

refer to here. If we look at unemployment it is clear that we need to focus on improving skills development — particularly with regard to artisans and engineers — as this will help boost productivity and service delivery in key areas such as municipalities.

Mentorship programmes are also essential. We need to revisit the idea of bringing people out of retirement to assist in skills transfer.

The small business sector has often been earmarked as the cornerstone for economic success, both in SA and across the rest of the continent. Though inroads have been made we need to continue developing a nurturing environment for small businesses to thrive and grow.

This requires increased funding, but systems to facilitate easier access to finance must also be improved. The bigger our small business sector, the faster our economy will grow.

Education is an issue close to my heart. Our schools look after, influence, mentor and mould our children for a minimum of 12 years.

We need to ensure quality control of teachers and curriculums while simultaneously increasing the levels of educators' skills, improving working conditions and introducing competitive salaries.

Health care is linked to education. The medical care and attention of the population is essential to our overall success and growth. Besides the humanitarian angle, we need a healthy populace to remain competitive. This starts with a quality education for doctors, nurses and others in the health-care chain.

Nursing is critical here and needs to be positioned as an attractive career with a competitive salary.

Great businesses are normally great brands and any effective CEO will tell you that staff are a company's greatest ambassadors. Without positive endorsement and company-wide buy-in, combined with a common goal of shared success, businesses won't grow as fast as they could.

We are an emerging market business, with both successes and challenges. The challenges aren't insurmountable and we have plans for them on a journey of continuous improvement.

□ *Mokgosi-Mwantembe is CEO of the Kutana Investment Group*

STEVEN COHEN

Focus on implementation, not just strategy

In government, as in business, there needs to be a focus on a few core offerings. No company has ever successfully been all things to all people. Similarly, I believe our government should be responsible for the delivery of three core services: a solid infrastructure, outstanding education and a system that supports the rule of law — from the police service to the judiciary and the penal system too.

Of course, they also need an efficient tax collection system so that they have funds available to pay for the above, but that's it. If government could get that right, business would have a safe and efficient space in which to operate and would be able to provide everything else our citizens require not only to survive, but to flourish.

Like any successful business, SA Inc needs a clear understanding of what its core purpose is, what the products or services it delivers are, and who its market is. The market encompasses two entities: citizens and business. The service is to guarantee our constitutional right to happiness. For citizens, this is a safe environment in which to live and work, which requires business to operate in a healthy economy that enables trade and the resultant creation of wealth, jobs and overall success.

Government must deliver solid infrastructure, outstanding education and a system that supports the rule of law

— STEVEN COHEN

This should form the basis of our strategy and each division within the business — or in this case the various government departments — is then tasked with ensuring that they do their bit in making that strategy work. A business measures the success of its strategy through its profitability and cash flow. I believe government needs to measure its success through unemployment rates and GDP — these are its KPIs (key performance indicators).

At the top, strong leaders who understand and support the strategy are necessary, but beyond that the overriding business plan is essentially meaningless and it becomes all about execution. The top guys need to manage their people to ensure that they deliver on the strategy. But the best service possible along the chain of command can be achieved only if everybody understands the value they create in that chain.

In my business, the call centre agents, for example, probably don't know or care about the details of our five-year strategy but they do know that they have to answer the phone in a certain number of rings and be able to answer all of our clients' questions so that their problem can be resolved. If they do a good job, they have supported the sales team who are able to retain a client and we remain profitable. In return, the agent gets a nice bonus and salary increase every year. If they fail to do what's required, they are usually asked to leave.

In government it should be no different. The minister of transport will know that the plan, for example, is to increase exports by 20% and to achieve this, a good road network is essential for the transport of goods. The guy responsible for maintenance of that road needs to know that a bad road hampers the ability of trucks to get to port, the result being that gross domestic product (GDP) is negatively affected and government may not have enough to pay his pension. Therefore his job of fixing the potholes is an important one.

It's about service delivery. There are so many government departments where you walk in for service and it's clear that the person behind the counter doesn't view you as a customer and there is absolutely no need to keep commitments or deliver with urgency or excellence. They probably don't understand their value in the chain. But taxpayers are customers and government needs to realise they work for us — all of us and not just those that voted them in.

If businesses behaved that way, they would go insolvent. The system automatically takes care of bad service and inefficiency; it's survival of the fittest out there. Unfortunately this system doesn't apply to government but it should. And the only way to get this right is to

Steven Cohen



employ the right people with the right attitudes.

Of course black economic empowerment (BEE) plays an important role in our employment process — and I think it's so important because of our past. Ironically though, true empowerment will come through education, which goes back to the fundamental role I believe government should play. It's a fact: don't give the guy a fish, give him a fishing rod.

Regardless of colour, my mantra has always been to pay a little more for the better person — the long-term benefit of having them on board far outweighs the cost implication. SA Inc should consider the same policy. Civil servants affect every single person in the country — there is a huge responsibility resting on them, so it's quite apparent to me why you would only want the best. I find it ironic that government is prepared to settle for mediocre employees when the effect of their work is so pervasive — consider the negativity created through the Eskom debacle where the parastatal had weak decision makers who never foresaw our power crisis.

And let's be clear about this: the best person for the job tends not to be a friend or family member.

When the wrong people are employed, which happens everywhere, management needs to take responsibility for this and fix the problem — just like we do with our nonperforming call centre agents. So often we hear ministers give excuses why bad people were employed, but I don't get the feeling that they feel bad about making these employment decisions. Discipline, pride and accountability need to be instilled right down the chain of command.

So, that's the HR element of SA Inc sorted, probably the most vital.

Again, in my business, we spend a lot of time, energy and money on marketing and communications. It's important to talk to customers and I do a lot of that myself; when leaders engage with customers it inspires confidence and creates a lot of goodwill which, over time, supports the ability to deliver on the company's KPIs.

Our president is often criticised for being absent or silent during times of uncertainty. It leaves me feeling unsure of whether he knows what's going on or what to do about it. If he engaged with us, his clients, more regularly I am sure that perception would disappear. In fact I would rather know what he thinks and disagree with him, than be in the dark on issues of national importance.

Wouldn't it be great if President Jacob Zuma had a regular television spot — maybe monthly — where he sat and just talked to us about what's going on. I would find it interesting to know that he visited a particular country and what he learnt from that visit and how we could follow the same principles. We pay the president's salary and as such, he is answerable to us. This TV time could also be used to talk about domestic issues — was our GDP up or down last month, what are the crime stats looking like and where are we seeing pockets of excellence in education? If this were broken down by province, I bet we would start to see interprovincial competition, let's face it: everyone loves a bit of public praise. Some healthy competition works well in my company and if all nine provinces were competing for the highest GDP growth or matric pass rate, I'm sure the country would achieve its KPIs very quickly.

To be honest, it's not clear in my mind how political affiliation plays a role in this. Providing infrastructure and education is not a political thing but an education grant would exist based on whether the party in power sat left or right of centre.

I believe these softer issues should be left up to government and realise they would be determined by the political leaning of the party. But this is where election rhetoric should start and end and it should go without saying that the government of the day will just make stuff work.

□ *Cohen is managing director of Softline Pastel*