

The power of personal branding for entrepreneurs

 By Leigh Andrews

13 Dec 2019

My favourite session of Cape Town Startup Week 2019 was the Raw series workshop featuring SA entrepreneurs Siya Beyile and Vincent Manzini, AKA 'Sir Vincent' on the power of personal branding for entrepreneurs. Because whether you're an entrepreneur from the township, the city or the country, the importance of personal branding cannot be overlooked for your business. Entrepreneurs tend to think a lot about their company brand, but many forget about the personal brand. Here's what you missed.



Vincent Manzini, AKA 'Sir Vincent' and Siya Beyile spoke at Cape Town Startup Week 2019 on the power of personal branding for entrepreneurs...

The session, held at Workshop17 on 3 December, was packed to the rafters with attendees looking to learn from and celebrate Beyile and Manzini's successes

Beyile is the founder and creative director of The Threaded Man, one of Africa's largest fashion and lifestyle portals that communicates to African millennials.

The platform generates over 500K + unique visitors each month, and through 'The Threaded Agency', has worked with numerous brands such as Adidas, Stuttafords, Titan watches, H&M and Woolworths. Beyile has styled prominent TV productions and personalities in South Africa, but his road to success has been an especially bumpy one, filled with U-turns and narrow one-ways.

We also heard from Vincent Manzini, also known as Sir Vincent – DJ, producer and award-winning entrepreneur when he scooped the SAB Kickstart people's choice award. He's currently co-founder of Blank Canvas, a below-the-line creative and communication agency based in Cape Town amongst other ventures in the tech and entertainment space.

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@siyabeyile and @sirvincentsa are about to dish out some serious brain food on personal branding. What a beautiful group of people 💎💎

A post shared by [Heavy Chef](#) (@heavychef) on Dec 3, 2019 at 3:01am PST

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rica and Siyabonga Mbaba Wilson, which got the crowd singing and ululating, resulting in a standing ovation before the main speakers even took the stage.

They explained Heavy Chef’s origins, where 12 years ago Danish Fred Roed first heard the phrase, “I never buy from a skinny chef,” which humbled him as he realised you can’t expect someone to buy something from you if you don’t use it yourself.



Getting heavy-handed on fintech community disruption with Heavy Chef Tours

Leigh Andrews 21 Feb 2017



Roed loves inspiring and empowering entrepreneurs as he strongly believes the South African economy will rise through entrepreneurs, from the ground up.

He’s committed to engaging through ongoing learning, and sharing those building blocks of entrepreneurship back with the community to connect and learn from their journeys.

Vincent Manzini on helping others shine

Next, it was time for Sir Vincent to share his entrepreneurial journey.



#EntrepreneurMonth: Insights into the SA female entrepreneur's journey in 2019


Leigh Andrews 9 Dec 2019




Manzini said he’s never had such a welcome as at the Heavy Chef session, and said it’s important to embrace your own journey as beautiful – don’t shy away from who you are, as that’s your truth.


In living our lives, we affect others and inspire them as they gravitate towards our energy.

“





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Laws Of Attraction, Rule Number One: You Can't Attract Something You're Not Willing To Visualize 💎💎


A post shared by SirVincent (@sirvincentsa) on Apr 25, 2019 at 1:11am PDT


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and error, so you can't be afraid to make mistakes. You can't change something you're not willing to confront, but you need to learn to 'fail forward'.

Manzini was born in Langa East in 1987 and grew up with a lack of role models in Khayelitsha, after forced removal.

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Don't underestimate the influence you have over the people that are watching your entrepreneurial journey. @sirvincentsa's hero is sitting in the room. Swipe left to see who he is. #CTSUNW2019 #HeavyChefRaw

A post shared by [Heavy Chef \(@heavychef\)](#) on Dec 3, 2019 at 3:18am PST

”

ed she wanted to go back to school at the age of 46, to qualify as a nurse – he thought she wanted to date others, which resulted in divorce. This prompted the 11-year-old to promise to always make her proud and protect her. He shared his learning from this time:

“ *I am not my father's mistake, I will make my own mistakes. I will learn from them and not repeat them.* ”

Manzini's mom finished her Matric studies through night school and graduated at the age of 51.

The journey was by no means easy as it led to drastic lifestyle changes. The family moved from shack to shack as his mom continued her general work by day and studying by night.



