

## MY GEAP Story

In April 2022 I attended the PMCB Race Day in Pietermaritzburg. Little did I know that this would begin what has truly become a special part of my life and business. A while prior I had received an email about a programme being facilitated by PMCB, the Global Export Accelerator Program. I had dismissed it, assuming that I probably wasn't the type of business which would be accepted, and it probably wouldn't be that beneficial anyway. At the race-day, I briefly spoke with Thabisile Ngidi who asked why I hadn't submitted my application yet. I explained my reservations; and after some prodding, the guarantee of having nothing to lose, and the promise that Shân Cade loved my coffee; I decided to put in my application.

On Tuesday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, I was invited to PMCB for a panel interview. I was definitely a little nervous, especially knowing my business wasn't exactly ready to export, but I put on my best smile and dived in head-first. Soon enough I was attending session with the rest of the successful GEAP applicants. There were a few familiar faces, but overall I was pleasantly surprised to meet a group of exceptional human beings who brought a variety of skills, knowledge, and insight to the programme... along with an exceptional group of trainers. The programme taught more than just business skills. From Shari's "I'm okay" circle, to the enthusiastic language based talk by Nicky Grieshaber, there was much to be learned as a person and as an entrepreneur. My personal favourite was the day long session by the team from FNB. They introduced us to tools which will be invaluable to my business in both local and international trade.

This GEAP journey has helped lay bare various aspects in which my business can improve. As a small, family owned and operated business, there is very little in the way of process documentation, and even overall organisation. Slowly but surely, we are beginning to address these matters. Another challenge was communication and interaction with my mentor. I know he is a busy man, but certainly I take my fair share of the blame too. There is much value in this relationship, so whether the mentor - mentee relationship continues or not, he is undoubtedly another connection for which I am grateful to GEAP.

There have been wins along the way too; not least the personal relationships and connections made through GEAP. But more than that, since joining the programme, I have begun adjusting my way of thinking, and operating to facilitate personal and business growth. "It's all about the thinking," as Shân loves to say. Francois of TIKZN helped us identify promising markets on the African continent, which will no doubt be our first targets once we are ready to export. During the course of the programme WillowBrew has been part of various events which have yielded the desired profits and exposure, along with opening 1 permanent and 1 semi-permanent coffee bar in the Pietermaritzburg area. Of course, these are non-export related wins, but I would be foolish not to attribute at least some of the success to the influence of GEAP.

Now with bated breath I await the upcoming port tour, along with various other sessions which I'm sure will continue adding value. I can't wait! Onwards, and upwards!