

Enterprising Women Programme – Pat's journey as master chef of her own success

Patricia (Pat) Esterhuizen is a 31-year old entrepreneur with a zest for life and a healthy dose of business savvy to boot. Trained as a professional chef, Patricia recently bid farewell the corporate sector after nearly two decades to start her own catering and food consultancy business – Phat Pat Catering.

If you ask her about her venture into the world of entrepreneurship, she replies that although at times daunting, the satisfaction of owning her own business is a liberating experience. But how did this former learner from Overvaal High School in Vereeniging come to be the master chef of her own catering business? The answer is simple: she applied and subsequently enrolled for the bhive EDC Enterprising Women Programme – a short learning programme for business start-ups with a specific focus on female entrepreneurs.

This programme – currently in its third year since inception, represents a dynamic collaboration between the bhive Enterprise Development Centre (EDC) within the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Information Technology and the Centre for Continuing Professional Development (CCPD) on the Vaal Triangle Campus of the North-West University (NWU Vaal).

An entrepreneurial journey

“I am a firm believer that sometimes you have to swim out to sea to meet up with your proverbial ship, rather than to stand on the shoreline waiting for the ship to anchor in the harbour,” says Pat. According to her the first stride towards entrepreneurial freedom and success is to challenge yourself to such an extent that you are not only willing, but also eager to step out of your daily comfort zone. She laughs out loud when I ask her about the early days; shortly after she decided to leave behind the security of a monthly pay cheque: “At the beginning it was a scary and unfamiliar road, since I had to get up every morning knowing that my performance – and my performance alone, will determine if this venture will be a success or a failure. But looking back at what I have achieved thus far, I can clearly see the progress I have made and I am now in a position to see the bigger picture and plan accordingly.”

Starting out as a female entrepreneur

According to Pat the eight months in the bhive EDC Enterprising Women Programme provided her with the necessary support structure to guide herself through the first phase of entrepreneurship, namely to transfer her dream from a mere idea in her head, to a tangible concept. “Before I knew it, the idea I toyed with on paper for so long started to take form and what followed was an unforgettable journey,” says Pat.

Pat reckons that the fact that the professional presenters and course instructors are as passionate about the participants’ business ideas, as the participants themselves, contribute immensely to the success of the programme. “The programme represented an amazing learning curve for me and the emotional support and guidance provided are some of the biggest gifts that I have received on my business journey thus far.”

Asked about her proudest moment as an entrepreneur, Pat answers: “The sense of accomplishment when I filed my first order!” When talking about the future, Pat is adamant that she would like to start-up another business within the next five years.

Pat’s advice to women who also want to pursue their entrepreneurial dream:

- Write your dream down and find a way to turn it into reality;
- Stop being afraid. The day you step out of your comfort zone, is the day you start standing on your own two feet;
- See failure as a learning curve – nobody said the journey was going to be easy, but is definitely worth it in the long run.

Enterprising Women Programme

During the course of the programme, participants are guided through a process to explore entrepreneurial ideas, develop sound business models and subsequently initiate their business with confidence and entrepreneurial know-how. Participants become part of a close-knit peer network of women embarking on an entrepreneurial journey, during which time they can share experiences and learn from one another and other established female entrepreneurs by being exposed to structured learning through workshops and group sessions.

Participants are furthermore guided through various stages of entrepreneurial development such as idea to concept development; business model generation, market research and business plan development.

This year is the last year during which the programme will be fully sponsored by the bhive EDC, with participants paying only a R1 500 deposit - refundable upon successful completion of the programme. Future programmes will not be sponsored by the bhive EDC, so don't miss this final opportunity to benefit from the bhive EDC's sponsorship! For more information about the programme and to obtain the application documents, contact Leonie at leonie@aequis.co.za or alternatively, collect the application documents from the bhive EDC, Building 6 at the Campus in Vanderbijlpark. You can also download the application form from the [website](#). Please note that comprehensive applications must be submitted by 31 January 2015.