#CreativeMornings: From homework support group to academic success in Khayelitsha

Leigh Andrews 3 Dec 2019



Money was so tight that Manzini couldn't afford transport to Sea Point High School, so he caught the very first train, where he was less likely to be checked for a ticket, and then walked from town to Sea Point, come rain or shine.

Through playing football, he met someone who stayed in Imizamo Yethu and ran a taxi service. Manzini went on to work as a *gaartjie* on the taxi, which brought in some pocket money and he meant he bothered his mom less.

How much is the BMW M3?

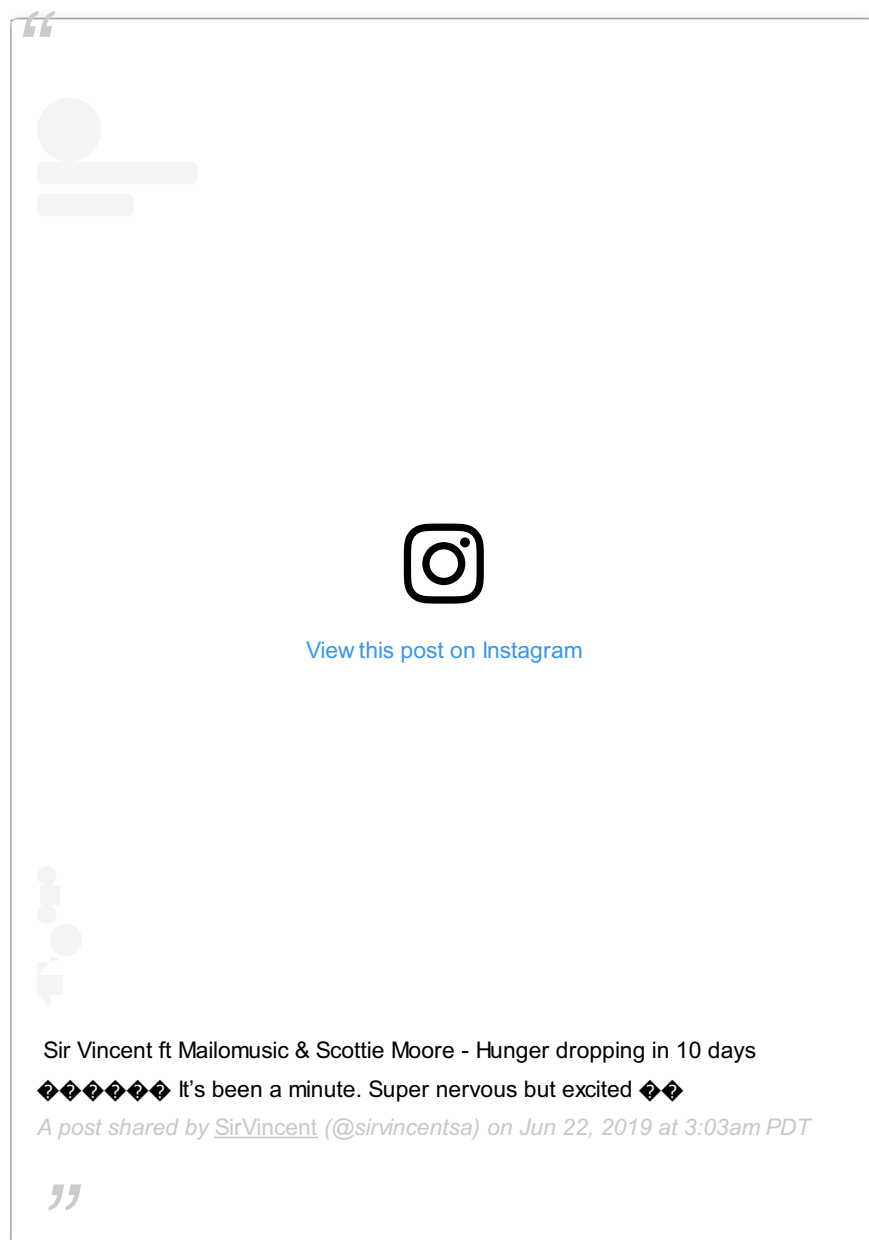
Manzini's grandmother sold gingerbeer, so he collected bottles to clean for her to sell. This shows the seed was always in him to be an entrepreneur, even though it was a survival instinct. He went on to work in the taxi rank for four years, even sleeping in the rank to save money. Manzini says his lesson from this time is as follows:

“ *Always keep your main thing the main thing. Your goal should be clear, so don't be apologetic about it. Do what you have to do.* ”

It's your truth – once you see it, the universe will conspire to help you reach your goal. Manzini would see fancy cars driving past while he was a *gaartjie*, and one day decided to walk through the Waterfront, as he describes himself as a big window shopper.

