



I made it as a music manager

Sheree O'Brien (28) from Joburg entered the house music scene at a time when it was predominantly male, and had to face sexism and harassment. She now manages some of the country's top recording artists.

the dream

I grew up in East London with a family who loved music and theatre. I dreamed of being on stage and becoming a huge star. Today, however, I create the stars you see on stage!

turning point

When I was fresh out of school my older brother was killed in a car crash. However, suffering in silence made me feel claustrophobic and I never wanted to be home. I started going to clubs as an escape. There I met, joined and toured with a well-known act. I then formed my own dance group. I hustled every promoter or corporate to book us and we became very popular. When we went our separate ways, I wanted to stay in the entertainment industry so I approached a previous client to let me organise entertainment for his club. I wanted to turn around East London's non-existent nightlife scene.

how I did it

I built up a reputation for co-ordinating events and promoting music and started hosting the big SA artists and record labels in the Eastern Cape. Soon everyone was coming calling. Among all the giant names I'd worked with, DJ Mbuso had not just seen a promoter in me, but a potential artist manager. He convinced me to manage him – I was 20 at the time, with no experience, managing a legend in the dance music scene!

stumbling blocks

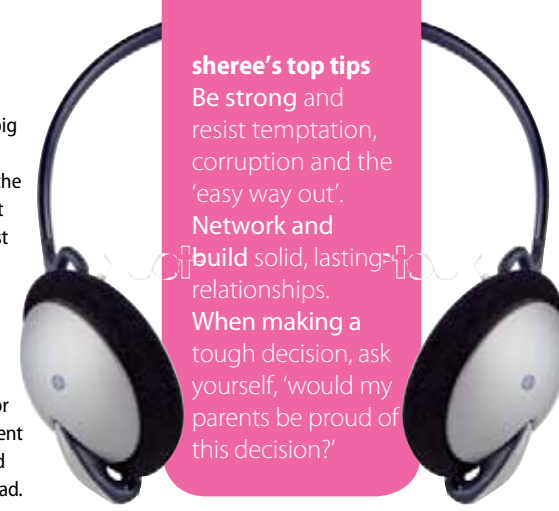
Earlier on, I got involved in a nationwide tour for a big pop group. I invested all I had, but things went wrong. I could only ensure the artists were looked after, while my business partners and I ate dry bread. We shared one room and were stuck with no money to even get back to East London. We managed to borrow enough for a train ticket but I lost my entire investment and had to start over again.

stereotypes and rumours

I was the first woman to promote music, particularly dance music, in South Africa. I was young with no formal qualifications so I was always underestimated. Male artists would hit on me and there would be rumours of 'sleeping her way to the top'. It took a lot of courage and I had to grow an extremely thick skin.

sheree's top tips

Be strong and resist temptation, corruption and the 'easy way out'. Network and build solid, lasting relationships. When making a tough decision, ask yourself, 'would my parents be proud of this decision?'



the pay-off

Today I'm the MD of Splakavellis Management. Before that I was marketing manager, head of artist development and distribution manager of Soul Candi Records (the largest house music imprint in Africa) for three years. Artists I managed previously include DJ Mbuso, Jub Jub, Relo, the late Brett Jackson and Noxolo Hlatshwayo. I now manage RJ Benjamin and DJ Giggs Superstar, on whose career I decided to focus.

blazing the trail

Two pioneering women show major hurdles can be overcome when you don't give up on your dream.



I bought a wine farm

Malmsey Rangaka (55), a former clinical psychologist in North West Province, left her secure job and bought a wine farm in 2003. M'hudi Wines in Stellenbosch released its first vintage two years later and today its wines are sold in a large retail chain as well as being exported.

the dream

I wanted to be part of a lifestyle that's still dominated by whites and to create a future for my children.

overcoming obstacles

Changing jobs was a huge step. Moving to the Cape meant I had to speak different languages like isiXhosa and Afrikaans – I had to learn Afrikaans in six weeks as I had to supervise workers who didn't speak any other language. I knew nothing about farming, let alone wine production. I didn't even drink wine, so it was a steep learning curve!

how I did it

I learned from the workers, neighbours and the internet. I also discovered it's better to build a brand than to sell wine. I first took our wines through competitions to establish their quality. Then I worked to put them in high-quality niche stores internationally as well as upmarket restaurants locally. After four years I got them on the shelves of a big local retailer. We build

relationships and work on them – and it pays off. There are government grants available and I use these mainly to participate in international trade shows. That's why it's become easier to market the wines for export. I was named Emerging Tourism Entrepreneur of the Year in 2010/11.

the pay-off

Working with my family is rewarding because they're committed to the business. The danger is overworking. We don't keep business hours – some of the best ideas come after hours.

how to get a grant

Identify the land you want to buy, or check with your local Provincial Land Reform office to find out about available land and apply for the grant at that office. You'll need a land-use proposal*; an option to sell with an agreed price if you're leasing with an option to buy; a list of household members or group members and their ID numbers if the proposal is for a group; and a valuation report.* Call Batho Pele government services on 1020 or email gatewaycc@sita.co.za for more information and to check if you qualify. *The office can assist you with these.

By: Setjhaba K. Maphalla. Photography: Jean Paul Veaudry, supplied