

## **African Entrepreneurs – Successful and Responsible**

### **Episode 9**

**Title: “Beading for a better life - Mathapelo Ngaka from South Africa”**

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### **Characters / Narrators**

	Women	Men	Age	Language
Intro/Outro		x	Unimportant	
Narrator	x		Unimportant	
Mathapelo Ngaka (clip)	x		Mid 30s	English
Joan Krupp (clip)	x		Mid 40s	English

## **Intro:**

Welcome to a new episode of our Learning by Ear series entitled “African Entrepreneurs - Successful and Responsible”. It is about businessmen and -women, making a difference in the economy and society of their countries. Today you are going to meet Mathapelo Ngaka at the southernmost tip of Africa, in Cape Town, where she successfully runs the Non-Profit-Organization “Monkeybiz”.

*1. Sound: Kayelitsha in front of Mathapelo's house*

*2. Narrator:*

Kayelitsha (pronounced as written). A sea of dusty metal shacks and small brick houses. A place for the poor in the rich South African Cape. In the times of Apartheid, there was a strict racial segregation and political and economic discrimination against non-whites. During that time, Kayelitsha was one of the townships, an area where black people had to live. This is where our story starts:

*3. Mathapelo:*

“My name is Mathapelo. I am 36 years old. I lived in a shack for many, many years. You know, the shack, when it is cold, it is very, very cold, when it is raining, it leaks. It was very, very hard”.

*4. Narrator:*

It was economic pressure that brought Mathapelo’s family from the rural area to Cape Town. Her mother was struggling to raise her five children after her husband had passed away. But today it’s all memories of a difficult time now in the past: Mathapelo is visiting her mother in her house in Kayelitsha. Her own home, where she lives with her husband and two children, is not far away. But the two women are not just meeting for tea. They’ve got business to do.

*5. Sound: Mathapelo and her mother discuss the business*

*6. Narrator:*

Mathapelo Ngaka has brought a car load of yellow plastic bags, which she is carrying into a room attached to the house. Her long white skirt is moving in the wind, her hair is tucked away under a brown head-scarf. The bags are full of colourful beaded animals and dolls in different sizes. Women here in Kayelitsha have created these cheerful artworks, Mathapelo explains. Her mother’s house serves as a centre, a meeting and training space for the women.

*7. Mathapelo:*

“We provide the artists with free material, for example the beads for free. The people work from home, so they can continue being mothers and wives. And once they’ve finished their things they just bring them here and we take everything that they make, before even we sell them”.

*8. Narrator:*

In a nutshell, this is the business idea behind the Non-Profit-Organization “Monkeybiz”, which was founded by Mathapelo and ceramic artists Barbara Jackson and Shirley Fintz in 2000. Their goal was to create an employment opportunity for women of the impoverished community and to regenerate the indigenous art of beadwork. Mathapelo smiles when asked what all of that has to do with monkeys.

*9. Mathapelo:*

“We used to say we were a bunch of monkeys and that Monkeybiz was not a serious business. It is laughable and playful, so we are happy family. That is why the name came up”.

*10. Narrator:*

Mathapelo, now director of the company, loves to tell the story of how everything started. As a young mother she was trying to make a living as a domestic worker and part time potter when she met her mentor and business partner Barbara Jackson.

*11. Mathapelo:*

“I started ceramics in 1998. In late 99, late Barbara Jackson saw my work. We used to say it was meant to be, because she didn’t know me, I didn’t know her, but she said she would like me to improve my skills in her studio. While I was there, one day my mom made a beaded bracelet. She asked me to show it to the people in the studio. They said: “Wow, it is beautiful, but you can find it everywhere here in Cape Town.” Then they showed me a very tiny doll they had brought from Grahamstown festival”.

*12. Narrator:*

Soon Mathapelo returned with a similar doll, that her mother had created. The artists at the studio were hooked. That was the start of the unique product range for which Monkeybiz is today internationally known.

*13. Mathapelo:*

“My mom trained a lot of people and passed on the skills. But most of the older people in Monkeybiz, there are now 450, learnt the beadwork from their grandparents. It is so amazing that you can pass this on to the young generation. So my life changed completely on meeting late Barbara Jackson”.

*14. Sound: Mathapelo gives two women new commissions*

*15. Narrator:*

The 36-year old smiles warmly remembering her mentor, who passed away in 2010, but after a brief pause returns to business and gets back to the office.

*16. Sound: Shop at Monkeybiz*

*17. Narrator:*

Monkeybiz’ office and shop are located in a brown multi-story building, in a narrow street in one of the oldest areas of central Cape Town. Dozens of beaded animals and dolls watch Mathapelo Ngaka as she walks into the shop. Some stand close together on glass shelves that nearly reach the ceiling. The bigger ones are assembled in a circle in the middle of the

shop, facing each other, as if they are holding a meeting. Mathapelo knows each one's unique story.