He doesn't know what prompted him to do so, but he walked into the BMW dealership and asked: “How much is the M3?”

The sales assistant entertained his question and even explained how the payments worked. Manzini says the funny thing is that he went on to buy the car a few years later.



great things and nothing moved him from his purpose. He's learned to call himself out if he feels he's doing something that's just "not him". Manzini's lesson from this: *"Don't strive to just be the cool guy in the room – be yourself!"*

When he was 18, Manzini's mom's dream came true, as she was finally working as a nurse. The dream presented a difficult reality though, as she'd used all her savings on her own studies, so there wasn't anything to offer Manzini for his own studies.

Don't be scared to leave it all and start over

Instead, he decided to go to initiation school as he felt he was ready and hadn't ever really been a child. The catch after this was that he needed to find a job.

Without further education, his options were limited to retail, a call centre or becoming a runner at a restaurant. He took the final option at a restaurant in Hout Bay, where he ate the leftovers and also wore a big fish outfit on Saturdays, as the restaurant mascot.





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I stumbled across @ennockmart's work on Twitter, when his post went viral after posting one of his iconic pieces. A painting of the legendary @realblackcoffee using coffee. He hails from a tiny and under developed town of Sasolburg. Today, I drove around 150kms to collect my special piece which I had commissioned him to kindly paint for me. It's so beautiful watching his story unfold and being part of it. "I bought some artwork for one million, two years later that shit worth two million. Few years later that shit worth eight million. I can't wait to give this shit to my children..." - Jay Z #sisonke #Artlover #BlackSupport #Ennock #Legacy

A post shared by SirVincent (@sirvincentsa) on Jun 29, 2019 at 5:13am PDT

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he experienced lots of rejection. But he knew people are already going through the most, so the rejection is about your business offer, not about you.

“ *Manzini's lesson from this is not to let anything have the power to take your peace. Get over yourself and do what your job requires.* ”

Manzini's says his breakthrough moment came when he worked at Vodacom. He says he became 'the guy in the hood', finally earning a decent salary and life started to look a little brighter – he even took his first flight at the age of 21.



#EntrepreneurMonth: Creating an enabling environment for SMMEs, entrepreneurs

19 Nov 2018



Unfortunately, the wheel of life spun again and dropped Manzini into depression when his sister died in a car crash. He calls this a true turning point, as it forced him to introspect and be honest with himself on whether this was the truth he came to live.

“ Would you be happy with this legacy and life you've lived? ”

Manzini took the plunge and resigned in his lunch break as his truth at the time was that wanted to be a DJ and change lives. He says it's important to note that he grew up with nothing, so he wasn't afraid to lose it all again and start over – a crucial message for entrepreneurs.



#CreativeMornings: How 18 Gangster Museum is lifting others as it rises in Khayelitsha

Sindy Peters 3 Sep 2019



Manzini laughs when he recalls that he resigned before he even knew how to DJ. It was tough but he was at peace with the process, as he was living his truth, so he “wasn't shook by anything”. Manzini wanted to be the change in his family, community, and even globally.

From personal to community DJ skills

He says people in the hood asked him about his DJing, but he would take a train or the last taxi of the day to the clubs and “DJ” while they were still stocking drinks. He kept at it and a few years later found himself in Amsterdam, touring with Black Coffee, working with Goldfish.

“



[View this post on Instagram](#)



I love making people happy through the gift of music...It's even a bigger blessing making a living of it...❤️👍

A post shared by [SirVincent](#) (@sirvincentsa) on Dec 8, 2019 at 10:47pm PST

” yet Manzini still wasn’t fulfilled, and found himself thinking: “If I were to die tomorrow, I would die with all of this potential.”

And so, Manzini opened a DJ school, called Jumpstart Entertainment in Khayelitsha.

