



grow



# International Hotel School

Changing the face of vocational  
education in Africa



**The International Hotel School (IHS) is Africa's leading Hotel and Culinary School, headquartered in Umhlanga, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.** For the past 20 years, the IHS has won multiple awards and holds a spot in the Top 50 Hospitality & Hotel Management Schools in the world.

## Genuine passion and pride for education

This is unsurprising, given the genuine passion and pride for education and world class service demonstrated by CEO, Mike Lambert, and his team. Together with Grow, they are now successfully implementing the Scaling Up principles to help manage the rapid growth in their business.

As the CEO of IHS, Mike Lambert is both a natural entrepreneur and a champion of education. Having spent most of his life starting and running various successful businesses ranging from restaurants to tech businesses, he was first introduced to the IHS in 2003 by the Three Cities Group (the Group).

Says Mike, "The Group was effectively a hotel management company on one end and on the other, an education business in the form of IHS. At the time, IHS had three small campuses and wasn't a main priority for the Group, who were more focused on the management of hotels and lodges."

Noticing his entrepreneurial drive and experience with starting and successfully driving new projects, the Group brought Mike on as a consultant to launch Africa's first marine theme park, uShaka Marine World.

As the uShaka project drew to a close, Mike was offered the opportunity to join the hotel management business full-time and purchase a small stake in the company. "This was an opportunity that I couldn't pass on and for the next three years I filled the role of Development Director, responsible for growing the hotel division. In that time, we grew from 10 to approximately 24 hotels and lodges," said Mike.



## Mike's surprising decision to buy Three Cities Group

**In 2010, Mike was appointed Group CEO and continued with his strategy to build the business further.** At the time, the education portion of the business was operating well, providing a healthy stream of students into their hospitality management business as well as into the local hospitality arena. That said, this side of the business was relatively stagnant and was yet to become a stronger focus for the Group.

That was soon to change, given Mike's position on education. "One of my core principles is adding value to people's lives, and I believe that education is one of the ways in which we can add the most value because education empowers students by equipping them with fit-for-market qualifications so that they can find employment," explains Mike.

During this time, Mike and his team also started systematising the business in order to get it into a position where the business could, with the right management, run itself. For the first two years of this new focus, their hard work paid off and the business experienced rapid growth. With this in mind, Mike decided to buy the entire Group in 2014 in order to sell the hotel management part of the business and focus on IHS. This move gave him the freedom to give the education business some much-needed capital to drive growth. It also allowed him to immerse himself in the education arena and identify opportunities in the vocational space. He could also investigate how to utilise those models and systems used for the growth of IHS, for other vocations such as fashion design, creative media, nursing, teaching etc, where the need for skilled personnel is high.

"There's an abundance of job opportunities in South Africa, but people aren't getting educated correctly to match the jobs that are available, and our strategy is to change that," says Mike.



**I believe that education is one of the ways in which we can add the most value.**

## Deciding to get a coach to implement scaling up

While the first two years of growth showed promise for the business, Mike and his team hit a wall as they struggled to integrate the existing vocational trades into their existing hospitality education business. It was at this juncture that Mike came across an article in the Entrepreneur Magazine about the Paddock brothers who started GetSmarter. Impressed with how the Paddock brothers were able to scale up their business so quickly with control, Mike took a closer look and discovered that they had used a system developed by Gazelles. Having bought the book 'Scaling Up' by Verne Harnish, he reached out to the United States Gazelles team who connected him to Grow Business Coaching in South Africa.

This is how Mike was initially introduced to Grow and the work they do with businesses using the Scaling Up principles.

"I knew that I needed to unpack what was going on in my head and get absolute clarity around my vision of where I wanted the company to go and this is what my Grow coach helped me achieve," said Mike.

Grow walked Mike through a number of processes to unpack his vision and implement specific systems and processes into his business. During this time, Grow also helped him clarify his goal to create a business called the Invictus Education Group, which seeks to "Educate, Empower and Employ".

### **Developing the values that would become the foundation of IHS:**

After establishing his vision to be Africa's leading vocational education network and identifying the sectors they wished to play in, Mike and his team sought to understand the core values governing who they were as a people and what they stood for as a business. To that end, Grow facilitated a three-day exercise where they focused on understanding the DNA of IHS and what drives it.

Says Mike, "Our coach walked us through the core values creation exercise, upon which we hung our entire business. With this foundation in place, we can look at our core values in order to make any decisions, which is a fantastically liberating mechanism for our people."

## IHS used this session with Grow to establish the following values:

- **Our brand is built on TRUST and INTEGRITY:**  
We do the right thing by being honest and open with each other.
- **The answer is always YES:**  
We focus on getting things done.
- **CHANGE moves us forward:**  
We recognise that change is vital for the growth and development of the business, and that to stay competitive in today's market, innovation is crucial.
- **Our people are our CHAMPIONS:**  
We understand that as an education business, our staff are our most valuable assets.
- **We live our brand PASSIONATELY:**  
We are committed to impeccable service.

