

Here's an example of how **tenacity and determination** can overcome great odds, showing his iconic traits

**I** decided I must go into business because I realised I must do something with this precious life, that I have only one chance to live," says Herman Mashaba.

This week, **21 Icons** shines the spotlight on our third Icon in the second series, entrepreneur and philanthropist Herman Mashaba. As founder of the revolutionary ethnic hair care company Black Like Me, Mashaba is not only an influential and inspiring businessman, he also stands as an example of how tenacity and determination can overcome great odds, which demonstrates his iconic traits.

Listening to Mashaba's story - of a child raised by a mother who earned barely enough cleaning houses to feed her children - we are struck by his refusal to let his circumstances define or confine him. "It's all about mind-set," he insists.

His mind-set is proactive - he is constantly alert to opportunity. This is how, at the age of 24, the young man who had only visited a hair salon once came to start a company that is today worth billions and has become known as an aspirational and motivating brand in the black community. Black Like Me is as much a market leader today as when it was established almost 30 years ago - yet its beginnings were markedly humble.

"I started my career as a sales rep, selling products for different companies from my car boot on a commission basis. That's how I came across this fantastic opportunity to get into hair care products - I noticed hair salons springing up all over the townships, villages and cities. Black women were starting to take care of their hair and I realised this was going to be the market of the future."

Mashaba's story is an example of one man becoming master of his own destiny - something he believes we all can, and should, do. He maintains that we can't rely on government to turn our lives into a success, they should provide an enabling environment, but it's up to us to make the most of what we've been given.

That's why Mashaba urges today's youth to see education as the key to a better life. He says: "You need to use your education because that's what's going to give you the mental capacity to change your circumstances."

Hard work is equally important. Mashaba says there are no short cuts and that without sacrifice, you can never expect to succeed in any area of your life.

21 Icons perceives that vigilance is another hallmark of his philosophy.

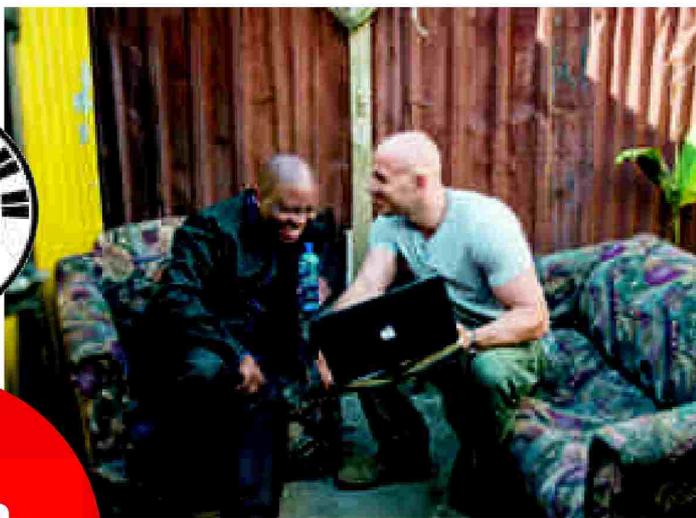
Mashaba learnt this lesson the hard way, when, in 1993, the state-of-the-art factory he had just built was torched by an arsonist. Devastating though this event was, Mashaba chose to see it as a wake-up call; a lesson that life must not be taken for granted. It also cemented in his mind the importance of taking a proactive stance; it's the difference between determining your future or letting your future determine you.

The future is something Mashaba is keenly aware of - his family's future, for a

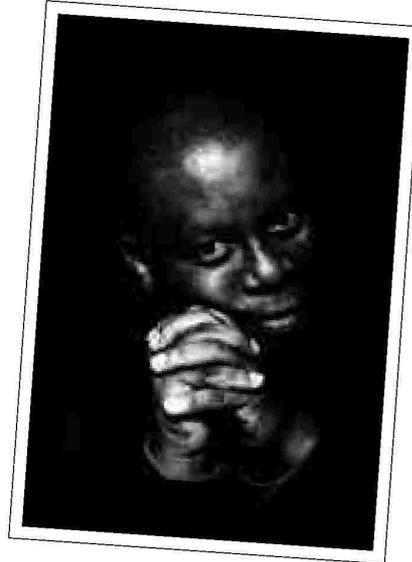


HELLO Adrian Steirn meets Herman Mashaba ahead of the 21 Icons project shoot

# Black like *Herman Mashaba*



**SNAPPED**  
Herman Mashaba and Adrian Steirn (left) share a light moment. Adrian Steirn photographs Herman Mashaba (right) for the project  
LOCATION  
PHOTOS: GARY VAN WYK



**STRIKE A POSE**  
Adrian Steirn gets Herman Mashaba ready for his photoshoot

start. Family and community remain front and centre in his heart and mind.

That's an interesting view for a businessman, especially one who has invested so much in his business. But Mashaba says the company is simply the vehicle that allows him to provide his family with the things they need. He's

committed to helping other entrepreneurs achieve the same success. To this end, he established an investment company that provides finance for small businesses.

But his passion is in serving South Africa. Now that he's not actively involved in Black Like Me operations, he spends most of his time - when he's not golfing or

playing the piano - facilitating NGOs that represent causes close to his heart.

One such organisation is the Field Band Foundation, an initiative that uses music to teach children life skills. The organisation reaches more than 5 000 children throughout the country.

For Mashaba, it is the men and women who make causes like the foundation successful who are the true South African icons.

"There are so many South Africans, black and white, who might not have high profiles but who are doing beautiful things every day to help our society," he says.

For him, that's the most important job anyone can do. "To me, being South African means being a human being. It means having a role to play in our beautiful country."

● **Watch The Herman Mashaba documentary on SABC3 at 8.27pm today**  
● **For more information, visit [www.21icons.com](http://www.21icons.com)**

Download Zappar from your app store, zap the icon and see more on the documentary