In doing so, Manzini effectively parked his own DJing for a while to build up skills in his community. Manzini also entered SA Kickstart on the basis of an idea, went on to win regionally and in 6 months, had also won nationally. This inspired him to want to do more, because by now he firmly believed:

“ *The power within you is amazing. No-one owes you shit. Instead, you owe the world. We’re all part of an ecosystem, so ask yourself what you’re contributing and what value you bring before you ask ‘Why am I not getting anything’.* ”

Giving Cape Town a more colourful voice

So Manzini partnered with Loyiso Mdebuka, fellow Khayelitshan ‘DJ Loyd’, who felt the community needed a louder voice as people of colour in Cape Town tend to want to go to Johannesburg to “make it big”, but that will never change if talented people keep leaving Cape Town.

“





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Dear Cape Town, you are in safe hands♥️🇿🇦

A post shared by [SirVincent \(@sirvincentsa\)](#) on Dec 9, 2019 at 12:19pm PST

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impact in the community.

a platform for others to build on, to have a true

They initially created *iKapa Live* as an online magazine celebrating township artistry. They soon realised they were ahead of their time with the idea as many of the people they wanted to reach didn't have internet access, so the business model didn't make sense in that format, though the premise was in a good place.

“ *Never be afraid to build from scratch.— L O Y D (@DJLOYD) [May 31, 2019](#)* ”

So, they turned it into something people could interact with. And the iKasi Experience gained fans from all walks of life as the idea went national. Manzini is also owner of Blank Canvas, a small agency focused on events that's part of a bigger umbrella company called Black Unicorns.

Own the narrative, tell your stories

It's part of Manzini's drive to build things that will outlive him and his story that if you think it, you can live it.

“ *We have a responsibility as Africans to own the narrative and tell our own stories as a lived experience.* ”

Manzini concluded that the similarly entrepreneurially minded need to be apologetic. Work with people with similar ideals and values, as sharing your adversities makes you equal. Take yourself seriously and be proud of who you are.



#EntrepreneurMonth: The program that prepares youth with future-fit skills

Evan-Lee Courie 28 Nov 2019



There's no ABC formula to follow, but once you focus and are aware of where you're going, you'll be clearer on your own path.

Work hard and things will come, be present in every moment and live up to whatever you say you are. The money is a by-product of your excellence.

Whether you're building the brand of the company you work for or your own personal brand, it's about how you package yourself and the energy that goes with it.



#AfricaCom: Why "African time" is now for African storytelling, by Africans

Leigh Andrews 14 Nov 2019



Siya Beyile on keeping at it even after hitting rock bottom

Next, we heard from Siya Beyile. He featured on *Forbes* magazine's 'Top 30 under 30' list in 2016 and shared Manzini's sentiment that the money will come and go, but the power of the soul and what drives you remains. His lifelong dream is about how he can help other souls...



Africa's top 30 entrepreneurs under 30

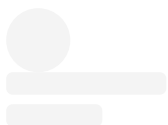
30 May 2016



Beyile grew up in the Eastern Cape and said an earlier memory his grandmother shared is that he would try to herd the animals indoors at night as we wanted them to be warm and dry.

Unfortunately, these good intentions that followed him in his life meant he got taken advantage of, which is why he reiterates people can take everything from you, except your purpose.

“



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Today my best friend and my biggest inspiration is taking a flight for the first time, I am grateful to God that I get to witness this moment. For years she has refused out of fear of the unknown and also believing she is not good enough for such but she is now confronting that fear , im inspired by her bravery because no matter how matured we get we should never stop challenging our fears 💎💎💎

A post shared by [HRH Siyabonga Beyile \(@siyabeyile\)](#) on Oct 31, 2019 at 4:07am PDT

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something magic happened when she added her headgear – a transition from the grumpy person who had woken up to someone with purpose. This love of culture and fashion grew, and from the age of five he had the desire to give that sense of confidence to others.

Beyile says his true story started when he moved to Cape Town at age 13, on a scholarship to attend Wynberg Boys High School.

“

I was put in an environment of possibilities for the first time in my life, but we couldn't afford Woolworths' food so my lunch was usually leftovers.

”

His fellow students didn't react well to his traditional food as they hadn't been exposed to it before.

"Are you proud of your culture?"

When he told his mom to rather just give him an apple from Woolworths, she told him something about personal branding that's stuck for life:

“

Are you proud of your culture? Why change yourself for validation from others? Rather use those differences as an opportunity to start a conversation about your culture and tell the stories of where you came from.

