

## The Business Life/Talking heads



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# From actress to entrepreneur

Recycled gift-box business was born of equal measures of necessity and inspiration, writes Penny Haw

**L**YNN Worsley trained as an actress and, for many years, earned a living walking the boards and playing to the camera. But, like many others who pursue careers in the performing arts, she realised early she would need to be resourceful and flexible. So she learned other skills to help pad out her income, particularly between acting jobs.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Worsley — who relocated to SA from Manchester, UK — was one of the hosts of Springbok Radio's Super Duper Shopper Show. She also became an accredited aerobics instructor and was signed to the Reebok team of "step instructors" when the exercise form was at its height of popularity in the early 1990s. When not putting others through their paces, she worked as a stylist in the fashion trade.

About four years ago, then a newly divorced mother of four, Worsley's resourcefulness was again put to the test and one day, as she waited her turn in the gloomy surrounds of a maintenance court in Cape Town, she decided it was time to teach what she'd learned about being ingenious to others.

"Maintenance courts are among the most miserable places in which to hang out," she says. "I was struck by the hopelessness and resentment on the faces of the women around me. I realised then that although we were all in the same position — some more desperate than others — I was at a point in my life where I could help others at the same time as helping myself, by being entrepreneurial and putting what I'd learned as an inventive and practical actress, mother and self-starter into practice in a business."

Immediately after leaving the courts that day, Worsley began looking for something on which to build a business that would provide other unemployed, dependent women with a means of employed independence.

She did not want to start a charity or nongovernmental organisation: "My idea was to establish a sustainable and profitable business. Crucially, it had to be something that would give me the opportunity not only to teach the skills necessary to produce a product or service, but also to coach others about how to be resourceful and entrepreneurial."

When Worsley came across instructions on how to convert used 2l plastic cool-drink bottles into natty little self-closing containers, she recognised the perfect product for her venture. She accumulated old bottles and began working on a prototype. Before long, she'd perfected the Kiketyklikbox, which transforms plastic bottles into nifty, durable containers using just a pen, a pair of scissors, paper and glue.



MOTHER OF INVENTION: Lynn Worsley, left, with some of the staff of All Women Recycling and the nifty gift boxes they make. Picture: TREVOR SAMSON

"It is the ideal product for the cottage industry business I envisaged. Not only does it recycle plastic containers but it's also a labour-intensive craft that can be safely and easily taught to those without experience or skills. It's a business that was not costly to set up and could begin turning a profit quickly. This was crucial because, while I was really lucky to have found a silent partner who invested R100 000, we couldn't fund the business for long."

Excited by her discovery and the opportunity to "get the show on the road", she went back to the courts and stuck up posters advertising employment. She was surprised by the outcome.

"I had such high hopes but did not receive a single response to my ads. I naively imagined that the dependent women I saw at the courts would jump at the opportunity to empower themselves and gain at least a little financial independence. "I was wrong. Perhaps I underestimated the levels of helplessness experienced by those around me."

In fact, it took some weeks to find her first employees and begin operations at All Women Recycling. But once business began — employing and training women who have been without work for at least two years — word got out and, since the first Kiketyklikbox production line began in 2007, 22 unskilled women have joined the company. Many, says Worsley, have moved on to study further

and/or to establish their own ventures, having had the opportunity to get on their feet.

At present, All Women Recycling, which operates from Worsley's home in Cape Town's Diep River, employs eight women full-time.

The company was recently awarded the Innoxa Circle of Women title by O, The Oprah Magazine, which "honours women who are rebuilding their lives — and the planet — with a clever, but simple idea."

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The women produce about 300 Kiketyklikboxes a day and supply more than 30 retail outlets. Because the container is easily branded, they are popular corporate gifts and widely used for product launches.

All Women Recycling is a Fairtrade International member and containers are exported to Germany, Norway, Switzerland and the UK. In fact, about 60% of the Kiketyklikboxes produced are exported. Worsley expects this to grow and plans to take the product to appropriate exhibitions in Europe and the US to help expedite business.

Although she says that, in line with the country's need to

reduce unemployment, she is pleased to have the opportunity to provide others with the opportunity of employment and training, Worsley insists she's had to learn a great deal herself during recent years.

"Running a small business is not for the fainthearted. It's all-consuming and if you don't believe in it and enjoy it, it can be draining. Because I'm largely responsible for marketing and sales, I have to be out and about a great deal. I've learnt about the power of the internet and the importance of interacting quickly and concisely with clients. I'm very fortunate that my partner, though silent, is a great sounding board with plenty of business experience"

One of the primary challenges of the business, she says, is to build confidence and initiative in other women. She determined they should be as proud of the success of the Kiketyklikbox as she is.

"I believe that empowerment requires telling everyone in the business about everything that is going on at all times. That means telling all the women about the orders that come in, where the containers are going and what they are being used for. I let them know about every comment we receive and try to involve them in every step we take. After all, the training is not just about how to transform a plastic bottle into a cute little container: it's about how to run a business and engage in the full process thereof."