These core values have played a big role in setting the foundation for business decisions and continue to play a role in the daily decisions that need to be made by the team to drive the business forward.

Take the hiring process, for instance. IHS draws on these core values to make a conscious decision that everyone who applies for a job will have their values assessed. If their values don't align to that of IHS, they won't be considered. "I believe that it's a culture fit first, because technical competency can be taught, but culture fit is innate," says Mike.



## Developing the strategy to build Africa's leading vocational education network

When it comes to developing this kind of strategy, Grow uses strategic and execution planning tools which factor in IHS' target revenues, target student numbers, critical priorities, etc. Grow then facilitates quarterly planning sessions for their executive team, as well as annual strategic planning sessions, which helps keep the organisation aligned and accountable to what they've set out in their plan. Moreover, the planning tools and Scaling Up process has enabled IHS to be more scientific around tracking the levers that drive growth, including understanding their lead acquisition costs, marketing effectiveness, conversion percentages, and more.

"Our time with Grow and in particular the sessions are vital for the growth of our business. We now have 4,500 students across four campuses and an online campus and are opening a new campus in Johannesburg this year. We've also established a training business with 20,000 students and have recently acquired a creative media business in Cape Town with 300 students," says Mike. Together, they make Invictus Education.

With the help of Grow, IHS is truly fulfilling their vision of becoming Africa's leading vocational education network. Beyond their ability to regularly plan, strategise, and track progress against their goals through the quarterly and annual strategy sessions, Mike believes that the most valuable part of implementing the Scaling Up principles with Grow is the monthly and weekly meetings, as well as the Daily Huddles (quick, daily meetings with team members). These meetings have helped the team to build deeper relationships with each other.

Says Mike, "It's not really about what you say each day in the Daily Huddles, rather it's about the human connection between people. These sessions have created a relational bond, allowing us to be honest with each other without fear and creating a solid foundation for our quarterly reviews going forward."



## The subtle touches that lead to a 95% job placement rate



**IHS has a truly unique selling proposition, in that they have a 95% job placement rate.** This is a direct result of how they educate their students, which involves students spending 50% of their time in the classroom and the remaining 50% in the workplace, gaining practical experience. There's not a hotel in South Africa that won't have an ex-IHS student in it.

**Another contributor to their success is the business' commitment to their people.** "In our business, we don't have assets in the form of factories or machines. Our assets are our people and we spend a lot of time building our organisational culture, building our people, investing in their training and development. Given that people spend more time at work than at home, it was important for us to create an environment where employees feel that IHS is home," explains Mike.


## The importance of getting the right coach to help drive growth

**Mike also believes that over and above the methodologies they've implemented, the coaches they've worked with at Grow made the real difference.**

"The methodology is what I call the skeleton, but the coach and coaching style forms the meat on the bones. I've had many coaches through my life and there have been some with whom I couldn't connect. The Grow coaches were different in that they 'got' me, and they 'got' my business. I couldn't imagine doing our quarterly reviews without our Grow coach," says Mike.

Through their work with Grow and their sheer dedication to working with the Scaling Up principles and frameworks taught by their coach, IHS now has a team that has clear goals. These clearly defined structures and strong culture of accountability propel the business towards greater growth. As a result, the business has achieved a sterling 30% year-on-year growth in the past three years. Furthermore, the team has all the tools they need to exceed these numbers in the years to come.

The business intends to continue employing these principles in the other vocational education businesses they are building and are now well positioned to achieve their vision of being Africa's leading vocational education network.



## When things don't seem clear, it's time to **find focus.**

When you're at the top. Everyone's looking to you for the answers. You're the leader, thinker, decision maker, mentor, planner and doer. Sustained growth and scaling up weighs on your shoulders. Yet, so many questions ruminate in your head.

When you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed yet committed to a sea change, you need a thinking partner to help you see the wood for the trees. An impartial sounding board with years in the seat and war stories to share. Don't lose sight of the bigger picture, and don't do it alone.

**Grow. Helping businesses find clarity and the confidence to lead with it.**



The Growth Formula is an easy-to-understand model that sets out what you need to master to build a truly successful, profitable, and enjoyable business.



### You the Leader

This is about your effectiveness as a leader. The success of your business is directly proportional to your capabilities as a leader.

### Setting Direction

This is about disciplined thinking and having clarity on where you are taking your business to, and ensuring everyone in the business is clear and aligned around this direction.

### Winning Team

Your business is bigger than just you. To build a successful business, you need a talented and engaged team of people.

### Operational Excellence

This is about disciplined action to ensure everything is working in your business to allow it to grow without drama.



Build your business with **clarity and confidence.**



## Contact us

Johannesburg | Cape Town | Durban | Pretoria



011 234 3453



[info@Grow-za.com](mailto:info@Grow-za.com)



[www.Grow-za.com](http://www.Grow-za.com)