

Sifika Business Accountants pays it forward

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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A small gesture kick-started her business and now, eight years later, accountant Zandile Sifika is paying it forward by helping other SMMEs survive the fallout from Covid-19.

On the first day of opening her own accountancy practice, a client paid R1,500 into Zandile Sifika's as yet untouched business account. Fresh from her second maternity leave and hesitant about starting out on her own, this small amount was the big boost of reassurance needed to convince her that she was on the right trajectory.

"It gave me hope that everything would fall into place," says Sifika, who now employs five people at her firm in East London. She hasn't forgotten that monumental gesture of trust and is now paying it forward by assisting other SMMEs in the Eastern Cape navigate the arduous process of accessing government funding and tax breaks during the current Covid-19 crisis.



Zandile Sifika shares the journey of Sifika Business Accountants...

■ ***Can you tell us a bit about Sifika Business Accountants?***

We are an African-owned accounting firm based in East London, serving the Border Region and run by a motivated team.

■ ***When, how and why did you get started?***

In 2012, after coming back from maternity leave with my second child, my husband encouraged me to open up my own business so that I can be home more for our children as I was working long hours and sometimes away from home.

■ ***What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?***

The usual lack of access to starting capital and getting clients have been major obstacles.

■ ***Covid-19 and the national lockdown has impacted many businesses. What impact did it have on Sifika Business Accountants?***

Our clients' projects were suspended due to the lockdown, which resulted in them not having money to pay us to provide our service to them. Our staff had to go home due to uncertainty of the longevity of the lockdown and therefore could not work remotely as they are from the rural areas. So, April and May have been the hardest for my business and our employees. I had to negotiate the rental and other fixed costs just to keep everything going.

■ ***How did you prepare for the lockdown?***

We didn't. We didn't see it coming.

■ ***What's the biggest challenge you are facing during this pandemic?***

The challenge we face is paying for our fixed costs like rent, insurance and salaries. The other challenge is not being able to give staff some sense of security for the future.

■ ***What sort of assistance will you need going forward?***

We'll need access to capital to keep the business afloat.

■ ***If you are able to operate, what steps are you taking to continue operating?***

We are building on cash reserves. For the safety of employees, we are having Zoom and Skype meetings, instead of face-to-face.

■ ***What measures have you put in place for your employees?***

We are continuing to practice physical distancing. We also make use of sanitisers and face masks and we keep track of who comes into the office.

■ ***Are you communicating with your customers? If so, how?***

Yes, definitely. We are communicating telephonically, by email, Zoom and Skype.

■ ***What do you predict the next 6 months will be like?***

The economy will get worse before it gets better.

■ ***Now is the time to innovate and experiment. What is Sifika Business Accountants doing?***

We have been assisting clients to access grant funding and loans for those who need them.

■ ***What has been your biggest lesson from all this?***

Life is unpredictable and one should always have cash reserves.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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