Worsley says she has new appreciation for what her career as an actress taught her: "For many years, I took my self-assurance and independence for granted. But when I see how difficult it is for other women who have not had the opportunity to experience self-sufficiency and haven't been trained to be inventive and confident, I realise how fortunate I have been. It is difficult to learn those things overnight, but I believe that All Women Recycling is changing lives and that gives me hope."

## Profusion of detail on pay leads to anything but clarity

**H**AVE just spent the morning doing something that has left me feeling bored and grumpy.

I've been reading annual reports and proxy statements, concentrating on the bit where companies try to justify why their top person got paid quite so much.

What has annoyed me isn't just the fact that most chief executives earn more than they are worth: this has been the case for such a long time that outrage fatigue has set in.

Instead, it is the increasing quantity of flannel and pseudoscientific analysis in which the numbers are now wrapped. Take Barclays. Last week, Pirce, which advises shareholders on how to vote, complained that the bank's system of setting pay was too complicated and advised them to vote against the pay deal at this week's meeting.

I've just looked at the report and can't make head or tail of the performance targets, but then I can't make head or tail of anything else in the 12 pages devoted to the subject.

Some of the annoying detail is stuff the bank is required to provide but Barclays goes much further than it need in offering obfuscating detail.

There is a cute little pie chart depicting how its remuneration committee spent its time — shareholders thus know that it devoted 4% to "other" compared with 12% the previous year.

The only vital information that appears to be missing is how many cups of coffee or biscuits the committee got through in the year.

However, Barclays is a model of brevity and clarity in comparison with Hewlett-Packard, whose report was last month wisely voted down by shareholders. It consists of an extraordinary 30 pages of throat clearing in which it fails to make



Lucy Kellaway

comprehensible its "six-level screening approach" or any of its perplexing array of clashing incentive schemes.

Eventually, having bludgeoned the reader to death with detail, the report lets slip that Mark Hurd, who quit last year after a scandal, got \$12m in cash plus a load of shares as a going-home present.

But my favourite statement this year is Kraft's, which seeks to explain why Irene Rosenfeld got a bonus of \$2.1m in return for missing her financial targets. Just in case anyone is simplistic enough to think that if you don't hit the target you don't get a bonus, the report pulls out of the hat a whole new set of reasons she deserved one.

Some of these are pathetically mundane — she apparently did well at corporate social responsibility — but others are more puzzling.

"Improved talent pipeline developed through retention of Cadbury leaders," it says.

I think this horrible, tortuous phrase means that Rosenfeld has hung onto a few top people at the confectioner — which isn't the impression one gets from reading the newspapers.

More sinister still is the news that her bonus is due to "improved year-over-year diversity representation".

This idea — that CEOs deserve to be paid more if they promote women and ethnic minorities — is grotesque.

First, it distorts the business of getting the right people into the right jobs.

Second, anyone who succeeds

in finding a few women to hire has not done anything terribly hard and surely does not deserve \$2.1m for their pains.

You could say that, in offering such detail on its CEO's bonus, Kraft was being admirably transparent. Or you could say the Kraft remuneration committee has been clever in producing after the event a list of the boxes that they knew they were going to be able to tick.

What all these reports show is that the system of disclosure — so close to the hearts of regulators — isn't working.

The idea of producing chapter and verse seems sensible in theory: it ought to help shareholders decide whether the sums handed out are reasonable or not, and make it harder for companies to pay their top people too much.

But it hasn't succeeded on either count. Indeed, all this confusing detail may be having the opposite effect. If I were a shareholder faced with so many boring, baffling pages that seek to excuse the inexcusable, I might be inclined to submit out of sheer weariness.

It makes me wish for a return to the bad old days where companies simply named the sum paid to the top people. No explanations or excuses were given. Shareholders didn't have the foggiest idea of how the figures were arrived at, but then for all the pages and pages of explanation that I've ground through this morning, I'm none the wiser either.

The bald numbers, stripped of all excuses, would surely be easier to grasp — and harder to defend. And they could be made harder still by the addition of one further figure: the ratio of the pay of the person at the top to that of the person at the bottom. © 2011 The Financial Times Limited

## Nothing to lose but chains of office

**A**MID opulence and splendour, thank you trade unionist Tony Ehrenreich for doing your bit to smash the cycle of poverty that is the weakest link in our Gucci revolution.

Thanks, too, for exposing a grievous misuse of public funds in Helen Zille's Western Cape.

Where African National Congress (ANC) provinces dutifully hand back billions to Pravin Gordhan (there's only so many launches, cocktail parties and golf days you can squeeze into a year), what does President Zille do with her allocation? She blows it on a bicycle path for larnies to pedal to work, from Blouberg and Milnerton to the cobbled streets of central Cape Town. I can understand just why Ehrenreich's proletarian blood is at the boil, but as winter arrives in the Cape, he's got a good six months of deserted bicycle tracks to look forward to.

