

'Make a decision that is right for you!'

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How Thuthuka changed my life - Zanele Maduna's CA(SA) story

Zanele Maduna CA(SA) (28) is currently a senior fund accountant at BNP Paribas in the Jersey Channel Islands but says she is currently transitioning from corporate life to full-time entrepreneurship. "For the past three years, I have been building No Valo Holdings, which consists of the No Valo Learning Centre providing coaching support for students and young professionals, and the No Valo Foundation which focusses on mentoring aspiring chartered accountants."



On her Instagram profile and during interviews Zanele often repeats her mantra that she "will make it because I think I can!" However, this sparkling young entrepreneur also needed some assistance to get where she is today. She says that the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants' (SAICA's) Thuthuka programme has changed her life, and we spoke to her about the journey that brought her to her career success.

Zanele grew up in Boitumelo, Sebokeng and attended the Esokwazi Secondary School where she was an A+ student at the top of her class. Among the reasons for her good performance then was the fact that her 'mother and my teachers' work ethic inspired me to work harder'.

She continues: "Before Grade 11, I wanted to be a gynaecologist, mainly because I wanted to empower women – and at the time I thought being a doctor who empowers women would be amazing. I just wanted to change the world. I didn't know how I would do it, but it was my deepest desire."

What were her greatest obstacles at the time – the things that stood between her and reaching those aims? "Some may say poverty is the biggest obstacle. However, the optimist in me knows that I wouldn't be where I am without it. Even though my mom regularly struggled to put a meal on the table and we were living in an abusive household for a while, I had my mom's love, happiness in the neighbourhood and support from my friends. It seems as though everything was meant to build my character."

Her career decisions started to change when she attended the SAICA's Thuthuka Development camps in grades 11 and 12. Here she gained insights about the chartered accountancy profession.

"It changed my whole life! Before attending the Thuthuka camp, I knew there was a light towards the end of the tunnel, but after attending the camp, the roadmap was clear and I knew who would help me to work towards my dreams."

In her matric year, she applied to the ThuthukaBursary.

Thinking back, Zanele highlights one of her challenges when she started attending the Witwatersrand University (Wits): "I studied Maths and Science in High School, but only encountered accounting in my first year of university. Understanding the technical aspects of accounting was a challenge and I used to attend two additional tutorials in addition to the normal lectures so that I could grasp the concepts."

Indeed, she says that attending university for the first time was an unusual experience. "Everything was new. Yet, the Thuthuka community at Wits University brought some comfort in the whole experience. It was pleasant not to worry about

paying for accommodation, books, and tuition."

Zanele is grateful for the "overwhelming" Thuthuka support. "In our first year, we had a coaching support programme from Therapeia funded by Investec through Thuthuka. The coaching support programme was based on building us as future leaders and learning to lead ourselves through our CA studies. We spent a considerable amount of time on soft skills and that is when I knew that I was meant to lead – and leadership starts with self-leadership! I will forever be grateful for the coaching support of Adel du Plessis. I am also grateful for the Thuthuka community and remain in touch."

One particular example of Zanele's success as a mentor is Ipfani Hope Singo, who is another Thuthuka Bursary recipient. The two of them met via social media, where Zanele has a following of over 23,000 students and young professionals across Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. "No Valo Learning Centre was hosting a coaching support programme for Initial Test of Competence (ITC) repeat candidates and partnered with different professionals to sponsor tickets for candidates. The purpose of this coaching support programme was to provide resources and tools with specific focus on mindset, exam technique and effective study plans towards the preparation for ITC. Hope took advantage of this opportunity, and participated with enthusiasm. After this coaching programme, we continued communicating. As a chartered accountant and certified coach, I could provide guidance on her self-mastery journey."

Today, Zanele says her 'Why?' in life is to break the cycle of poverty. "I believe we can break the cycle of poverty through education – and that students who have access to coaching and mentoring have a greater chance of succeeding and breaking the cycle of poverty. My immediate plan is to partner with corporate businesses, universities, as well as bursary and scholarship providers to make our No Valo Coaching Support Programme available to a wider audience. Our focus will remain to focus on self-leadership, peak performance and work-readiness/career-coaching."

In terms of the effect of Thuthuka not only on her own life, but other members of her community, Zanele says "if you educate a child, you have an impact on the whole community! Through the support I received through Thuthuka, I have changed my family's lives, and I have improved my Mom's living conditions."

The impact of the coaching support Zanele received via Thuthuka in 2011 inspired her to provide such support programmes on a larger scale. "The No Valo Foundation continues to have a huge impact in our community. We have been able to engage in book drives, uniform drives and raise funds for portable study light bulbs for students who do not have electricity. The No Valo mentorship programme is growing stronger, with mentors and mentees across the country. At No Valo, we are passionate about breaking the cycle of poverty and our mission is in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals SDG 1 and SDG 4. I credit this to my upbringing and my mom's and teachers' influence. Beyond that, I wouldn't have done it without the Thuthuka support!"

Zanele says it is important for young people starting out in their careers to make a decision that is right for them and their own 'sweet spot'. She says: "You have to understand yourself and your strengths, weaknesses and interests before you decide. Look for the sweet spot where your interests and the things you are good at meet the world's needs! Then also look into the relevant educational institutions, so that you choose the best one for your chosen direction."

- Find Zanele's relevant Instagram post here:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CDTESREDr1F/?igshid=6oipvmb0xzea>.

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