Africa.

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Is it worth sharing your trade secrets and success story

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Meet Thabo Molamu

Coach K interviewed Thabo Molamu (@Primitive_Natives) for this issue of K Insights.

The Founder of Primitive Native™; a unique creative clothing brand that seeks to showcase Africa's stories in the most colourful and unapologetic way.

He was recently featured on Metro FM's afternoon drive show The King's Suite SA, with DJ Naives and Spectacular discussing the struggles and journey of manufacturing textiles locally.

During the #buylocal trend, popular DJ, Mo Flava (@moflavadj) tweeted his order while endorsing the quality of their products and encouraged others to do the same and buy local

So let's get straight into the interview and find out how he purposefully stepped into being an entrepreneur.

Briefly tell us (readers) who you are and where you are from?

I'm a regular guy with a plan and undying will to make my dreams a reality. I am the second of four boys and a girl. I was kind of a nerd growing up, top 3 of my class since sub A (oh what grade is it called now?).

My first failure was in matric; which was a huge disappointment for my family since I was always top of my class. The failure has since motivated me to focus, complete my matric and work hard in everything I do.

I have been working in the financial services industry for the past 20 years, whilst also venturing into various business opportunities. I hold a Post Graduate Diploma in Business Management; B Tech Degree in Operations Management, and various other qualifications. Education is very close to my heart, and all my qualifications were obtained part-time.

"Failure...Motivated Me To Focus..."



Dual Professional Persona - The Corporate Man & The Entrepreneur

Since you are both a corporate professional and an entrepreneur - tell us about that journey and whether or not your professional career has fulfilled you?

I'm a Cost Optimisation Manager responsible for supporting Service Managers in managing third party vendors contracted to our organisation. I've been in the role now for almost 2 years. The role does fulfil me, as it is challenging and I get to engage with a variety of people and businesses.

I think I was somehow fortunate to have worked for some time prior to choosing a qualification that complemented my career goals.

Operations Management is my passion, I was trained to see the organisation as a whole and also see its components. We do not focus on a single component, without due care for the whole. We are challenged daily and required to have an understanding of various business disciplines, as we are involved in the A to Z of the business.

When did you first venture into running your own business?

I have always been involved in business since I was a little kid. I sold sweets in primary school, and on weekends I would sell cheese spread that my father used to stock at his workplace. I also sold fruits and vegetables at our local train station.

Eventually I was recruited by a gentleman in Dube who baked these amazing biscuits, which I would then sell for him at various train stations. I have always hustled, as we didn't have much at home, thus one had to always make a plan for either food at home or clothing.

I am a self-starter and team player, I believe there is value in collaboration. Integrity and authenticity are important to me. I do what I can to continue to improve and be the best I can be at whatever I do. I'm excellence-driven and always look for ways to exceed personal and organisational objectives. I'm always looking for opportunities that can help me learn and grow at work and in my everyday life.

You've had a few business opportunities but the one you most known for is your clothing brand Primitive Native™ - did you always know you would be doing this in particular?

Oh yes, it's something that I worked on for a very long time until I met the right people who assisted in bringing the concept to reality. I think people who have been around me for years will tell you that I take pride in my roots as an African. Primitive™ is thus a celebration of our ethnicity and is founded to capture the essence of Africa.

Give us insight into what it's like to work full time and still actively push Primitive Native™ on the side?

It's hectic and exhausting.

Early mornings and late nights, as you are required to balance the two and ensure that they have your full attention all the time. I'm fortunate that I have always been great at managing my time.

I have been privileged to work in diverse environments, which have taught me a great deal about responsibility, commitment, team work and most importantly time management. I believe my academic background, business knowledge and industry experiences have provided me with the credentials needed to thrive at work and also manage a business on the side.

"...Never Take Things For Granted And Always Work Hard..."

Did growing up in Soweto impact the choices you made in your career? If so how?

Oh yes! The struggles of growing up in Soweto and seeing dreams being shuttered daily does impact on my decision making every day.

I think the experiences are core to who I am and a reminder to never take things for granted and always work hard. I grew up loving reading, which is something I believe built my character. I was a very confident young man and that confidence is what fuels the fire to succeed every day.



The Birth of Primitive Native™

When did you officially launch Primitive™?

The brand was officially brought to the market in 2019, we are almost a year trading.

Was Primitive™ a clear vision or has it grown and evolved with time?