For Cape Town is a city best enjoyed in photographs, and on the handful of days that you don't feel like one of Magellan's crew in the Roaring Forties, the sheer heat of the place will likely keep you indoors.

Anyway, Ehrenreich is taking the city to court over the cycling lanes. The hub of the case, it seems, is that Zille's bunch running the city have gone and spent taxpayers' money on tax-paying, rate-paying and milked-to-the-bone residents of the city. It's a scandal, at all



PATRICK BULGER  
Late Night News

three levels of government. And more than likely it's unconstitutional as well.

To deliver to those who've already been delivered to (not recently, of course, but historically speaking) is a shocking deviation from the norm of not delivering at all, and keeping everyone equally unhappy. That's how delivery works in ANC provinces, or you get a company not linked in any way to Julius Malema to deliver bridges that fall in the first rains.

It's a sorry indictment of the levels of militancy in the Western Cape that a burning grievance like these bicycle lanes should end up in court, rather than being settled at the barricades of revolutionary heroism, where it so rightly belongs. Fresh from storming the Bastille of those corrugated iron toilets some months back, you would have thought the crowbars would be turned then to Zille's bicycle paths, and that not a stone would be left unturned in the righteous

**"Similarly, the working class hate fresh air, water, silence, wide open spaces and the outdoors generally"**

venting of prole anger.

But no. Instead, the province lapses into quietism, going so far as the ANC naming the hapless Ehrenreich as their mayoral candidate for the May 18 elections, so little faith do they have in his chances against Patricia de Lille. That leaves it to Judge John Hlophe, perhaps, to decide whether these bicycle lanes represent a bigger misuse of public funds than the ANC's own everlasting junket.

But if Ehrenreich thinks he's going to appear his poll chances by plying to populist grievance around bicycle lanes, he shows a glaring ignorance of the workers he leads. He must know, surely, that the working class abhor the idea of cycling to work, and in fact cycling is most easy when you've got a shiny 4x4 at home in the garage. Similarly, the working class hate fresh air, water, silence, wide open spaces and the outdoors generally — all the things we're told are in such demand nowadays.

Me too. So give me world-class African Joburg over Chardonnay-sipping Cape Town

any day. Recently, I had cause to take my life into my own hands, by way of a 13km bike ride in the more pleasant sectors of Joburg and Ekurhuleni. Obviously such busy metropoli as these have no inclination for cycling lanes, or even pavements as one once knew them.

And here's a tip for Malema and his cohorts to think about, gleaned from my cycle ride: the quality of a pavement is directly proportional (gets bigger) to the level of private involvement and investment in that pavement.

What is left only to public enterprise in an ANC area is unpassable to the cyclist: weeds, glass, potholes, bare cables and used (free) condoms. Where the homeowner has invested in his pavement, why it almost feels like Cape Town. In the same vein, I happened to pass on my ride the beautiful old Huddle Park golf courses, once a public facility, but now a slum run into the ground by the ANC council. (As consolation, we're offered in the future a new shopping centre, with parking for 50 000 4x4s. No bikes, please!)

Here's an idea: let's have our first debate on nationalisation and state guardianship on Huddle's old blue course.

We'll need Malema's guards, I fear. And bring your own machete, just in case, if only to clear a picnic space in the once-pristine fairways.

Or even on the greens. bulgerp@bdfm.co.za

# BusinessDay

NEWS WORTH KNOWING

## Call Centres 2011

May 05, 2011

The local call centre market has great potential for growth, which will be stimulated by the increasing availability and lower cost of bandwidth. Increased bandwidth will also make it more viable for companies to integrate Voice over IP (VoIP) capabilities into their call centres and implement multiple communication channels.

It will also make SA a more favoured destination for offshore business process outsourcing. Government incentives are in place to encourage companies to bring in offshore business process outsourcing business, and to set up call centres in outlying areas in the interest of creating jobs.

Business Day's Call Centre Trends and Solutions Insight to be published on April 26 will explore the local and global trends, issues and opportunities in this market. This will include:

- How the call centre market is evolving locally and globally.
- How local call centres measure up to those in developed markets in terms of the use of the latest technology, the standard of agents, multichannel customer interaction and first call resolution of queries.
- How companies can improve customer service and retention through optimising their call centres, and which ones are achieving this.
- Advancements in customer interaction technologies in call centres and their benefits.
- How the upcoming consumer protection legislation will affect call centres.
- What will it take for SA to attract more offshore call centre outsourcing business?
- Whether it is a myth or reality that SA can create hundreds of thousands of jobs by attracting more offshore call centre outsourcing business.
- What does SA have to offer as an outsource call centre destination?
- Workforce management and skills development opportunities and issues in this market.
- The government incentives that are in place to stimulate this market, and whether these are having the desired effect.

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