”

Unfortunately, Beyile's parents' relationship was not a peaceful one. He strongly remembers his mom crying at the house they had just moved into, as the geyser had burst on his first day of grade 8. But your circumstances don't determine your future, you do.



What is your personal brand?

Karabo Keepile, Rosebank College 27 May 2019



Beyile persevered, but started suffering from depression at age 14. He would sit and watch Fashion TV for hours, entranced by the misfit creatives who had build an economy for themselves.

He soon spotted a gap, as we live in a country where 90% of the population can't afford name brands, yet the townships are filled with style, so he started his Threaded Man blog in Matric, on style from a cultural perspective.

His dad stopped talking to him, he was called gay, but he was happy as he was going to study fashion as his 'fall back'. His mom had worked her '9 to 5' for thirty years and carried the family financially, yet she withdrew all her savings from Old Mutual for Beyile's studies.



Personal branding is more important than ever

Boris Dzhangarov, ESBO 5 Jun 2019



And so he took the 14-hour bus from Cape Town to Johannesburg – a place he'd only seen on SABC1 TV shows, and registered at Lisof.

Beyile told receptionist he didn't have anywhere to stay, and she told him of a cheap place at the Randburg Taxi rank – he ended up sleeping on the floor, some 20km from his place of studies. But Beyile wanted to survive and push his creativity.

Finding a fit with fashion trends

Unfortunately, he had the worst experience at Lisof – he couldn't draw to save his life, and as he'd played rugby, his hands were too big to sew. He just didn't fit in for the bulk of it but loved one of his subjects – fashion trends. How do you create something people don't know they want until they see?

This went into the psyche of fashion, and he took the lessons he learned onto his blog. By now it was halfway through the year and he was failing miserably.

Marks would be read out from top to bottom, and he featured so regularly on the bottom that his fellow students would clap that he had showed up at all – yet he was the top student for trends in his year.

“ Your life is bigger than a trend💎💎♥️ pic.twitter.com/rD8rCUm2RI— Siyabonga Beyile (@SiyaBeyile) [November 8, 2019](#) ”

Lecturers asked how he achieved 95% for his trends class but failing everything else. The truth is, his blog was his passion, and the trends class fed into that.

As a result of his academic failure, Beyile's mom cut him off financially – he effectively dropped out of Lisof but carried on updating his blog, and unexpectedly became popular in Nigeria.

Then *True Love* magazine wrote a feature about his blog, just a few sentences but this was a big deal to him as it appeared on the same page as Bonang's Revlon ad.

Because of his love of trends, Beyile went on to intern at a trends specialist – but all his earnings went to taxi fare and his boss felt he didn't have a natural flair for fashion as he didn't fit the accepted mould at the time.

This taught Beyile that you shouldn't look for validation from others, as they don't make the dream happen for you.

Famous stylist... Still broke

Next came a stint as influencer for SAB's Flying Fish. Through the experience, he met Nomuzi Mabena from MTV, who asked him to be her stylist.



#VWDriveDry: Take home lessons

Sheila Afari 22 Jan 2019



This taught him that when you are anointed instead of appointed into a position, that's based on your purpose, so it doesn't

matter whether you're qualified or not. Instead, you get to start your dream and learn along the way.

Beyile went on to style almost every major music video for every major musician in the country, but he was still broke.

At the age of 21, he met the CEO of SAMAs at a music and fashion event, who said: "We need to support local fashion through music... I'm tired of seeing the same old style on the red carpet."



Personal brand leads organisational brand

Johnny Johnson 30 Jul 2019



Beyile went on to become the youngest ever fashion director for the SAMAs. He gave the designers his vision and let them run with it, but the industry started speaking against him as they hadn't heard of this "unknown kid" before.

That year's SAMAs were well-watched, and while working on the awards he was also still in demand as an influencer. At the same time, he was approached by business partners for the Threaded Man, but through a series of unfortunate events, he ended up resigning from his business and being sued by the brand with the name he came up with.



Sneaker wars: Four ways to kick it with Afrillennials

17 Jun 2016



It's almost as though the concept he had started became his enemy. He took legal advice from a friend, and luckily the judge ruled that he should be allowed to buy his company back – but it was valued at R10m based on its number of followers in the database and the size of their influence.

