

From shelf packer to national coffee shop specialist

When Ricardo Xolisele Claasen (35) left home nine years ago to look for a job, he didn't think he would find himself in a senior position at Africa's largest food retailer a few years later. He wasn't even sure about where to go, but serendipity led him to the Shoprite Group's home office in Brackenfell, where he dropped off his CV in the hope that he would be considered for any vacancies.

"I got onto the train that morning in Paarl and I really didn't know where to go. I thought I'm just going to try, go to new places, put feelers out everywhere and that's how I ended up in Brackenfell," says Ricardo, who had never been to Brackenfell before.

His shot in the dark paid off and three months later, he started off as a shelf packer. Shortly afterwards, in 2011, Checkers opened its first coffee shop at the Checkers Hyper in Fairbridge Mall and Ricardo was asked to assist.

"There were only two of us in the coffee shop when we started, so it was a little tough in the beginning, but I knew I didn't want to go anywhere else. I was happy in the coffee shop," he explains.

Checkers has since expanded its coffee shops in the Western Cape and throughout South Africa. Because of his passion for people and coffee, Ricardo was given the opportunity to oversee the coffee shops in the Western Cape.

"I love making coffee and I love serving our customers. I have so many friends at Checkers because I enjoy what I do."

In recognition of his efforts, the coffee shop at the Group's home office was named after Ricardo, who has since been promoted to National Coffee Shop Specialist and today oversees the training of all new baristas at Checkers stores nationwide.

"I think I've been successful because I take care of the customers."

Checkers now has more than 175 coffee shops across the country and is considering expanding into other countries. Ricardo is excited by this prospect because he enjoys traveling and is looking forward to being part of the expansion.

When he's not working, Ricardo unwinds by spending time with his newborn baby and girlfriend or going out with friends. He is also an avid reader and enjoys visiting coffee shops to ensure that he keeps up with industry trends.

"If you want to succeed, you must believe in yourself because anything is possible."

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