

# SEARCHING THROUGH DUSTBINS

an authentic account of  
the birth of a business

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## ABED TAU



First published by Tracey McDonald Publishers, 2019  
Suite No. 53, Private Bag X903, Bryanston, South Africa, 2021  
[www.traceymcdonaldpublishers.com](http://www.traceymcdonaldpublishers.com)

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ISBN 978-0-6399928-4-6

e-ISBN (ePUB) 978-0-6399928-5-3

Text design and typesetting by Patricia Crain, Empressa

Cover design by Ron Olivier, incynq solutions

Narrative assistance by Lisa Witepski, Creative Copy

Stickman illustration by Nkgabiseng Motau

Graphs by Thabile Gumede

Digital conversion by Johan Koortzen

Printed and bound by XXXX

*This book is dedicated to my loving parents,  
Richard and Elizabeth. Thank you for all the  
sacrifices you have made for me and my  
siblings. I owe you everything.*

*And,  
to my beautiful wife, Tebogo. You are all my  
reasons.*

I have been married four times – and I intend to have many more weddings!

These marriages have given me five children, and we are hoping (make that expecting) a soccer team in the years to come.

I am not talking about a conventional marriage. Rather, I'm talking about the number of business partners I have and the number of businesses we have started and continue to run. I refer to these as 'marriages' because your relationship with your business partners isn't all that different to a marriage. You fight, you laugh, you build together, you love each other, and you sometimes hate each other. The businesses that you start are your children; each has to be nurtured and taken care of until it becomes a responsible adult and can begin to function on its own.

My marriage partners over the past five years – years which have given me the adventure of a lifetime, as I pursued my entrepreneurial dream – are people I admire and respect enormously. They may have started as business partners, but they quickly became friends and, eventually, family. Without them, none of the small successes our companies have enjoyed to date would have been possible. Together, we have learned the most incredible lessons in business, and in life.

I began sharing these lessons on Facebook in a series called 'Searching through Dustbins'. My aim was to share an authentic account of my business journey and the lessons I had learned along the way. To my surprise,

the series had a great reception. The posts were shared by hundreds of people and received thousands of comments. I started out posting every Wednesday, and it reached a point where my inbox would be flooded with queries from strangers and friends asking for their entrepreneurial dose if I missed a week. I grew my Facebook friends from around 800 to over 3 000, and every time a post went live, I'd receive hundreds of friend requests from people who wanted to hear more.

As time went on, I started seeing the same comment over and over: when are you writing a book? The more I thought about it, the more it made sense – not because I was interested in becoming an author, but because I really wanted more people to hear my message.

That message is simple: entrepreneurship is necessary for our country's growth, but – in spite of its often-glamorous image – it's not at all romantic. It is usually difficult and painful, even if it is rewarding.

So, here we are: just over a year after my first 'Searching through Dustbins' post went live, all that learning has been captured in a book. Over the next few chapters, you'll learn about the experiences and lessons that shaped my partners and me as businesspeople. There is a disclaimer, though: we've only just started on our journey, and we're still learning so much. Our children are very much just that: children. Some have started to crawl; others are like Benjamin Button, ageing in reverse. On the plus side, the fact that everything is still so new leaves room for '*Searching through Dustbins: Volume 2!*'

This book would not have been possible without my business partners – or, as we call ourselves, the wolf pack of four guys and a girl. Most of the stories shared in this book are lessons that we experienced as a team, so it's fitting that I introduce you to my four business partners, and our children, in chronological order.

## **Tebogo Sehume: It was love at first sight (Marriage 1 and Child 1)**

Tebz is a serious focal point in the story, because she was my partner from Day One: we both quit our jobs at the same time, back in May 2014. Tebz has a Master's in Tax and worked on the tax team at Deloitte Consulting. She also happens to be my wife. We have been friends since university, and we have spent five of our ten years together building our business. Most of my Facebook posts started with 'Tebz and I', to the point where my good friends started calling me 'Tebz and I'. Tebz and I (see what I did there) gave birth to our first child, Thamani Consulting (Pty) Ltd, after six unsuccessful months of trying our hands at being venture capitalists; failing dismally at it and running out of savings.

