

Mentors give entrepreneurs a foot up

Business is not about making money but about making a difference in people's lives.

This was the message from Marko Saravanja, CEO of Regenesys Business School, to delegates at a Youth and Women Entrepreneurship Conference hosted by the Umsobomvu Youth Fund.

"When you get involved with everyday issues, you forget the all-important 'why am I here', your purpose," he says.

"Stay true to your vision and your purpose so you keep perspective of the bigger picture."

Saravanja succeeded as an entrepreneur by following his vision of making the world a better place through education.

Not just ordinary education, but education that would awaken human potential, inspire and transform human lives, that approaches human development holistically: intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and physically.

Today, Regenesys is a fast-growing institution of management and leadership education and training.

"Contrary to popular belief, it is perseverance that distinguishes ordinary and extraordinary success – not

intelligence and talent," Saravanja told the delegates.

"And vision and passion are the elements that make perseverance possible; obstacles are there to make you stronger," says Saravanja.

He admits that at a stage in his life he considered selling Regenesys to go travelling on a yacht, but then remembered the reason why he started the school in the first place ... and stayed true to his purpose.

Saravanja also urged entrepreneurs to listen to their gut feel when making decisions.

"Get advice – from anywhere – but remember that the answer to every problem lies inside you," he elaborated.

"Trust yourself, trust the feeling that says 'this feels right', because entrepreneurship is all about heart, soul and



gut feel."

The Youth and Women Entrepreneurship conference marked the start of UYF's 2008 mentorship programme, aimed at matching entrepreneurs with industry leaders to increase the success rate of entre-

preneurs.

As Umsobomvu sees mentorship as a key requirement to developing successful entrepreneurs, some 120 entrepreneurs were linked to a mentor during the conference.

UYF is to facilitate regular contact between the two parties over the next few months.

"We don't look for financial assistance from the mentor, but business advice to help with the usual day-to-day issues that small businesses encounter," says Laurence Ntlokoa, UYF market linkages manager.

"We hope to form long-term relationships between the parties that will eventually lead to the entrepreneur becoming successful, and one day becoming a mentor too."

The conference and programme were targeted at entrepreneurs under 35, and at women, who were "the next group waiting to fly".

Celiwe Mkhabela, one of the delegates, was full of expectation that her linkage with an executive from Kaya FM radio station would teach her valuable marketing tricks.

"I have learnt a lot since starting my small business in March, But I want to grow my business much more."

Mkhabela's business, Ayanda Promotions, supplies cleaning services and materials as well as promotional items to companies and government institutions.

The business started with an overdraft only months ago, and now sustains Mkhabela and her partner, a driver and an office administrator.

■ For more information on entrepreneurship and Umsobomvu Youth Fund products and services: www.youth-portal.org.za, or call the Call Centre on 08600 YOUTH (96884).