



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHERE SHE'S BEEN Dr Felicia Mabuza-Suttle was the first person to have a local talk show named after her. Now she's ventured onto the international stage and hosts *Conversations With Felicia* on The Africa Channel, which airs in the USA, the UK and the Caribbean. She also runs several businesses.

WHAT SHE'S ACHIEVED Mabuza-Suttle has published *Dare to Dream*, while *Living my Dream* and *Dare to Succeed Against All Odds* are expected to appear by year-end. She's the President and co-owner of Leadership Success International (LSI), which specialises in leadership communications and employee motivation, and has shared a stage with internationally acclaimed motivational gurus such as Tom Peters and Peter Drucker, as well as with former US President Bill Clinton.

HER ROLE MODELS Her grandfather Ben Mabuza, the first black man to own restaurants in downtown Johannesburg prior to the passing of the infamous Group Areas Act; Marina Maponya; the late iconic songbird and activist Miriam Makeba; Oprah Winfrey and American media personality Barbara Walters.

Making HER MARK

As a child, Dr Felicia Mabuza-Suttle dreamed of leaving Dube, Soweto to live the American Dream. And, in many ways, that's precisely what she's done. She was among the first (and most successful) media name brands to be exported from local shores and has gained iconic status among millions of other women. Yet she believes she's still to make the mark that will define her legacy

“I’m a DIVA – Divinely Inspired and Victoriously Anointed,” says Mabuza-Suttle. And it’s difficult not to agree, given her spectacular success as an international talk show hostess, author, restaurateur, MC and award-winning businesswoman who was one of the founders of Pamodzi Investment Holdings. She has an eclectic array of corporate interests – not to mention her role as “unofficial ambassadress” of SA in the USA.

Felicia Mabuza’s media career began soon after matriculating with a stint at the *World* newspaper. During the Seventies, she went to study at Marquette University in the USA, gaining first a BA in journalism and then an MA in communications. After graduating, she met and married marketing executive Earl Suttle in 1976. The couple eventually settled in Atlanta, Georgia (on whose City Council Mabuza-Suttle worked) with their two daughters.

She returned to SA during the Eighties for a brief stint as an on-air hostess for (then) Radio Bophu-

thatswana. During the Nineties, however, SA’s first democratically elected President, Nelson Mandela, issued a clarion call to all South Africans living abroad to come back and contribute their skills to developing their homeland. Mabuza-Suttle answered the call with gusto, returning to take up the reins as Vice-President of Corporate Affairs with South African Airways.

She changed career direction, however, upon being invited to become the country’s first-ever TV talk show hostess on NNTV’s *Top Level*. (The channel later became SABC1.)

Before long, her red lips, *chutzipah* and slight American twang had become signature features, aggravating some, but endearing her to millions of others. Mabuza-Suttle proved to be a natural for the job, getting South Africans of all colours, cultures, ages, political persuasions and economic levels to debate issues of national and social interest – often with dramatic and heated results. So strongly did she imprint her personal ►



THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT FELICIA

- She hates shopping, but loves good clothes and wears mostly Escada and Laurel.
- She's a good cook who makes an "amazing" lasagne.
- She was part of the team that led the transformation drive at SAA, firstly by changing its corporate colours and then by getting more black pilots.
- Back in Soweto, she started a dance class attended by people like former Metro FM DJ Shado Twala.
- She loves the sea and has homes in both Cape Town and Miami, Florida, USA.
- She'd love to have dinner with President Jacob Zuma, so they could discuss ways of leveraging SA's image in the USA.

brand on the show that it was renamed *The Felicia Show*, and was subsequently taken over by e.tv.

Today – nine years after the show ended its run – she's still inundated with fan mail from viewers. Mabuza-Suttle says the talk show's most compelling element was its authenticity as a mouthpiece for ordinary South Africans. "They were about real people, women who're abused and children who're molested. It was 'come as you are'. We had everyone on it, from Mama Miriam Makeba to funeral undertakers, and there were often emotions flying. We also had the Manhattans and the Temptations sharing a stage for the first time!"

Juggling a successful TV career in SA and a family across the Atlantic for over 12 years was far from easy, she admits – but she has

no regrets. "To succeed in life, there must be some sacrifices. The challenges were many, including missing my daughters. I missed their tennis tournaments and beauty pageants, but not their graduations. As my husband says, during those years he and the girls had to go home each day to a 'cold bed': a house isn't a home without a wife and mother. But the results today have been worthwhile."

Mabuza-Suttle's remarkable success as a talk show hostess is remembered not just by her devoted public, but by friends like veteran businesswoman Dr Anna Mokgokong, who recalls: "She was one of the pioneering black women who were brave and tenacious enough to enter the economic mainstream of the media industry when the barriers of entry were high. By owning and promoting

her own show, which got South Africans talking and thinking, she touched the hearts of multitudes. We were saddened when her show was discontinued. One wonders why, as it had made an impact on many souls. But she's now sprung back into action in New York, where she's making her mark."

Carol Bouwer, CEO of Carol Bouwer Productions (and former DESTINY cover star), agrees that Mabuza-Suttle was ahead of her time. "It's only now that many of us are beginning to understand the role she played in affirming us as young women. Felicia hit the screens when we weren't even close to recovering from [apartheid era] 'Bantu television' and she was glamorous, confident and informed. For many this was refreshing, but for others, it felt like a confrontation – they thought she didn't know her place," she says.