Primitive™ was conceptualized in 2001. My vision was to spread Africa's rich history and art by turning everyday clothing into colourful design pieces with a rigid standard of quality, infused with Africa's history which is carved in stone throughout the continent, from Cape to Cairo. The concept was brought to reality and perfection by what I term the *Primitive Collective*.

Who is the Primitive Collective?

We have McDonald Musimuko (@CreativeGod1 on IG) who played a very critical role in birthing the brand. He is a gifted Graphic designer who understands my concepts, embraces some of my crazy ideas and is able to bring them to life.

Then there is Mamrosi and Sadick who print the designs onto fabrics. We have Keith and Kris who are responsible for all our sublimation garments. We then have Richard and Avuya who run a sewing factory, and are responsible for bringing the garments to life. We also have Nkuli who is a fashionista and partner in the business.

Lastly we have our customers, oh they have embraced us from day 1 and they keep on supporting us.

You are known as someone who constantly supports local business and encourages others to do the same - why is supporting local so important.

I believe that the only way for us to change our economic circumstances as Africans, is if we embrace one another and build our own businesses. In supporting a small business, you are not only supporting the person who sells the garments, but also the entire value chain. We might not own the value chain, however as the demand increases, other opportunities are also created thus enabling us to gradually own our means of production.



The Highlights & The Lowlights

What is the most significant highlight of your Primitive journey and why?

The highlight I would say is being embraced by fellow South African's.

The support has been amazing and has enabled us to weather the Covid storm, and also evolve from just offering screen printed t-shirts to awesome garments.

As it is with any business, there are mistakes that occur along the journey, but we have managed to overcome them. We have a wide offering with various designs and a whole lot more in store.

What is the lowest point or toughest challenge you faced with launching and running Primitive™? How did you overcome these challenges?

I would say there are two toughest challenges I have faced;

The first being bringing the brand to market while trying to support local and source our raw materials from local suppliers within South Africa or Africa. We don't have scale so we struggle to find local suppliers of cotton especially who are willing give us good deals without buying the kind of bulk numbers that international competitors can order.

The second challenge I would say is satisfying all the critics and those customers with high expectations. I therefore always under promise and over deliver which allows me to be able to overcome some of the challenges. It's a daily learning curve, as you can never satisfy everyone.



Competitive Edge & Thoughts On Sharing The Market In Africa

The sad reality is that as Africans we tend to avoid sharing our success stories for fear of either someone taking our idea, our target market or competing with us in the same market; a clothing brand is not a new idea but you are still successful and rapidly growing, what are thoughts on this and what do you think makes your brand so unique?

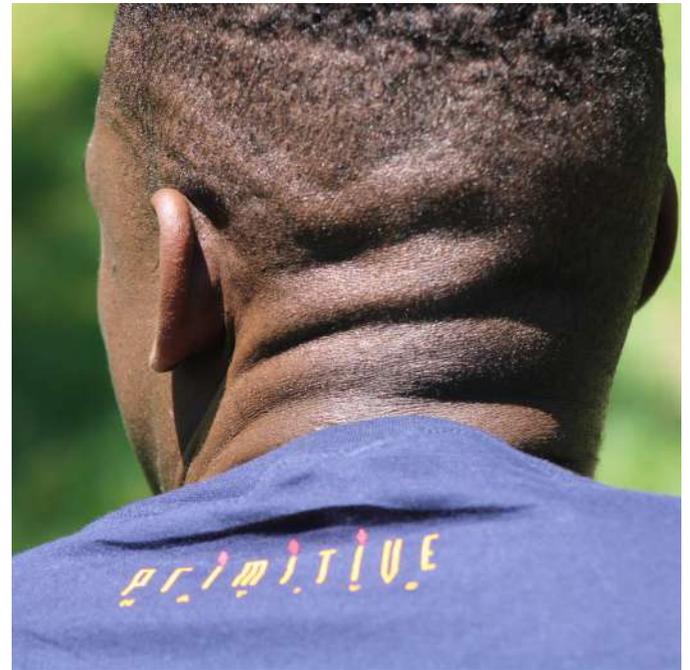
I honestly believe that competition is the essence of business. It provides customers with choice and also challenges business owners to be innovative and come up with new unique ideas.