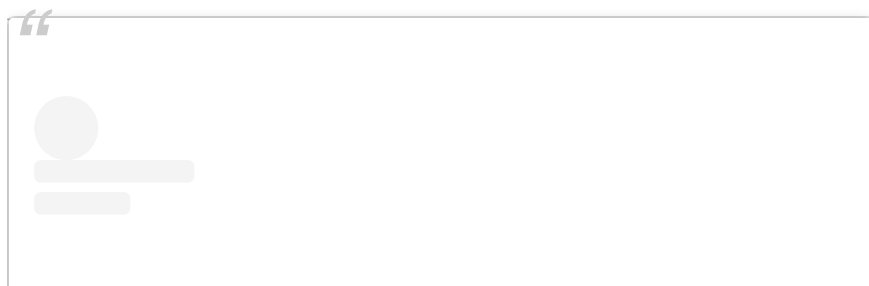
Millionaire for 10 minutes

How could he ever buy it back? Even if he sold everything his family-owned, Beyile wouldn't have enough money, even after the price was halved. It was halved again when a bank negotiated it down further – he saw the money come into his account and was a millionaire for 10 minutes.

“Beyile prayed that no-one else would go through the same thing, but he hadn't factored in the need for working capital.”

He pushed forward with the vision and launched the Threaded Year, to open the platform up to others as a collective voice. This went on to become the biggest fashion lifestyle blog, with bigger reach than some of the leading fashion magazines in the country.

Beyile was even invited to attend Europe Fashion Week; where he styled Gabrielle Union – but he still had to pay back the money he owed the bank. He was working from 5am to 3am, had stopped eating and only saw his family once a year.





[View this post on Instagram](#)



26👍👍👍👍 #712 Thank You God 🙏🙏🙏🙏

A post shared by [HRH Siyabonga Beyile \(@siyabeyile\)](#) on Dec 6, 2019 at 11:23pm PST

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mouthed on social media in 2017.

s, especially when he started being bad

Beyile got into such a deep depression, because instead of asking if they could help him, people celebrated his failure. But he shares that even through the worst situations; you are still being elevated to the next level.

Preparing for the next level

Beyile stopped going out, stopped showering, stopped charging his phone. He was angry at himself and decided that he needed to die. “Fighting for happiness becomes so draining that you think to yourself, ‘Why should I even be on this planet?’ So he packed up his apartment, took what he thought would be his last shower, bought some rope, bought more rope in another colour, and forgot to lock his door – that’s what saved his life.

“ *Beyile hung himself and describes the surreal experience of feeling his spirit start to leave his body. He blacked out and woke up tied to a hospital bed two days later. He was ashamed and felt like a failure, only for one of his mentors to walk in and say, “While you are still alive, you will make things happen, but you need to make a choice to live.”* ”

So Beyile moved back home to the Eastern Cape. One day he asked his grandmother why she still woke up at 5am when she deserved to enjoy her time, to which she said “Your purpose doesn’t stop because of your circumstances, you need to keep moving. They can’t take that away from you.”

“





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A Student.

A post shared by [HRH Siyabonga Beyile \(@siyabeyile\)](#) on Jul 20, 2019 at 8:38am PDT

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his dad and confronted himself about where he
had gone wrong.

He found his purpose again and decided to give the Threaded Man another chance, even if it meant sleeping on friends' couches while he got his life back on track.

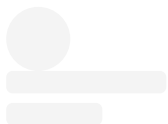
Beyile started a podcast about what he was going through, in rebuilding his brand with purpose.

The comeback

Soon, the opportunities started rolling in: He was approached by Vaseline to become a brand ambassador. His style featured on the cover of *GQ* magazine. Global Citizen asked him to be their fashion director. He was invited to be a keynote speaker in Chile.

Speaking of the Vaseline experience, a collaboration with Riky Rick, Beyile loved that he was allowed to take ownership of the narrative, as the overall goal was to raise funds to deal with skincare issues in poverty-stricken areas.

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Stay lifted & glowed up.

A post shared by [HRH Siyabonga Beyile \(@siyabeyile\)](#) on Dec 3, 2019 at 7:07am PST

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suffering, but we each have a unique journey to follow.

al. We often ask, “Why me”, when we’re

Even when it feels like the very end, know that you’re being elevated to the next level of power. Beyile’s story serves as testimony that life can break you so many times, but each time you fall, you get up stronger than ever before.