"People like me, and many other young female producers, wouldn't have the voice we now have in media if Felicia hadn't taken the knocks she took. She's a pioneer – a fearless go-getter who stands head and shoulders above the others. And it obviously hasn't hurt that she's gorgeous and gets more beautiful each time we see her!"

Indeed, Mabuza-Suttle doesn't seem to have aged a day since her reign as TV's chat show queen. Having jetted into Johannes-

PHOTOGRAPHER: NICK BOULTON. HAIR & MAKE-UP: FAITH SEOU. CHAIR: EN STYLE

burg from Miami, USA, for a board meeting with Pamodzi Investment Holdings, she arrives for her interview with DESTINY looking as elegant and relaxed as ever in black trousers, a crisp white blouse and a fiery-red pashmina. Neither has she lost her knack for making others feel at ease.

“I’m a doer, not a dreamer”, she says, wiping her hands with a wet white napkin – a habit she picked up during a long-ago stint as an x-ray technician. “I make my passion my mission – and my passion is my country and its young people.

“My goal is to start a Dare to Dream Academy, aimed at creating future leaders. Like me, they should dare to dream, and the academy would give them the exposure to help them realise those dreams,” she says. The concept, she adds, was inspired by the work she did with potential young leaders in America, and the realisation that South African youngsters needed the same initiative. She’s currently attempting to persuade her Pamodzi business associates to come on board with the Dare to Dream project.

Mabuza-Suttle was one of the first people to invest in Ndaba Ntsele and Solly Sithole’s Pamodzi Investment Holdings. The company was started in 1996 with R1,9 million, and is today worth \$1,2 billion (about R9 billion).

Apart from being a shareholder in the organisation, Mabuza-Suttle’s present role in the company is to use her media, marketing and public relations expertise on its behalf. She regrets not being around to do PR damage control for Pamodzi Gold when it was beset by difficulties early last year.

Her involvement with Pamodzi, she says, is an ongoing learning process. “It’s all about understanding the business, which means reading and preparing for board meetings.”

Her soon-to-be-released book, *Living My Dream*, she says, will hopefully inspire readers to follow her lead of seizing opportunities and realising their full potential. “[For me], living my dream is about doing what I want, when I want, with whoever I want. I swore that by the age of 55, I’d be marching to the beat of my own drum.” And so she is – notably as the hostess of *Conversations With Felicia*, which is gaining her as many followers abroad as her first talk show gained

her in this country. “I enjoy the international stage,” she says. “It gives me a bigger platform from which to change negative perceptions about Africa.”

And, certainly, when it comes to changing perceptions, few South Africans have Mabuza-Suttle’s credibility. “She’s one of the most powerful people to come out of this country,” says businessman Mandla Sibeko. “You’ll be walking in New York with her and people will come up and ask: ‘You’re from SA, aren’t you?’ Just the other day, we walked into a New York hotel for breakfast and Chris Gardner [on whose life the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness* was based] screamed her name out. Everyone knows her.”

Apart from her achievements in media and business, Mabuza-Suttle has also achieved success in other industries. She served as President of SA Tourism in the USA, where she helped promote SA as a travel destination. She’s also a partner in the Back o’ the

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Moon Restaurant at Gold Reef City, which opened in 1990 and captures the spirit of Sophiatown in its menu and ambience. The restaurant will soon be opening in Sandton and New York City.

In addition, she’s launched her own clothing and cosmetics line, as well as Felicia Eyewear, which is manufactured in Italy (where it’s reportedly outselling most local brands). The range is available in Atlanta and will soon be launched in Detroit and Chicago, USA.

How does Mabuza-Suttle juggle so many diverse interests without compromising her high standards of excellence? “I believe you need to hire people who’re smarter and better than you are in order to succeed in business. McDonald’s hires the best franchisees who have vision, passion and expertise. For the restaurant, I looked for partners who knew the business better than I did and who’ve had extensive experience.”

Mabuza-Suttle holds a PhD from the

University of Berkley, USA, and her accomplishments have earned her an impressive list of accolades, including the 1995 *Star/Agfa* Award for Most Popular TV Personality, the 1999 Ralph Metcalfe and 2000 All University Alumni Merit Awards from Marquette University, the 2000 *Vivid* People’s Choice Awards for both Entertainment and Humanitarianism, the 2001 Soweto Legends Award, the 2001 Prestige *Rapport* and *City Press* Achievers Award, and Businesswoman of the Year in 2001.

Says Thebe Ikalafeng, a brand guru in his own right who met Mabuza-Suttle while studying overseas: “As a brand, she’s unchallenged. Although she’s been out of SA for almost 10 years, the lasting impressions she created still keep her relevant today. Some say she’s difficult, inaccessible and ‘un-Suttle’, so to speak – but all brands develop by design or default. Felicia understood that and used both the media and oppor-

tunities in an emerging new SA to enhance and develop her brand. That takes guts.”

Mabuza-Suttle says the most important lesson she’s learnt in business is knowing who to trust. “I

can take and shake off negativity, but I’ve had to learn to overcome hurt and betrayal by my most trusted family member,” she says.

Given her admirable ability to rise above challenges and her spectacular success in so many fields, it seems this diva is, indeed, divinely inspired.

MABUZA-SUTTLE’S SUCCESS SECRETS

- Strive to achieve a different PhD – that of Passion, Hunger and Drive!
- Always look your best. People form an opinion of you within 20 seconds of meeting you.
- The way you speak and present your message can make or break you.
- Have integrity and always deliver on your promises. **D**

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