

Profiling Inspiration – île de pain

Daniel's Perspectives: 17 April 2019

In a recent set of results, JSE listed specialist financial services group **Sasfin** provides a sobering reality check on many small and medium-sized businesses in South Africa:

“...facing cash flow crises with a growing number going into business rescue and liquidation due to the challenging economic conditions in the last few years”

Against this backdrop, finding businesses of any size that beat the odds is refreshing and inspiring to me as an investor, business founder-owner and South African. I recently met with Markus Färbinger, the co-founder-owner of **île de pain** on Thesen Island in Knysna. Together with co-founder Liezie Mulder and a team of 52 strong, they work directly alongside their team to infuse purpose, meaning and pure unadulterated enjoyment into every interaction, loaf of bread, plate of food and cup of coffee or tea. Theirs is a business living up in every way to its own strapline, *“Authentic Artisans”*

What contributes to making their story special is that the place burnt down completely a few years ago. They were forced to close for 2 years while they redesigned and rebuilt everything from scratch. For pretty much any single location business in the global hospitality industry this would have spelled the end. They not only reopened, but they managed to pay all their long-time employees appropriate severance packages even though insurance didn't come through. In addition, every employee was absorbed 'somewhere between Johannesburg, Knysna and Cape Town', a testament to their skill level and worth in a highly competitive industry. Let me rephrase this, because Markus and Liezie calls the people they work alongside *“our extended family”*. When they reopened, île de pain v2.0 was not only bigger but much better in layout, design and functionality. Delighted former and new patrons have returned, in greater numbers than ever. Suffice to say, it remains a focused team effort.

One thing about them that made a lasting impression on me was the elevated levels of pride, confidence and mature demeanour of every staff member I interacted with, regardless of whether their managers were present or not. Equally impressive was how incredibly hard they work while simultaneously being conscious and deliberate about the values of resting properly and family. They 'only' serve 2 meal periods, 5 days a week, 11

months a year; that's it. They are religiously disciplined about sticking to this schedule - but the interesting thing is their customers respect and love them even more for it.

île de pain matters deeply to its people and community and it is clearly so much more to them than a restaurant or bakery. To me it seems more like a way of living a truly meaningful life.

This is an example of a long-term business and business culture I respect, admire, can learn from and be inspired by.

Our work continues...

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