*18: Mathapelo:*

"Take this animal for example. As you see it is beautiful. It was made by Siziwe Lumkwana (pronounced as written). She has only one eye, but she can bead beautifully. She has been struggling with her family and she has been abused by her husband. But since she joined Monkeybiz, she said her life changed completely".

*19: Narrator:*

Siziwe is one of the 450 women who work for Monkeybiz. Mathapelo Ngaka keeps in touch with all of them. She loves her work and therefore doesn't count the working hours. But it is definitely more than a 9 to 5 job to be director of the Non-Profit-Organization. It is part of her duties to make sure, that there is a balance between the amount of stock and the orders that come in. Not an easy task, as Monkeybiz promises the artists to buy all the animals and dolls they create.

*20: Mathapelo:*

"It is really a big responsibility. You think: Oh my goodness, where I am going to get an order again? We are just thinking about how to creatively increase the sales all the time. What's more, the people are really craving for work, they want to work and work. Then, it sometimes really resembles fear".

*21: Narrator:*

But the young entrepreneur isn't driven by fear. It is passion that keeps her going and the strong will to uplift people. Being a Non-Profit-Organization, Monkeybiz' financial returns are invested in helping the communities the women live in. Besides other projects, they support their HIV-positive artists, run a soup kitchen, distribute food parcels and have started a funeral fund for the women and their families.

*22: Sound: Mathapelo walks to her office*

*23: Narrator:*

Mathapelo leaves the shop through the back door, follows a corridor past the storage rooms and walks up a set of stairs to her office. It is not a fancy room: Her desk is a simple table in the middle, covered with piles of papers and some semi-finished animals. Three other women work around her. They are sitting in front of computer screens, busy answering emails and phone calls. One of them is Joan Krupp, Customer Relations Manager. She enjoys working with Mathapelo.

*24: Joan:*

“As hard as the challenges are that we face, she never walks away from them. She continually strives to improve. She is just not a push-over. The beauty is whatever skills she has learned from others she is very happy to share them and give back and not hold them within her heart and not share. That for me is vital”.

*25: Narrator:*

Mathapelo Ngaka shares one of her warm smiles. She doesn't seem to be flattered by her co-worker's positive words, but is just happy to have made it as a professional business woman. It was a steep learning curve for the 36-year-old. The advice and support of the more experienced co-founders were crucial, she reflects.

*26: Mathapelo:*

“They explained everything to me: That we have to make a profit in the business, we have to buy something for a certain amount and we have to double it, so that you can cover all the costs. And what I also learnt is: You must always make the product that the customer loves. Monkeybiz is here today, , because we have a unique product and we try to satisfy the customer. We never had funding, but we had that strength. So that is why Monkeybiz is running nice and smoothly”.

*27: Sound: Mathapelos Office*

*28: Narrator:*

Co-founders Barbara Jackson and Shirley Fintz invested money from their own pocket to start-up Monkeybiz. In its second year, the business was already able to sustain itself financially. Support also came from another well-known South African artist, Carol Boyes, who helped to find clients all over the world, included the beaded animals and dolls in her own shops and made the office and shop space available rent free. Only this generous support made it possible to expose Monkeybiz to an

international market without an expensive marketing campaign, Mathapelo stresses.

*29: Mathapelo:*

“I can say maybe 75 or 80% of our business is merely exporting. At home in South Africa, the people sometimes don’t get what this art is all about. So all around the world, but especially in America, we have a lot of people who really love what we are doing. So we are really privileged. Otherwise, if we didn’t have international markets, I don’t think we would still be running today”.

*30: Narrator:*

An international market, a unique product, a strong management team, intense networking and a vision that goes beyond profit - that seems to be Monkeybiz’ recipe for success, which could be a role model for other businesses. Mathapelo Ngaka shares advice with anyone who wants to follow in her footsteps as a successful entrepreneur:

*31: Mathapelo:*

“If you are a patient person you can be successful in life. It is all about being patient. I wouldn’t be here today if I was a person who wanted to give up. You have to be patient and you have to be passionate about what you are doing as well. That can take you further. So you have to follow your heart and have to do whatever you love”.

**Outro:**

Thank you Mathapelo Ngaka and goodbye. We hope you enjoyed listening to today’s Learning by Ear program about entrepreneurs in Africa. Our reporter was Leonie March. If you would like to find out more, listen to this broadcast again or the other Learning by Ear programs, please visit our website [www.dw.de/lbe](http://www.dw.de/lbe).

Thank you for listening and don’t forget to tune in again for our next episode. Goodbye.