



ADDING PURPOSE TO PASSION

Ariane de Bonvoisin's initiative, TheFirst30Days, aims to help people find a sense of direction and enthusiasm

Inside the theatre of the Guga S'Thebe Arts & Culture Centre in Langa, Cape Town, seated on a random array of bean bags, chairs and stools, are a group of young social entrepreneurs participating in Red Bull's Amaphiko Academy, which aims to provide them with the tools and skills to develop and elevate their individual projects, as well as inspire them to interact with leading thinkers.

De Bonvoisin (43), the founder and CEO of TheFirst30Days, personally undertook the journey these young entrepreneurs are on just over a decade ago. To do so, she walked away from a very lucrative job running Time Warner's \$500 million digital media venture fund.

"I was taught that you should play safe, get a good job, marry the right guy and have two or three children. I finished high school at 16, graduated at the top of my

class at the London School of Economics and was the youngest person ever to complete an MBA at Stanford University in the USA," she recalls.

However, something was missing that she couldn't ignore. "A voice inside me kept saying: 'You're in the wrong job' and: 'You're sleeping with the wrong guy.'"

The tipping point was a press release announcing her new position at Time Warner, which detailed her accomplishments and what she'd be bringing to the job.

"It should have stated that Ariane de Bonvoisin opens schools, changes the world and the like. The woman the world, my family and friends saw wasn't who I wanted to be. I felt I should be doing something more purpose-driven. There was a lack of meaning in my life," she says.

After leaving her job, she travelled a lot

and came to the realisation that, although change is a constant in life, most people regard it as negative and threatening. She interviewed more than 1 000 people on what change meant to them, thus gaining a better understanding of the changes she herself was experiencing.

"I've learnt not to ask for approval or seek validation from anyone else. Your family and friends want you to stay 'who you are'. I only told my father about the transformation in my life a year later.

"I've now become my own best friend. When I'm aligned with my truth, there's no need to prove anything to anyone."

TheFirst30Days involves De Bonvoisin writing, speaking and offering personal coaching to individuals. Clients are charged per hour, with discounts for groups, and she offers reduced fees to charities and schools. She also gives talks for companies, runs seminars and recently created an app called Mindful365.

Her biggest initial challenge, she says, was finding capital for the initiative. She used her own money to launch the website and app, with friends, family, Hearst and the New York City Investment Fund raising \$5 million to launch TheFirst30Days. Other challenges were hiring the wrong people, failing to heed her gut instincts (which cost her dearly) and focusing more on the logo, the website and public relations than on the business itself.

She's currently based in Cape Town, with her husband and two-year-old son, but does a lot of work in the USA and Europe.

She's keen to help people embrace change as a positive, essential experience and move from fearfulness to confidence. "We live in a friendly universe and if you really believe that good things will come to you, they will," she says.

During her stint in the corporate environment, De Bonvoisin always asked the following questions when interacting with entrepreneurs: "Is it going to make money? Will it make a difference to your customers' lives? Is there a need in the market for it?" Today she still asks those questions, but adds another crucial one: "Will this business enhance your inner sense of meaning and energise you?"

Helping others find their passion will also lead them to their purpose, she says.

– **Kojo Baffoe** ■