“



[View this post on Instagram](#)



"Each time you fall, you'll get up and further than before." @siyabeyile

#CTSUNW2019 #HeavyChefRaw

A post shared by [Heavy Chef \(@heavychef\)](#) on Dec 3, 2019 at 4:49am PST

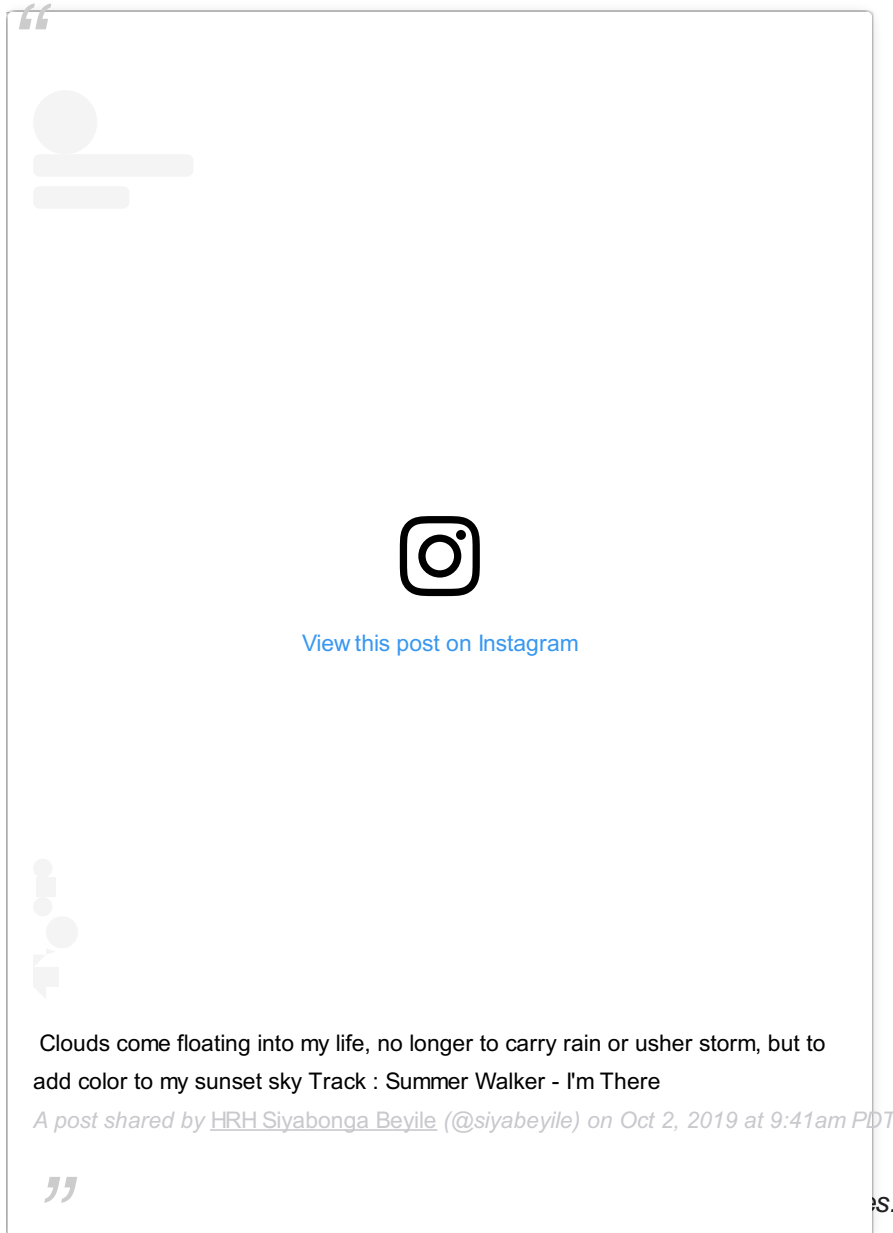
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We need to work together and do amazing things. He firmly believes Africa is the most talented continent in the world. Don't give in to your struggles.

the most powerful thing we have is each other.

“ You don't need to be the next Beyonce or Kanye West – be yourself. ”

Manzini and Beyile both received a rousing standing ovation for sharing the power of personal branding in their own lives, and sharing insights into their often-tough entrepreneurial journeys.



ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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