

LOUISE VAN RHYN

Louise van Rhyne is a social entrepreneur and founder of the Symphonia group of companies. She is an experienced change practitioner and is currently focusing most of her attention on the activities of Symphonia for South Africa, a non-profit organisation with a purpose: To strengthen the fabric of South African society. Find out more about Symphonia's work on www.symphonia.net.



WALKING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

We returned to South Africa in 2004 after almost six years in the UK. This was a big decision for us, as parents, but we wanted to bring our two beautiful daughters to the country we love so much.

We felt a strong sense of responsibility for acting against the advice of many who warned us about returning, but knew this decision would impel us to actively participate in building South Africa.

My doctoral research was focused on large-scale change and South Africa, with its many complex challenges, must be one of the best places in the world for any change practitioner. I often reflect on what an amazing privilege it is to live in a country where the contribution of active citizens counts so much. Previously we lived a very safe and comfortable life but in many ways it was quite bland and boring. Now back home, because of my personal commitment to actively engaging with the issues facing our country, I feel I'm living a life of meaning and contribution.

The first thing that struck me on my return to South Africa was how much negativity there was in conversation and in the media. When we invited Ben and Roz Zander (the authors of *The Art of Possibility*) to South Africa in 2008, our hope was to re-ignite the conversation of 'possibility' in South Africa. We recently released the *South Africa: Alive with Possibility* DVD to spread the message. It's amazing how many people have been touched or inspired by this message.

When the *Dinokeng Scenarios* (a discussion around South Africa's way forward) were released in May 2009, I felt called to action in a very specific way. The initiative looks at the three possible futures for South Africa: *Walk Apart*, *Walk Behind* and *Walk Together*. I was inspired to become even more actively involved to see if I could make the *Walk Together* scenario a

reality. This led to me to challenging and meaningful conversations with some of the most inspiring people in our country: Dr Mamphele Ramphele, Professor Jonathan Jansen and Professor Brian O'Connell. These elders and many others helped me to identify education as the most significant challenge facing our country and the area where we most need business, government and civil society to *Walk Together*.

This led to the *School @ the Centre of Community* initiative. The project unites business leaders with school principals in a co-learning partnership (as part of a leadership development process). We know the best way to develop leadership skills is to expose leaders to dealing with complex challenges in unfamiliar territory. The business leaders (we call them "Partners for Possibility") and School Principals (the "Principals for Possibility") have a specific and challenging task: To mobilise parents and other citizens around the school to become actively involved in the activities of the school.

Being involved in this project has been one of the most meaningful things I have ever done. My life has been touched by my partnership with Ridwan Samodien, my principal partner at Kannemeyer Primary School. What has become even more rewarding is to see the impact the programme is having on those who have signed up to be Partners for Possibility and Principals for Possibility. All over the country schools are becoming *Alive with Possibility* as principals are re-discovering their capacity to be leaders in their community. Through this work business leaders everywhere are being challenged about their contribution to making South Africa work. ■

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