

Craig Newman

Nothing is impossible



Craig Newman, 51, incoming president for UFI 2019, has been serving as the chief executive Officer of the Johannesburg Expo Centre (JEC) for the past 12 years and has turned it into a highly profitable business, year on year.

With over 27 years of industry experience, Mr Newman has made a phenomenal contribution to the South African exhibitions, conferences and events industry. Since 1991, he has occupied leadership positions in some of South Africa's leading business events industry companies that included Forge Ahead Exhibitions, TML Reed Exhibitions, Oasys Innovations, Balanced Solutions and Kagiso Exhibitions and Events.



WHAT IS UFI?

UFI is the leading global association of the world's tradeshow organisers and exhibition centre operators, as well as the major national and international exhibition associations, and selected partners of the exhibition industry. UFI's main goal is to represent, promote and support the business interests of its members and the exhibition industry. UFI directly represents around 50,000 exhibition industry employees globally, and also works closely with its 55 national and regional association's members.

On 1 June 2006, Mr Newman's appointment as chief executive officer of the Expo Centre signalled the beginning of a new era. Having set about fixing things immediately, he became the major driving force behind the JEC with his exceptional vision and his confidence to make things happen.

The JEC was the host venue for the international broadcast centre for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, held in South Africa.

Where do you see the business events industry in South Africa?

The industry is struggling at the moment, it is very tough. The environment is tough because the economic situation is tough. Companies are finding it difficult to invest in conferencing and exhibitions. Many exhibitions are shrinking; it is a very competitive environment. In this kind of environment, the cream rises to the top. Strong companies will continue to grow from strength to strength.

Looking to the future, there will be more investment and more participation from government and the public sector. Already, most conferences and exhibitions are coming through the public sector. This is where growth and development lies in our industry going forward.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in a township in Durban called Wentworth. I completed my matric at Fairvale Secondary. I have no tertiary education. When I finished matric, I headed to Johannesburg.

What do you enjoy most about the business events industry?

Everyday there is something

new, something different. It is an incredible industry to be part of.

What has been the biggest change you've seen in this sector?

The use of technology. With the explosion of IT, people thought there would be no need for exhibitions as everything would be done online, but the thinking has changed. The fact is, technology has improved the delivery of exhibitions around the world.

What role does your family play in your life?

Everything I do, I do for my family. As simple as that. I am married to Fatima and have twin girls and a son.

What would you change in your life if you could when looking back?

Absolutely nothing. I would do it all over again. It has been an incredible journey; I have no regrets, no desire to change anything. My upbringing was tough but that has made me a tough person, made me street wise and I think if it wasn't for my upbringing I wouldn't be where I am today.

Do you have any hobbies?

Not so much hobbies, but I have passions. Music is my passion. Music is what brought me from Durban to Johannesburg as I am a drummer. I drummed for the first five to six years in the city. I loved and enjoyed it thoroughly, but realised I couldn't survive on it for a living, but music remains my passion. The music industry is tough all over the world.

Sport also my passion. Soccer is my leading interest, but I follow most sports; soccer, rugby, tennis, golf, cricket.

Who is your favourite sportsman? Muhammad Ali. It is incredible if you look at his life and his lifestyle... what he went through to get to where he was, becoming the best boxer in the world.

What do you do for leisure? I spend time with my family. I love hosting family and friends at home with a braai and, of course, music.

What is your secret to success? My belief is that nothing is impossible. I take a lot out of my initials CAN. I can do whatever I want, I can achieve whatever I want to achieve.

What has been your biggest challenge in this sector? Integrity – there are many people in the industry that operate with integrity – but also lots who don't. It is very challenging, it is important to deliver to any client what you have promised.

What is the most memorable place you have ever been to, and why? Most recently, Mnemba Island, a private island off the coast of

Zanzibar. It is not known to many, but it is a piece of paradise.

What type of holiday would you avoid at all costs? Historical city holidays – it bores me to death. I can only do it for a short time.

If you could be anyone for the day who would you be and why? Right now, the Queen of England. Just think: being born into royalty gives you lack of reality in life, and I would love to experience what it would be like to lack that reality by being a king or queen.

What is your favourite book, film, TV programme?

Book: I'm not a big book reader. I am more a current affairs person, and I read a newspaper every day.

However, of the few books I've read, I really enjoyed Sir Alex Ferguson's autobiography.

Film: *Man on Fire* with Denzel Washington.

TV programme: I don't have a favourite TV programme. If I'm in front of the TV, I'm watching sport.

How do you relax? Same as my leisure time. I relax by hosting people, by having dinner or lunch with people over a glass of wine, and just enjoying the conversation and company.

What is your favourite food? I love most food but if I had to choose, a good braai with chops and puttu (maize meal), and very strong tomato gravy.

Who is your role model? I have quite a few. From a spiritual point of view, my dad was my role model. He was a pastor. From a business perspective, my role model is Raymond Burke, an incredible business man, also because he has a realistic approach.

What advice do you have for anyone starting out in this industry and hoping to follow in your footsteps? Stay true to yourself, be driven, be self-motivated and be proactive.

What is your dream for the future? Continued success in all aspects of my life – family, business and spiritual. ■

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