

ENTREPRENEURS

QUINTON VAN DER BURGH

The **Born Businessman**

Quinton van der Burgh was kicked out of school for doing business. This prepared him to become a multi-millionaire through coal mining, filmmaking, fashion and hotels.

BY IGA MOTYLSKA

“I was born into business,” says coal mogul and media magnate Quinton van der Burgh.

“I knew I wanted to be a businessman from a young age. An entrepreneur is born, you know inside yourself what the passions are and where you want to drive yourself in the future.”

His eyes light up as he talks of working for his father’s supermarkets. Through this job, the Simba Chips Company gave him a pile of Ghostbusters stickers for which children clamoured. So, always the entrepreneur and scholar of the science of scarcity, he priced the stickers according to market forces—high prices for scarce stickers, lower prices for common ones. He bought one of his teachers lunch and she allowed him 10 minutes during lunch break in which to do his deals.

“I was on a sales mission. I told him [his classmate] that if he didn’t come to school with the money the next day he’d be in trouble.”

This landed him in the principal’s office and was one of the reasons why he was kicked out of school.

Van der Burgh felt that school was a waste of time and spoke to his family

about entering the business world. He moved to England on a holiday visa and began trading shares under a friend’s name, for commission. After two years, he managed to get his business visa. London is where he learnt difficult lessons. He lived with 14 other guys and learnt how to wash his clothes and cook.

“A few people took me for my money, so I was down and out a few times,” he says

When he lost investors’ money, he pleaded with his boss to give him one month to make it back. He made an excuse about having a problem with his bank account to borrow £50 (\$78) from a friend.

“I learnt my lessons on how to be cleverer about my next transactions and from there I grew and grew on my own,” he says.

Van der Burgh learnt the hard way.

“I’ve gone bankrupt a few times, not so much in my later years but in my early years when I was naïve to the fact of how business works. It’s tough when you think you know it all but you don’t, that lesson is the best lesson you can learn and take it into your next business development.”

That’s how he made his first million by the age of 21.

“I always wanted to have a Ferrari

by 26. By 32—when I could afford one—I realized that I didn’t need one, but it was my goal and I couldn’t go against what I believed in,” he says.

From Ferraris to bowling alleys, he knows what he wants.

“Growing up I was a *Richie Rich* fan and I thought that it was a fantastic idea to put a bowling alley into the house. It was a bad idea when it came down to building the house. It worked out to be 10 times the price but worthwhile when you have friends over and it’s a fantastic game when you have a competitive nature....”

“I’m an average bowler, I’ll get there one day,” he says.

Another one of his ambitions is to be the richest man in Africa by 2022.

When he returned from London he bought equity in the family-owned investment holdings company, Burgh Group Holdings, of which he is chief executive officer. He works in close partnership with his father, Stan, and his brothers, Stanley and Wayne. Burgh Group Holdings has a portfolio of several companies including mines; a plant hire company; an earth moving equipment company; several hotels and commercial properties, as well as a production company.

Experience has taught him to have fingers in many pies.



“I diversified into a variety of different businesses where I tried to spread my risk because I never wanted to be in that position again, where I had nothing. It’s a terrible feeling, to go from something to nothing and have to build that up again. That was my best lesson,” he says.

His next big idea was being a television and film executive producer.

“I’m passionate about the creative aspects of media. Had I studied I would have liked to have learnt about the media game, filmography and how to become a director or a good producer,” says van der Burgh.

“But you need to understand the industry and everything I have learnt to date has been the hard way, from other people and having to understand the industry, the market and how things are done. I attach myself to experienced people, that’s how I learn very quickly,” he says.

He stays away from what he calls ‘passion projects’—films for South African viewers—because the majority of such movies die. He believes that the South African film industry needs to emulate Hollywood.

“I just change a few things around, cast aspects, the story line and where it’s going and then we can make 90% of our money back and we can double our profits in international markets...

If you just produce for this country you’re going to be breaking even, if not make a loss, and that just doesn’t appeal to me. I’m passionate about what I do but it has to make business sense,” he says.

With *Sharp Shooter*—a documentary about photography—behind him, his most recent venture into the entertainment industry is *Clifton Shores*. He funded and starred in the unscripted reality series, shot in Cape Town; under the direction of Hisham Abed, who directed *The Hills* and *Laguna Beach*. The series follows four American women—alongside South African cast members—who come to Cape Town to work for Quintessential Events, Van der Burgh’s events and marketing company. It aired in South Africa in late August. He has two movies, a thriller and a romantic comedy, in the pipeline.

One day, he wants to produce films in the filmmaking hub of Los Angeles in the States. For now, he lives between Cape Town, Johannesburg and Witbank, where he can keep an eye on Eskom power station Duvha—to which he supplies coal—through his back window.

His mining interests lie in Eyethu Coal, Iyanga Coal, I.M.E.C, Zingaro and Twin Cities Trading. Between 60 and 70% of his mines’ coal is sold to Eskom—South Africa’s energy provider, for which they also wash coal.

Van der Burgh is always looking for innovative business ideas.



“I thought to myself ‘half our profits are going out the back door to contractors for transport’. I knew we needed a turnkey solution and a new and sustainable strategy so we started doing it ourselves.”

“Our multi-billion [rand] family mining development

“I diversified into a variety of different businesses where I tried to spread my risk because I never wanted to be in that position again, where I had nothing.”

has great partnerships; which trust and like us for being hard workers. We work according to the trust of the handshake. I’d rather cost the money than make money, ruin a relationship and have a bad name. We have not one bad name, I say that with confidence,” he says.

He is not interested in easy business.

“I don’t want to sit in my office and just collect a check. I want to master business and create new innovations,” says van der Burgh

With the launch of swimwear range, Wet Peach, in South Africa, van der Burgh says that he’s looking into launching a fashion channel. He’s also dabbling in the music industry.

The entrepreneur describes himself as being down to earth.

“I don’t enjoy people with money, they are full of themselves... although I am a prankster and like to have fun,” says van der Burgh. 