

Plans to surf way around the world

ENTREPRENEUR AND CHANGE-MAKER: MASIMO A BADIMO MAGERMAN SHARES HIS LIFE

» **He's driven by an internal fire to create a company that delivers for the pensioners invested in it and which touches the lives of ordinary South Africans.**



Sasha Planting

When Mergence Africa Holdings hit R10 billion in assets under management, co-founder and MD Masimo A badimo Magerman took a four-month sabbatical in Nicaragua, where he surfed, fished and read in a local village.

“We are socialised to believe certain things – like blacks can't swim and whites can't dance. But I don't buy into that cultural stereotyping. I plan to surf my way around the world.”

The 2014 sabbatical was a chance to reflect on whether he was doing the right thing. “We launched Mergence in 2005 and I

can tell you building a business is hard ... At some point I needed to step back and affirm myself.”

As a boy, he collected empty bottles for cash in Soweto. At 20, he received a scholarship to attend Kean University in the US. After graduation, he worked as a financial data analyst on Wall Street. In 1997 he enrolled for an MBA (Finance) at Rutgers University and thereafter joined Merrill Lynch in London.

In 2000 he returned to SA to run an equity derivatives book at Gensec Bank, now Sanlam Capital Markets.

In 2004 he and Izak Petersen launched Mergence into a somewhat unwelcoming market – it took them two years to get a client. “Izak and I sold our houses. We lived on peanut butter sandwiches for three years.” Nowadays Mergence is a diversified investment management company with a capability across listed and unlisted investments. Its unlisted business is focused on infrastructure, renewable energy and commodity finance. The listed business is focused on equity investing and property management.

At a group level Mergence has grown its assets under management at a compound rate of 30% a year since 2005 – with the steep-

est growth in recent years. Its Mergence Equity Prescient Fund is the 7th best performer over five years out of 98 funds.

Magerman has no intention of taking another sabbatical. “... I know what I want and I'm loving what we are creating here.”

In his suit and tie with white sneakers Magerman cuts a charismatic, maverick figure, but he's driven by a fire to create a company that delivers for the pensioners invested in it and touches the lives of ordinary South Africans.

“When I go back to Alexandra I want people to respect what we do. Our investments must facilitate change – whether this is in job creation, education, housing, township malls or energy.”

Magerman's absorbed by people and how they relate to one another. “The rainbow nation was a myth. We had the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but we don't know each other, we haven't had the necessary conversations.”

He's initiated a series of deep dive diversity workshops for staff. Magerman hopes that by learning to remove their 'lenses', critical thinking will deepen. That, he says, is good for the individual, the company, and the country.

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