

Superbalist co-founder and former COO, **Mikael Hanan**, makes the case for getting away from your regular place of business and taking the work headspace into new and unexpected places.

**B**eing a business leader isn't easy. We implement our best guesses, we ask others, we read, we use historical data. We aim to get it right most of the time, learning from our mistakes. So, what are some of the tools that support us to be better?

One way I have found is to engage with the world outside of our regular business interactions and routine; through travel; conferencing; and also short periods of remote working. Naturally, international flights, time and costs come to mind, but this is not the only way to get away. Local travel is equally productive, if not even more valuable as a means of better understanding South African customers and staff. I have found that travel and movement out of the office not only provides a novel context for my work, but also allows for creativity development and input of new perspectives on ideas from people outside my usual circle. All this is especially

# Escape

the everyday

important if you are part of an industry that continuously develops and strives for perfection, as most of us are.

One of the most reassuring realisations from completing my MBA, travelling the world, as well as spending time working remotely with corporate managers, academics and entrepreneurs, is the context our many discussions gave me. These interactions outside my regular setting have challenged me from a different perspective, both culturally and in the context of business. They have enabled me to reach alternative realisations or consider new ideas. They help me – months down the line – to recognise when more work needs to be done on a project or whether what my team and I are producing is good enough and of a global standard. Plus, these out-of-office encounters can present points of view that I would never otherwise have considered.

All of this provides greater context for my decision-making process. For me this is valuable as we find ourselves globally connected, but geographically isolated at the tip of Africa, leading businesses with a first-world developed mindset in a mixed first/third-world developing economy.

The challenge we have is to shift from remaining in the same circle of interaction

we have become accustomed to and escape the everyday to go interact with the world. It is convenient and easy to remain in the same holding pattern. We know almost all the views and where the blind spots are. But to be vulnerable, to allow for a different and altogether new context, is not always easy to do. Especially if you exist within the context of a small or inward-looking tribe. Which is why leaving your normal routine and getting away from your comfort zone is the best way I know to shift from a repetitive point of view, gain new context, and develop original ideas in order to make more informed decisions.

*By escaping the everyday, travelling and engaging with people outside our regular tribe, our networks and knowledge inevitably mature.*

Doing this does not necessarily require expensive flights to Europe, Asia or the US of A. Start locally, make an effort to engage with a new perspective by getting out of the office to disrupt the routine.

We naturally share knowledge and learn from those within our workspace and social networks. As we strive to increase our

knowledge and be better, a common way we do this is through network expansions. By escaping the everyday, travelling and engaging with people outside our regular tribe, our networks and knowledge inevitably mature.

As with all things we have a choice, the choice to stick with the same formula or to shift when the time requires change. And don't forget about your team. Encourage the people you work with to travel and escape the routine, so that they too can gain additional context, become more knowledgeable, and become better at developing their ideas.

And, finally, do not make the excuse of claiming you cannot make time to step outside the office to travel because your team will not cope without you during those days or weeks you're away. Because if you do, it simply means that you're either hiring badly, or scheduling your time incorrectly. Either way, that's a topic for another day. ■

## DISRUPT YOUR ROUTINE

As a current or future business leader, it's essential to get out there and see the world beyond your office. Escape the everyday in order to discover new insights and unexpected perspectives on the work you are spearheading. You are an innovator, after all. To assist you in making next years' strategy better than the last, you need to explore the world. It's worth creating a space outside the office that facilitates the development of your original ideas.

If I ask you where you were when you came up with your last original strategy or idea, I'd suspect with some certainty that you were not at your desk. You were away from your office,

on the road comparing your product to a competitor's discussing concepts with a fellow business leader at a conference or in a state of flow while engaging in your hobby. Through this change of scene, out of the office, you found a space to think about your business or project from an unusual perspective and different mindset. So why not allow for more of this to happen? Few of us can present next year's strategy to the board with short preparation time. We usually need to build it up, gather data and contemplate options to set the right course all while maintaining our regular duties. You know it is coming, so why wait? Why not establish spaces to develop your strategy,

where you can allow for your strongest ideas to be envisaged? Knowingly setting periods of time aside to shift from your regular routine to thinking about your business in a non-conventional environment. Ultimately you can expand your thoughts, test them within a specific context and keep the winners. Habitually we may 'brute-force' a solution by applying our mind to a specific scenario, but I do not believe this is where originality and creativity shines. I have found that by escaping the regular pattern we put ourselves in, I have been able to develop some of my strongest original and creative ideas for future planning as well as problem solving.