

Staying ahead of the game



Anne Pratt

WBS MBA graduate Anne Pratt sees opportunities where others see obstacles.

Outgoing, pioneering, multi-dimensional, resilient and entrepreneurial with a passion for life.

All of these words describe award-winning executive and WBS MBA alumnus Anne Pratt. She is quick to point out: "I like to make things happen. I'm not good with people waiting for things to happen."

She has always been a high achiever, deciding early in her university career that she wanted to be the best and learn from the best. As a Social Science student at Natal University (Economics, Industrial Psychology), she identified Unilever as her company of choice. Over 500 students applied for internship positions, eight were short-listed and Pratt was one of three who went to Lever Brothers.

In 1991, she was awarded a Businesswomen's Association bursary to complete her MBA.

"I am very brand conscious and I choose the brand I want to be associated with. I identified Wits Business School as the top school at the time. WBS was at the heart of the South African business community and I wanted to be there because I knew it would be a strategic advantage. I learned from the best."

While doing her MBA, she helped manage Elaine's Curry Bistro in Yeoville and helped turn the restaurant around from potential closure to profit. She subsequently won the Nedcor award for the full-time

student who made the most outstanding contribution to business. Her thesis opinion was published in Finance Week.

"I am so grateful for the MBA. I learned in a practical way from my classmates who came from diverse backgrounds," says Pratt, adding that some of those friendship bonds are still strong today.

After completing her MBA, she identified a need for designer clothing for larger women and started the BIG Wearhouse on the East Rand.

"This was the first time I'd started a business from scratch and within six months it was making a profit," she says.

This foray into retail "made me realise that entrepreneurship could be fun".

She sold her interest in the business and rejoined the corporate world, becoming marketing executive of KIC/Gentech, the appliance company, part of the Altron Group. Thereafter, she was headhunted and became MD of Woodburn Management Selection for three years before recognising a gap in the market and established her own global search business in 1995.

"The company was launched seven years ago on Workers Day. We have a strong work ethic."

Anne Pratt and Nyasulu (Pty) Ltd took on a market that was dominated by top-end global players who had been in the market for years. Pratt

realised, however, that the market wanted more.

"There was a strategic gap for a global service with an empowerment component. We wanted to set a standard and trend for the top end of the market. Premium price, premium quality with value for money," she recalls. "We definitely did not just want to help companies in their own challenge to transform but lead by example through our own empowerment and transformation."

The company initiated qualitative research, with a top-rated advisory board, on how corporate South Africa should close its gaps.

After eight months, Pratt sent her company's strategic vision, objectives and a due diligence report to the 12 top global executive search companies in London. All 12 gave her an appointment.

They chose the Accord Group and a year later she



Totsie Memela-Khambule

includes my psychological, physical and spiritual growth," says Pratt.

Through the Karos Foundation, Pratt has learnt various life skills and her involvement in various charities keeps her grounded. Regular gym, musical shows and dancing keeps her going, she says.

"I love reading about great leaders and entrepreneurs. I seek self-development to keep focused. I travel a lot in South Africa and globally. Travel is learning. Good global executives are good travellers. They embrace cultural diversity and the understanding it gives is a tremendous benefit."

Pratt says she is inspired by her mother Renee: "My mother worked at mission hospitals in Nqutu in northern KwaZulu Natal with a doctor who later won a Nobel Prize. I remember the doctor's table was a tomato box. My mother instilled in me the values and principles of hard work, humility and helping others."

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and fellow consultant, Rosemary Mangope were in New York to present at the annual Accord conference. The Accord Group is the 10th biggest in the world with 44 international offices. Hixonia Nyasulu sold her stake in the company in 2001.

Pratt's new partner is Totsie Memela-Khambule, a former Land Bank acting MD and FNB Home Loans Division CEO: Customer Services and Retention. Memela-Khambule is also a former WBS student having completed the Senior Executive Programme through WBS and the Harvard Business School.

The company is now known as Memela, Pratt and Associates. In 1998, Pratt was nominated for the Business Woman of the Year award.

In 2002, she was among the top 10 finalists of the Business Woman of the Year Awards; in 2003 she won the Johannesburg Businesswomen's Regional Achiever award. Last year, she was nominated for the "Top Women in Business and Government" award in the entrepreneurial category.

She manages her achievements by having, "a good support structure around for achieving balance in life. I regard my personal growth as very important, this

"When we pass away the legacy we leave behind is our humanness and our human connections. It's important for me to keep in touch with all aspects of people in life."

Pratt's clients include South Africa's top banks, parastatals, corporations and international companies such as Japan Tobacco International and Levi Strauss.

"We are able to offer clients a global or geographic regional "one stop shop" whereby you have a consultant who understands your business, its challenges, operations and management team in different parts of the world," she adds.

"I like to be a pioneer and will continue with that. I am currently looking at new BEE investment models that give representation to all groups of society including gender. I have brought together a team that is quite visionary," says Pratt.

"I like to think out of the box and then find creative solutions for existing problems."

In future, Pratt sees herself finding a relevant space in transformation of companies helping with their executive leadership and also with a financial investment role. "I'm now into my third career."