

My brilliant new start-up

Meet the women whose bright ideas inspired new businesses that are taking the market by storm

'I saw a gap in the market for writing workshops that could heal' – Natasha Mansour

'We're meant to love what we do' – Sharon Choritz-Orleow

'My new career saves peoples' lives' – Allison Martin

'My Tool Share Studio helps others become self-sufficient' – Megan Kirchhoff





The medical visionary

Allison Martin, 29, lives in Morningside, Joburg. She's the founder and managing director of UDoTest, which offers discreet home medical tests.

I used to work in the telecommunications industry. It wasn't long before I started my first business, Innov8tion, a technology company. But I had no idea that I would one day work in the medical space and never imagined that advanced genetic testing would excite me as much as it does today.

With Innov8tion, I was exposed to mobile health technology, and realised that many people lack access to medical information – and particularly so with cervical cancer. I also realised how serious the cervical cancer situation is in South Africa, and that there's an urgent need for more information and support. The number of cervical cancer-related deaths in South Africa is on the increase, often because women neglect to go for their annual pap smears. Many women feel that a pap smear is an inconvenience. I always thought, 'If only I could just do this myself'. Then I realised many other women

'There's a sense of peace in helping others'

felt the same way! I also wondered if most women in South Africa have access to pap smears and if they

even know what they are. Then I discovered there were innovative testing techniques able to detect the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) in use in other parts of the world. That's when I had the idea for UDoTest.

UDoTest offers men and women across the country home-based chlamydia, gonorrhoea, STD and cervical cancer tests which are discreet, safe and convenient. UDoTest delivers the test to consumers in discreet packaging and the test is done at home.

We then collect the completed tests and have them processed. Afterwards, customers receive feedback

from the doctor straight to their email. The concept can improve lives and even save them too. I love that we get to be the ones who provide women with peace of mind, to let them know that they're safe. It's a privilege to be able to make a difference to so many people.

I'm blessed I get to be part of something as cool as that every day! UDoTest helps to empower and educate people so that they can live healthier lives. When you feel that you have the opportunity to make a significant difference in the long-term, then you know that you must be on the right path. There's a sense of peace that comes with doing something that can help others.

Allison's tips

Don't be afraid to move beyond your comfort zone. Never brush off a simple idea: it might just be a great idea! Make every effort to learn continuously and grow yourself. Learn more about UdoTest at Udotest.com.

The writer

Natasha Mansour, 34, lives in Edenglen, Joburg. She owns copywriting and media business, Room 206, and runs Write of Passage Healing Sessions.

For eight years I held my own as a marketing manager and creative executive in the high-demand, bloodthirsty world of retail. I was good at what I did. But I was desperately unhappy. I was downright cold and hard, and I was angry and miserable most of time. I was also a money-driven corporate animal.

But after a tragic death in our family, I fell ill. Through my recovery, I began to reassess my purpose in life. I found sanctuary in my pen, and realised how powerful creative writing and journaling can be for any matter of the heart. I also realised that everyone has a story to tell, and telling it on the page lets us find who we are, where we've been and how we've found our way.

My passion for writing started when I was around seven, writing poetry. I never stopped writing, and I studied English literature and journalism.

As a writer, I've learnt to appreciate the beauty of witnessing my life through the words on a page. Through my own journey to happiness, I came up with the idea of starting my writing company, Room 206, which offers business writing services such as content writing, digital writing, editing and PR.

I also saw a gap in the market for writing workshops that would deliver a two-fold experience of creative confidence and inner healing to everyone who was open to it.

Write of Passage is a series of creative writing therapy workshops, where writers and non-writers use writing to heal and let go of the shackles that bind them to love, pain, people, places and their past.

I started my business on a leap of faith. I never

imagined that running your own business would be so daunting and overwhelming. Just deciding on a brand name was probably the biggest challenge of all!

I learnt very quickly how to sink, swim and run like a wild horse just to get it off the ground. It involved a lot of marketing, plenty of paperwork, and a lot less sleep. But, when you have a burning desire to manifest a vision, it becomes really difficult to concentrate on anything else. It's a very exciting process!

Write of Passage has opened a floodgate of engagement with so many interesting and beautiful people – even from corporate industries. I suppose there's just something magical about

breaking away from career confinement and diving into the unknown depths of your soul's ink!

'I started my business on a leap of faith'



Natasha's tips

If you want to start a new project, just go for it. Don't ever doubt yourself and the abilities you have to be magnificent at what you were born to do. In life, we only miss the shots we don't take. So pack a punch, believe in it, and watch the world take notice! Learn more at Writeofpassage.co or room206.co.za.



