

BEYOND THE IMPOSSIBLE

by Deidre May

Some years after African Bank acquired Ellerines, which has a national footprint of 650 branches and 100 stores in neighbouring countries, the CEO approached Sedick Arendse to become the managing director. He warned Arendse that there was a culture of non-performance, the business was unprofitable and it needed to be turned around. And Arendse thought, this sounds like an exciting job!



Sedick Arendse ●

In the two years following, Arendse says, “We have enhanced the business to the extent that our profitability at the end of 2011 was 153% on the previous year. Implementing a Neethling Brain Instruments [NBI] creativity programme has had a profound impact on bottom line results.

“The approach was to ask: What needs to change radically to create an enabling organisation, with new and innovative ways of approaching the business and servicing the customer? In the last four to five years the retail landscape has changed and we are faced with complex, sophisticated customers that buy in different ways. The demand is to be customer centric – to understand the customer. We are not only in the business of selling goods but in the business of being chosen by customers.

“The important thing was to create an environment where we no longer did things the same way and where all 6 000 staff members understood this new way and engaged differently with team members and customers. To create sustainability meant to dynamically change as we went along by learning from what we were trying to do.”

The NBI creativity programme began with the Voyage to Wisdom introduction to becoming a beyonder. Raché Rutherford of the Kobus Neethling Group explains, “We are what we think. We choose our thinking and our attitude and we always have choices. All of us can be beyonders and organisations can shape themselves into beyondness by the attitude of their people and the way they make decisions. We encourage people to look at how they think on a daily basis.

“Then we introduce whole brain thinking. Every Ellerines employee, from top management to branch sales consultants, had a brain profile completed to determine their brain preferences. Your predominant brain quadrant or quadrants determines the way you communicate and like to communicate. When people understand that different people think with different quadrants of the brain, they begin to understand why people react differently.

“This enables you to realise you can have good relationships if you understand where others are coming from, and you can move from tolerating people who are different from you to understanding and valuing them. Ultimately, we need to become whole brain thinkers. If you are in sales you need to become your customer for the time you are dealing with them. Whole brain thinking is the skill of talking the language of the listener. If you move into others’ space and talk their language then you can manage people, sell to them or even parent your child in the language they understand.

“We did exercises on how consultants can recognise the predominant brain quadrant of customers and how to approach them in a sales situation.” For example, Rutherford explains, while a very friendly approach suits a customer dominant in the lower right quadrant of the brain, this could be seen as unprofessional by a person with a upper left quadrant thinking preference.

“WHOLE BRAIN THINKING IS THE SKILL OF TALKING THE LANGUAGE OF THE LISTENER”
– RACHÉ RUTHERFORD

Rutherford continues, “We did a lot of creative problem solving, addressing issues the company faced. We also addressed the issue of becoming a beyonder company, which means thinking beyond where you are now. Ellerines set specific stretch targets to achieve by certain dates and then set beyonder targets. These are goals that may seem impossible but by shifting your paradigm and the way you think about business you can achieve them.”

Arendse adds, “In the past we had a one-dimensional view, for the future we have a four dimensional view of decisions. Being able to move around in the four quadrants we make more of the right decisions.”

Rutherford explains, “Poster scorecards were put up in the stores, detailing the actual performance and the targets. The posters also show the chosen beyonder motivators, or workflow factors, and their associated types of behaviour, needed to achieve the targets. Passion could be a beyonder

THE IMPOSSIBLE IS NOTHING

The Kobus Neethling Group develops creativity programmes for many companies in South African and beyond. Kobus Neethling co-founded the Creativity Foundation with Raché Rutherford.

At the 17th Africa Creativity Conference, held in Bela Bela in October 2011, Kobus Neethling said, “The great cricketer Sachin Tendulkar had a T-shirt that said: Impossible is nothing. Having worked with Sedick Arendse and his company I understand completely that impossible is nothing.

“Becoming a beyonder is based on an understanding that you live according to the beliefs and limits you create for yourself. If you probe your beliefs about yourself and your organisation you start to change them. Apart from being creative you need a number of exceptional qualities, which we can all generate, to help us combine our creative mind with our passion.”

Neethling’s whole brain instruments are used in 30 countries and he is one of the top three global speakers on creativity and innovation. He has authored more than 80 books and 9 television series. He has received 10 International Who’s Who awards and has been cited as one of 2 000 outstanding scholars of the 20th century. •

motivator, associated with being highly energised and loving your job, while the motivator commitment could be associated with customer service, trust and communication.

“We have a model called thinking above the line, which is a barometer for organisations to see where their thinking is. Employees measure whether they think each factor is below or above the line, by placing red or green dots on the scorecard. Many red dots show management there is a problem and they can decide to intervene.”

Arendse facilitated a session at a Cape Town branch and afterwards a 60-year-old manager came up to him sobbing and said, “If I knew what I know today and implemented this 20 years ago, I would’ve been a different person.” Arendse comments, “This is the power of a branch manager to impact the business at the coal front that eventually impacts on the performance of the organisation.” 