

From humble beginnings to the cover of *Forbes Africa*

By  Nicci Botha

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Not many 28 year olds have achieved what Nigeria's Obinwanne Okeke has. Not only does he run a successful company spanning five African countries, but he has graced the cover of *Forbes Africa*, in their "30 under 30 people to watch in 2016" feature.



Master of his fate

Named after Nelson Mandela's favourite poem by William Ernest Henley, his company, [Invictus Group](#) comprises construction, oil and gas and agricultural development interests, operating in South Africa, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia and Botswana.

Like the man in the *Invictus* poem, Okeke says he is the master of his fate and captain of his soul whatever the weather. "I became an entrepreneur because of a dream. I say that because I have known from a very young age that all I needed was to dream and work towards it."

Biggest risk

He started his first business enterprise at 14, but then being the youngest of 17 children does tend to make a person resilient and willing to take chances.

"The biggest risk was investing my whole life savings in a business that was at that time very risky and had no guarantees." This ability to take risks has paid off. Today he has 28 permanent and 100 part-time employees across nine companies.

Many hands, without dropping the ball

Okeke explains that rather than focusing on one industry, he has kept his business interests diverse as it presents more opportunities.

"We are consistently filling in the gaps that we identify as viable in the markets within which we operate. Our approach is to have as many hands in as many interests as possible and whilst doing this, ensuring that we don't drop the ball in any area

- this is definitely one of the many keys to our success story.”

Solving the continent's problems

What he loves the most about his job is the flexibility. “I am currently working out of my Johannesburg site office in South Africa, while skyping my main office in Abuja. I could be working out of any country or continent at any time. This is the most exciting part of my job and also the possibility of meeting interesting young people full of ideas to solve our continent's problems,” says Okeke

His advice to young entrepreneurs out there, wanting to start out. “Start a business now! Do it now! Don't wait for tomorrow.”

Giving back

Okeke spends a lot of time shaking hands and making life-changing decisions in boardrooms across the world, but his humble beginnings keep him grounded and inspire him to give back.

“My foundation; Invictus Foundation initially started off as a personal charity project. I do work with the Zandspruit informal settlement in Honeydew, Johannesburg and make sure that they receive some aid,” says Okeke.

His hard work has paid off, but most importantly, to him, was buying his mother a house. “This is my most proud achievement to date, because of the happiness I see in her face whenever she talks about the comfort in her own house. She has been a huge source of inspiration for me as I went through life and being able to do that for her will always top everything else.”

Is he a billionaire yet? “Soon,” he says.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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