

# SAGE INTERN WHO TAKES IT ALL IN HIS STRIDE

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he triumph of the human spirit over adversity is epitomised by the story of Denver van der Bergh.

After many years of personal struggles, Van der Bergh, who hails from Athlone on the Cape Flats, turned his life around after being given an ultimatum by his then boss in the hospitality industry to be fired or to get his life on track.

In the four years since he chose the latter, Van der Bergh has completed a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) Finance degree at TSiBA, a Cape Town-based not-for-profit higher education institution, and, with the help of the ASISA Academy, landed a two-year graduate internship with Coronation Fund Managers.

In his second year at TSiBA, Van der Bergh showed an interest in building a career in the savings and investment industry and was selected to participate in the ASISA Academy IMACS@TSiBA Internship. These students are required to participate in the IMACS@TSiBA Internship over 12 months while completing their BBA degrees. Those who complete all their courses proceed to intern at their host sponsors for four months in the final semester of their studies. Students who impress their host companies during the internship may be offered permanent employment or a longer graduate internship. The latter is what happened to Van der Bergh.



Denver van der Bergh and his family at the TSiBA Graduation in March 2024.

With the help of TSiBA and the ASISA Academy, he has achieved so much on his four-year journey of healing that he now exudes the wisdom of a sage alongside the enthusiasm of an intern. He credits the IMACS@TSiBA Internship for getting him work-ready: “You get a taste of the real world before you step into it.”

Samantha Achilles, Client Services Team Leader at Coronation Fund Managers, says when she interviewed Van der Bergh, she was immediately impressed by both his maturity and his willingness to start again.

She saw resilience, “that he could bounce back from everything he had been through”, and humility in “being happy to start at the bottom in a new industry”. She adds that his discipline and humility shine through in everything he does: “He uses every bit of feedback he gets to see where he can improve.”

“Sometimes I forget that he is still learning; that he is still an intern,” adds Achilles.

Van der Bergh tells the story of when he started his journey at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The isolation during lockdown threatened to destabilise everything he had achieved during therapy. To avoid “everything going down the drain”, he decided to make his new life a mirror of life in therapy.

He would wake up early and sit down for a proper breakfast. He made time for exercise and meditation, as well as watching motivational videos. He also dedicated time to looking for opportunities to better himself and taking practical steps to get his life back on track. He got a driving licence. He applied for a replacement copy of his matric certificate, which had been lost over the years, and renewed his CV.

He had done well in high school, but a lack of funds and opportunity had denied him the chance to go further than matric. Now, starting his life afresh, he was determined to get back into the education system somehow. He went online and applied to as many places as he could.

He had all but forgotten about applying to TSiBA when someone from the university called him and asked if he wanted to join a degree course. He was hesitant because he “didn't have much money” and was delighted when he was told that he didn't have to pay for his studies.

He describes that time in his life as “one of those phases where you decide to make your life better, and the universe conspires to push you forward”.

That is how Van der Bergh found himself starting his business degree at the age of 44, worrying about how he was going to “reignite this old brain”. He didn’t have to worry, as it turned out. On completing his degree, he was honoured with the 2024 Graham Lashbrooke Award for outstanding academic achievements in entrepreneurship and leadership.

Signing up for the ASISA Academy IMACS@TSiBA Internship, was another solid stepping stone on his road to success. Van der Bergh found the lessons delivered by professionals in the industry to be game-changing, especially for students from his sort of background who previously “didn't know anything about the investment world whatsoever”.

This lack of familiarity with this key tool of wealth creation is something that Van der Bergh is inspired to change for others in his community. He sees his parents’ generation struggling to survive on their state pension. He hopes that, in time, he will be able to share what he has learnt about investing to change people’s perspectives and help to improve their financial outcomes.

Before joining the IMACS@TSiBA Internship, Van der Bergh says he had put successful people on a pedestal and considered himself a failure. By bringing in successful professionals and teaching him how to converse with them, the ASISA Academy gave him confidence, he says. It also taught him that his idols were human and probably also started at the bottom.

Van der Bergh says he wants to continue his studies to become a Certified Financial Planner and has already planted the seed with his managers at Coronation Fund Managers.

Another of his dreams that was born when he was reinventing himself was to run the Comrades Marathon, which he is planning to do in June. The marathon has also become the subject of a book that he is writing.

When he was looking for ways to improve himself during Covid, he taught himself to touch-type. Once he had completed the theory, he looked for ways to practice and came up with the idea of writing a book. He started the book (working title: How Hard Could It Be?) about his “big, hairy, audacious goal of going from ‘ground zero’ to running 80km”.

He is not worried that he won’t make it; he just hopes that he will be able “to enjoy most of it”.

He has been training for three and a half years, and this year’s Two Oceans Marathon, his second, was basically a warm-up for the Comrades. He had a really good run, he says, and he beat his previous time by almost half an hour.

The book is almost finished, but he wants to complete the Comrades Marathon before saying that the job is done. “It's basically me having that goal of the Comrades to drive me and keep me motivated and focused on my studies and my purpose. Once I cross that finish line, I will complete the book.”



**Denver van der Bergh and his siblings celebrate after he completed the 2024 Two Oceans Marathon.**