

EVEN THE BOLDEST BENEFIT FROM A HELPING HAND

As a teenager, Itumeleng Motlhale travelled alone to the University of the Free State (UFS) with nothing but his matric certificate and a plan to register for a course (any course). Now Internal Compliance Liaison Officer at Refuge Financial Services (and a graduate of UFS as well as the ASISA Academy Independent Financial Advisor (IFA) Internship), Itumeleng is quick to point out all the help he has received since then.

Hailing from Viljoenskroon, a small town about 3 hours' drive from Bloemfontein, Motlhale was raised by a single mother. She passed away when he was at university and his grandparents took over caring for him and his younger brother. While at school he did not apply to any universities, though he did apply to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) for funding, as everyone in his matric class was urged to do.

He heard that he had been provisionally funded while he was still writing matric. The day after receiving his matric certificate, he says, he "woke up before everyone else, hopped into a taxi and went to Bloemfontein" to register for university. He had "nothing in his backpack other than my certificate, my results".

He had heard that students went to the campus and queued to register so he made his way to the university in Bloemfontein and did just that. When he got to the front of the queue and was asked what he was registering for, he said medicine. He was told that he was too late to register for medicine, he would have to wait until the next year. That was when he saw a course titled "computer science", and "liked the sound of it".

As a second subject, he chose chemistry since "he had done well at physics at school". That was how he came to be registered for computer science and chemistry in his first year at university, 2017, which turned out to be "a terrible mistake".

While most students in the computer science class were learning about programming languages, Motlhale was learning how to operate a computer. "I needed to figure out what 'Shift' is and what it does. What is 'Caps Lock'? What is 'Tab'. It was a very daunting experience."

Chemistry was no better. He got the lowest mark and wasn't allowed to write the exam. That was a tough year. "There was a lot going on. My mom was very sick, going in and out of hospital," he says. "I was mad at God, but still going to church."



Itumeleng Motlhale works as an Internal Compliance Liaison Officer at Refuge Financial Services.

That was a good choice since it was at church that he met a couple who introduced him to the world of financial services. Melanie Ferreira (who worked for Allan Gray) introduced herself and her husband, Tinus, one day, and the three of them hit it off.

Soon, Ferreira, who was to become his mentor, invited him to an investment performance update hosted by Allan Gray. He remembers being fascinated, and it wasn't long before he decided to change course at university to study banking and investment management in his second year, 2018.

Ferreira continued to mentor him and invited him to meetings and events. It was through her assistance that Motlhale took courses at Allan Gray, including Allan Gray Continuous Learning Quarter 1, 2, 3 & 4 (2023) on FAIS exchange.

When Motlhale was in the final year of his B Com Investment Banking degree, Ferreira told him about the ASISA Academy IFA Internship, and urged him to apply. He was accepted into the programme and selected for sponsorship by Refuge Financial Services. He graduated from UFS in December 2021 and the IFA Internship started in 2022.

Trevor Tsupa, Financial planner at Refuge Financial Services, who supervised him during his internship, says it was his strength of character that first impressed him and Refuge Financial Services' CEO Choko Lechoano.

The internship started with a 2-week workplace readiness programme, which took place in Durban. Since ASISA helped Motlhale 'to fly', it seems appropriate that the organisation paid for his first ever plane ticket. He smiles when he tells the story about Ferreira, his mentor, planning to buy him his first plane ticket as a graduation gift, but the ASISA Academy getting there first.

Of the work readiness programme, Motlhale particularly remembers it giving him a basic understanding of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, how to deal with conflict, for instance.



"I still apply what I learned from the work readiness programme to my everyday activities and life at work today," says the 26-year-old Motlhale.

In early 2023, after he had completed his internship, working mostly in paraplanning, he was offered a full-time position at Refuge Financial Services.

"He is an incredible young man and a highly valued colleague," says Tsupa, his former supervisor, who adds that Motlhale has a work ethic and a level of professionalism and consistency "that a lot of young graduates do not possess".

Motlhale has since moved into the role of setting up internal compliance frameworks. He is really enjoying the challenge, even if he doesn't see himself staying in a compliance role for too long. He says working in compliance has taught him how important it is to have basics in place before you can really build a business. He hopes this will stand him in good stead when he comes to opening his own practice, which he hopes to do in the future.

Towards this end, Motlhale has recently joined the [ASISA IFA Practice Management Programme](#), an IFA development programme run by the ASISA Academy's sister organisation, the ASISA Enterprise and Supplier Development initiative. He was nominated and accepted earlier this year for the course, which is facilitated by Rob MacDonald from Fundhouse.

After a number of sessions with his mentor and his first 3-hour workshop with MacDonald, Motlhale said he was very excited by the material and even more committed to the industry. "I can't wait to cover other modules, including building value in your business, managing clients effectively, effective marketing and branding, systematisation and technology, people and culture and, lastly, making a business sustainable."

As for building blocks, he is busy with an important private assignment. His younger brother is finishing high school this year and he is helping him to identify his strengths and weaknesses so that he can make an informed choice about what to study, and not have travel that road alone.