



HOW SHE DID IT

DOMESTIC BLISS

Former molecular geneticist Aisha Pandor shares how a dilemma planted the seed for success for her domestic-help business. **By Yusrah Julius**

While completing her PhD in human genetics, Aisha Pandor became frustrated with the slow pace of the academic field. In her last year she added a business course from the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business and graduated with a PhD and a business qualification.

A PROBLEM LEADS TO AN IDEA

In 2013, while on holiday in Cape Town, Aisha and her husband struggled to find someone to clean the house they were staying in. 'We began by looking at newspaper

classifieds and on websites such as Gumtree and OLX. We noticed so many inefficiencies with this process because it didn't tell us when the person was available, what their rate was and which areas they serviced. We would have to go through the time-consuming process of interviewing possible candidates before finding someone who suited us. We eventually went to an agency and found that most of the cleaners were poorly paid and badly treated. At that point we realised that based on our experience as well as that of

AISHA PANDOR

Age: 31

Current home: Cape Town

Family: Husband Alen and daughter Ajla

Favourite way to unwind: Yoga and reading

Go-to gadget or tool: A to-do-list app

Wishes she had more time to: Spend with my daughter

What she loves most about her job: The people we work with

Website: sweepsouth.com

the cleaners, there was an opportunity to shake up the industry using technology.'

DOING THE RESEARCH

Aisha had the idea of creating a safe, reliable and hassle-free way to connect people with professional home cleaners using technology. She decided to do some research before turning her idea into a business. 'We sent a survey to about 50 of our friends to find out whether they would be interested in using this kind of service. We wanted to know their thoughts on the industry, what has been their experience and how much they'd be willing to pay. The response was overwhelming and most of them felt that the industry isn't working and that domestic workers aren't treated fairly. At this point we knew we were onto something.'

POLISHING THE IDEA

Aisha and her husband, Alen, who is a software developer, quit their jobs and started building the website themselves to test the concept. They had to create a platform that made it easy for their customers to select when they needed a cleaner, to choose the household tasks that needed to

be completed and to be able to pay for the booking, all within minutes, using a laptop, tablet or cellphone. 'We were lucky in that we could rely on Alen's skills to build the website, which saved us hundreds of thousands of rands. We started building the website towards the end of January 2014 and officially launched SweepSouth on 1 June that same year. It was very slow in the beginning, but eventually we started getting customers and people started inquiring about the service.' Word soon spread and interested domestic workers began queuing outside their home.

LEARNING TO TRUST

'I've had to learn to work with very different people and trust that the people I hired would run the business in the way that I envisioned it,' says Aisha. She soon realised that micromanaging her staff wasn't working. 'I learnt that you have to give people the freedom to do the job you hired them to do.'

GROWING PAINS AND SETTING TARGETS

'We had to be careful about pushing the company's growth at the expense of our own mental and physical capabilities. We've now set six- and 12-month targets so that we reach our goals without doing so at the expense of everyone's wellbeing.'

SWEEPING SUCCESS

Overall, Aisha says that one of the biggest victories for her is seeing the company grow from an idea to the business it is today. 'We are now a staff of 15 people with 1 000 cleaners on our database. We've received funding, which means that there is someone out there who is willing to put down money and invest in the company and sees it as something that has a future as a business in the long term.' **GH**