



Entrepreneur: Nellie Chipwanyana, 38

Nellie originally thought about starting her own business while volunteering on a social development programme in support of her studies. Her support role highlighted skills she didn't know she had and the idea for Joy Crafts, a business making gifts – such as placemats, aprons and clothing – to sell to the tourist market, was born.

Consultant: Geoff Brown, 63

Geoff has an MBA from the University of Wolverhampton Business School. He has run his own consultancy business for 17 years, operating in the energy industry in the UK, Portugal and Africa. He wanted to share his knowledge and skills and, in return, get involved in business outside of the conventional office and boardroom setting.

Business challenges and objectives of the project

Entirely self-taught, Nellie was designing and sewing her products during the evenings and at weekends. Although she enjoyed her work and was able to make sales, she had no in-depth understanding of how her business was performing and would struggle with peaks and troughs in demand. She needed help with business planning, strategy and marketing.

She was also highly qualified as an environmental educator and keen to pursue this career despite struggling to find a job following completion of her studies.

The results

Through careful analysis and planning, they managed to identify the true costs of Nellie's business, including her time, and work out which products were profitable. They created a business plan and portfolio and researched the right markets for her products. Nellie also learnt about business marketing and managing an inventory.

In addition to Joy Crafts, they also discussed her environmental education career. Following a long period of study, Nellie built Joy Crafts while she struggled to find a job. Geoff pointed out that she could employ people to sew for Joy Crafts and take on a management role, freeing up her time to continue her career. Nellie is now working as an environmental educator and studying fashion design to help improve the products she can offer through Joy Crafts.

The Impact on Nellie

"Although I was working hard before Grow came along, I wasn't really running my business. Geoff taught me the difference and now I understand marketing, strategy and the importance of making a profit. I now feel I can create a business that employs people to sew while I manage it. My vision is to have a shop with a café where people can come to browse and buy gifts."

The Impact on Geoff

"Volunteering with Grow added a different dimension to my working life. It's great at bringing you back to basics. What will work to get a business off the ground: it's not just about complex business skills. I also felt I could be of use in sharing some of the softer skills that create credible businesses, such as the importance of creating good first impressions. I'd always encourage people to have a go at volunteering."

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