I find that we are obsessed with looking at new entrants and our competitors rather than expanding our businesses and finding new clients. The market is big enough for all of us. I mean from as far back as I can remember there has always been competing international brands coming to South Africa, even to this day.

These brands are making billions in this country and the continent unchallenged, because we are scared to collaborate and formalise our businesses.

Consumers are now demanding locally made garments and products, there is so much pride in wearing proudly South African garments. I suppose our sustainability will be determined by how we evolve from one man businesses, how we collaborate, how we structure and formalise our small businesses to allow us to grow and capture the market.

We are our biggest critics, and we strive to make sure that Primitive garments are top quality. We have set a very high standard for ourselves, thus our customers feedback is of utmost importance as it informs whether we are on the right path or not. Our designs are completely unique, and we always make sure that we are rooted and engage with our customers.



Purpose Living & Career Alignment

Do you consider your entire career journey including Primitive purpose driven?

Everything I do is purpose driven. I make decisions based on rational thought, long term analysis and cold hard logic. Understanding the A to Z of business; which is the essence of Operations Management and my career has prepared me for this point of my life, and provided me with the tools to make sure I am able to manage my business and take it to greater heights.

What would you say to anyone wanting to start their business now whether they are 18 or 50 years old?

We live in the information age, everything you need from a business plan to an overview of similar successful businesses across the world is available at the click of a button. My advice is do not rush into unfamiliar territory without the necessary tools. Take time in conducting your research, identify failures and successes in your chosen industry.



Final Words by Thabo

What mantra do you live by?

"I will not lose, even in defeat there is a lesson learned"

This is something I learned from listening to Jay Z. If you look at his journey, and not only his, I mean locally you look at DJ Sbu, they have overcome huge setbacks and opened doors that one would have thought that were closed. They are inspirational and winning for them is not the ultimate goal, not losing drives them to achieve the impossible.

Final words of advise?

Learn from the shortcomings of your predecessors and shoot for the universe. Do not be fooled by the glitz and glamour, big houses and green grasses.

There is blood, sweat and tears in running a business. The big house is owned by the bank and it is not water that makes the grass green. The biggest mistake we make is wanting to do what someone else is doing, without the drive and passion to make it happen. Social media will help you make a few sales, however it's your passion and drive that will take you over the hill.

Gratitude

Thank you to the Hello CoachK team for inviting me to be a feature in the magazine. A lot of people think that the magazine industry is dying, however the team has ventured into this territory and you doing fantastic work.

Big up to you guys and may you grow from strength to strength.



Photo by: Stefan Coetzee

TRANQUIL SUMMER ESCAPE

CELTIS MANOR GUEST HOUSE

The Celtis Manor Guest House is a tranquil haven situated in Crowthorne (Kyalami), owned and managed by Hilary Henderson & her special team. Our guest house offers 11 rooms beautifully decorated with full amenities where any leisure travelers, businessmen & women, holiday makers, groups and corporate guests can relax and unwind, guaranteed a pleasant stay with us. We can offer bed & breakfast (B&B) or self catering units.

We have three acres of beautifully landscaped grounds & boast an abundance of birdlife with an outdoor pool and a sun-lounger terrace. You can enjoy the peace and tranquillity that nature offers and you are within a few minutes drive from Kyalami Business Park, Mall of Africa, Kyalami Race Track Vodaworld, Gautrain Station and Gallagher Estate situated in the business hub of Midrand.

We invite you to spend some quality time at our owner-managed tranquil thatched country guest house where we offer comfort, style and warmth at affordable prices. We are a TGCSA 4-Star guest house.

We look forward to having you!

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Photo by: Stefan Coetzee



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A Word from Coach K

The idea for K Insights was a no brainer and something I wanted to prioritise for Hello Coach K; not only to showcase African Talent and Leadership from the most unsuspecting places but also to show you (our audience) just what is possible when purpose is pursued with vigour and fervour.

The dream is to be able to profile industry leaders, thought leaders and those still coming up that show potential as often as we can and to give them a safe platform where they can share their honest testimonies; hopefully their stories will inspire and encourage you (our audience) to continue on your journey, to make the courageous leaps required because it is not easy...it is not neat...but it is possible.

So I truly hope that you read these profiles and see resemblances in their stories and faces with yours. I hope that in taking in their stories you will start to appreciate your own, to see the beauty in your journey, your struggles, your failures and successes and that you will not only persevere but be tenacious in your pursuit of purpose.



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