The party-planner

Sharon Choritz-Orleow, 33, lives in Waverley, Joburg, with her husband David, 37. She owns The Dash Boutique events company.

Before I started my business at the beginning of this year, I worked as an attorney.

While I was planning my wedding, I hired a wedding planner who happened to be an attorney before he became a planner. He'd been in the events industry for 15 years and was having such fun. When I saw how much he enjoyed it, it hit me: surely we're meant to love what we do? I'd always wanted to run my own business so, when I saw how much he loved his career, I took that as my cue. I enjoyed planning my wedding so much that it sparked the idea to start an events company.

I definitely needed some encouragement to take the leap, though, and a tremendous amount of support too! My husband David, has been my rock. He encouraged me everyday by reminding me that 'to get to second base, you have to take your foot off first.' His support was unwavering and relentless. He also left the corporate world for a new career, so he encouraged and guided me.

'I'd always wanted to run my own business'

Nine months of preparation and planning went into creating The Dash.

I had weekly meetings, made business cards, created a website, launched a social media platform, balanced balance sheets, joined mentorship programmes, and spoke to established entrepreneurs. And all of this while working as an attorney! But I poured my heart and soul into my business. It was a busy few months! Changing careers was a major challenge. I had to take my legal thinking cap off and had to think more creatively day to day.

The events industry is filled with a hubbub of people who use a completely different skill set to what I was used to. In this industry, it's not what you are or did that matters, but your last gig that counts!

Some people find the planning of an event an extremely stressful experience, and The Dash removes this element, giving them an event that they simply have to show up for! And we always make sure that no two events are alike. I love organising private dinners, boutique weddings and bridal showers, to mention a few.

I imagined I'd always work as an attorney, but life has all sorts of twists and turns! And now I love what I do. I'm a workaholic and I thrive on success. And I make sure to do the best I can every single day. You know what they say: if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. I love working with people and being creative every day. I love being my own boss because the mistakes I make are mine alone – and the successes too.

Sharon's tip

Only take the leap and leave the comfort of your job when your business has grown enough to demand your full attention. Learn more about The Dash at Thedash.co.za.

The DIY guru

Megan Kirchoff, 40, lives in Bryanston with her husband Chris and sons Benjamin and Jesse, 4, and Daniel, 3. Megan is the founder and CEO of the Tool Share Studio and a serial entrepreneur.

I grew up with a 'maker' dad. We were always in his garage making things for the house. He had all the machinery a guy could want. While visiting him last year I noticed his tools were unused. So I recruited a fellow maker, Paul Mackenzie, and took my dad's tools. That's when we came up with the idea for Tool Share Studio.

Before I started Tool Share Studio, I ran a learning solutions programme, which helped start more than 500 businesses and trained rural women on financial literacy. I kept coming across people with skills in their hands but not skills in their heads about how to start a business. They also didn't have the resources to buy the tools they needed to make products. It made sense to create a shared space and give people access to tools and mentorship to make them self-sufficient.

We spent a few months researching the market, and found a space in Randburg to set it up. In April, we established Tool Share Studio as a 'community garage' where people could share resources and space, and have fun. We offer people with skills such as woodworking and sewing the chance to use our tools, which reduces their capital expense. We provide access to tools such as hammers, saws and sewing machines. We help them to research their market, to use clever marketing, and to make the sale. We also provide a friendly space where people can learn new skills, and leave with a piece of furniture they made themselves. We believe in sharing resources and lowering our carbon footprint by recycling and up-cycling. My son Jesse was trying to understand what I do. 'So mom, if you have something old and ugly, you can fix it up and make it new again?', he asked. And that's exactly what we do. We also make bespoke furniture for people, and run courses for adults and kids, teaching them how to make furniture. I love helping people make something great out of their lives. We take young people who have enthusiasm and energy and ideas, and give them the tools and knowledge to start businesses.

The Tool Share Studio is a completely new idea in South Africa, and educating people about what we are doing is a slow process. But it's so rewarding that everyone who comes to the studio loves it and wants to stay. I'm passionate about helping others, and I've combined this with a passion for design. So it's a winner!

'I've combined two of my greatest passions!'

Megan's tips

Find the right partner for your business – they'll provide the support when you need it and share in the highs and lows. In terms of skills – confidence and a can-do attitude help when starting a business, as does an affinity for risk-taking. Learn more about Tool Share Studio at Toolshare.co.za.