Thamani Consulting was born out of a need to make some money just so that we could stay alive and pay our bills. The company provided accounting services like payroll and management accounts to SMMEs, and Tebz and I did all the work until we could hire staff.

Thamani Consulting is still going today, and continues to provide accounting and tax services to an array of awesome clients.

*Fun facts about Tebz:*

- She is always laughing.
- She hasn't yet changed her surname, Sehume, to mine, Tau, even though I've paid lobola in full.
- She's an amazing human who cares about our company culture and staff; she's super organised and very smart.

## **Dylan Hyslop: The white BEE partner (Marriage 2 and Children 2 and 3)**

Dylan features a lot in the story because of the businesses we founded together, which have been my greatest teachers.

We started out in 2016 with an edtech business called Tuta-Me, which we dubbed the Uber of Tutoring. Tuta-Me is positioned as a solution to the education crisis in South Africa.

We also started Silicon Maboneng, a software development house, that same year – it made sense because Dylan is a software engineer by profession, and a very talented one at that. Dyl and I didn't start out as friends, but he is now one of my closest mates, and I have enormous respect for him.

### *Fun facts about Dyl:*

- He can fix anything, from light bulbs to cars. If my wife is ever stuck somewhere because of car trouble, she knows to call Dylan before she calls me.
- He has an extremely practical approach to life, which is why his entire wardrobe consists of one pair of formal pants, two formal shirts, and two pairs of shoes (one formal pair, and one pair of running shoes that he's owned for nine years).

## **Thuto Motsie: The arrival of the coconut (Marriage 3 and Child 4)**

Thuto joined us in the middle of 2016, two years after Tebz and I left Deloitte. Like me, Thuto is a Chartered Accountant, and joined the Deloitte Consulting team shortly after completing his articles.

If you have ever spent time with people from a management consulting background, you'll know that they excel at making perfect slides and stating simple things so eloquently that you feel that you want to pay them just for those words. That's what Thuto brought to Thamani: with his fancy lingo, he's the guy we send to close the big sale when the client wants to speak to someone with a superlative command of the English language and an ability to make outstanding slides.

On a more serious note, Thuto's arrival gave birth to Thamani Advisory, which focuses on services like

corporate finance, internal audit, flexible resources and BEE advisory services, and typically services medium to larger enterprises. Like Dylan, Thuto and I didn't start out as friends but he, too, has become one of my good mates.

*Fun facts about Thuto:*

- He went to Parktown Boys' and I went to KES, so we will argue about who is superior 'til kingdom come.
- He says he can speak African languages, but we are yet to hear this. He even laughs with a British accent – that's why we call him a coconut.
- We have played over 200 squash games together, of which I have won 180 – but he loves to boast about the 20 games he has won.

## **Nathan Maduna: To gain weight you must eat (Marriage 4 and Child 5)**

Nathan is the newest member of the wolf pack. He's also a Chartered Accountant, and is a former Deloitte employee.

With Nathan's arrival, Thamani Assurance Inc was born. This is our audit division, specialising in assurance services.

I would say that Nathan has the clearest vision for Thamani of us all: he is determined to build a massive professional services firm so that we can leave a legacy that outlives us.

*Fun facts about Nathan:*

- He desperately wants to put on weight (he is the smallest of the four guys in our business), but he hardly ever eats.
- He dresses formally every day. That's just his look – even when he's dressed down, he could land a part in a James Bond film.
- He is process driven, super reliable and ready to burn the midnight oil whenever it's needed.

## **The searching never ends ...**

They say that if you are the smartest person in a room, then you are in the wrong room. That's because you've already learned all you can from the people in the room with you. If you want to learn more, it's time to move on.

I am happy to report that every day of the past five years, has presented a challenge as I try to keep up with my four business partners, both intellectually and from the perspective of work ethic. I work with truly brilliant people who I learn from every day. They have challenged me and helped me develop as a businessman – and they continue to do so. If it's true that we are the sum of the four people we spend the most time with, then I really am the luckiest person on earth.

Now that you've been properly introduced to the wolf pack, it's time to read about everything we've learned together. I hope you enjoy the lessons in the coming

chapters – and remember: no matter where you are in your own entrepreneurial journey, there are always plenty more lessons to be learned.

Happy searching.

