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One Good Turn Leads to A Fruitful Business and Friendship

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Sitiveni Nawaqa, then a young national under 20 rugby representative and hotel worker in 2010, thought life would never change for him.

Of course his rugby career could have sprung up but at that time, just going to work from his village of Tau, in Nadroga to the InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa seemed the only future for him if nothing else worked out.

He was started working at the resort at the end 2011.

One day he was given AU\$1000 (FJ\$1,529) for his kind gesture by an elderly woman on holiday here.

He made a bold decision to buy a second hand van to try his luck at business and give his family a better life.

He made that choice after previously wasting his money in having a good drinking session with his friends.

“I had always dreamt of making a better life for my family.”

Today, Mr Nawaqa, happily married to Yvonne (nee Nabainivalu) with three children and operates Mick’s Transfers and Tours, which is proving to be a great success.

Within three years he had built what now has grown from that second hand van to four cars and four 16-seater vehicles all paid off except for two of the 16-seaters.

How it all started

In 2010, like most of his friends from his village and those nearby, he was part of the Sanasana Academy, where young men and women were trained and slotted into the InterContinental resort to work whenever the opportunity arose.

So for Mr Nawaqa, that meant a daily routine of going from his home to work, playing rugby after work and then back home.

Only four months into his job as a waiter at the resort, he met an Australian businessman, Ross Johnstone and his mother, Patricia, who were attending their company conference and enjoying a short holiday at the resort.

Soon Mr Nawaqa was entrusted with looking after Mrs Johnstone with her limited mobility and he was instantly loved by the family.

“Wherever she wanted to go they would look for me and I would greatly assist as I looked at her as my mother,” he said.

“When I was working the afternoon shift, I use to help this old woman.

“I had to escort her from the bar to her room and this was the trust they had in me – taking her around the hotel.

“I use to hold this old lady’s hand and walk her to her room and along the way we would have a chat and she would tell me about Australia and I told her that I was a rugby player and was playing rugby for the resort’s team.

“So I looked after her for two weeks while they were at the resort until the last day.

“They were really appreciative of what I did for her.”

Making choices

On the last day of their stay, the Johnstone family called Mr Nawaqa and handed him the envelope with the money inside.

“The lady handed me the money and said this is from Ross and it is in appreciation of all that you had done for me.”

He took the money and for him, that was massive, considering the \$120 he was earning a week at the resort.

“I was 20-years-old then and they told me to spend it how I wanted.

“Firstly, I thought of a big party with friends then I also thought of my family who were struggling to make ends meet.

“My parents, Bulou Taina Kawai (mum) and Epeli Ratu (dad) used to sell rourou, ota and duruka in the Nadi market and one of my brothers was making money by offering horse riding to tourists at Natadola Beach.

Bulou Taina, is from Nalimolevu, Vatulele Island and making tapa was one of the source of income that my family survive.

“I said to myself I need to use this money wisely so that my family can benefit, not for a short time but for years.”

Mr Nawaqa never changed his mind and offered to buy his cousin’s old van for \$10,000 with a deposit of the money he had received and pay the balance off with weekly payments of \$200.

“I made the sacrifice not to use the money on drinks and with the van, we started doing runs for the villagers in Tau.”

He soon was sought after for the vehicle and

besides making the weekly \$200 repayment to his cousin and keeping aside something for their food, he opened and a bank account and saved the rest.



Sitiveni Nawaqa's family Photo: Charles Chambers

Mr Nawaqa said soon after Mr Johnstone called from Australia for a chat and asked whether he (Mr Nawaqa) had enjoyed his time with the money he had given him.

“He was stunned and became emotional when I told him what I had done.

“He could not believe a young Fijian boy from a small village in Nadroga would venture into business rather than enjoy himself.”

Mr Johnstone then sent him \$500 more and told him to make his way down to Suva to register a company for the business which he did in 2015.

“I went down with my dad and two brothers, Ananaia Nawaqa and Iliesa Lagavakatini Nawaqa and registered the company as a family business with my two brothers as co-directors.”

The name Mick derived from Cyclone Mick where the family had to brave through the height of the cyclone to get his older brother Ananai Nawaqa’s wife from the Sigatoka Hospital with

their newborn baby, aptly named Mick, back home.

“My dad said that company name with Mick would suit as it was something for us to member for the rest of our lives.”

He went on to become the owner of one of the first Toyota Prius vehicles in the west and bought two more before getting his brand new 16 seater vehicles which cost \$59,000 each.

“You should have heard my English when I was young so Ross got me enrolled in Eistein College in Melbourne to learn English.

“My English was pretty bad.

“He then got me into Victoria University where I attained a Certificate in Business and will go back to Melbourne soon to complete my studies in Tourism.”



One of Sitiveni Nawaqa's 16-seater vehicle. Photo: Charles Chambers

After the purchase of the Hybrid vehicle, Mr Nawaqa left the old van and the car to be based at Natadola Beach and created a base there doing runs for locals and vehicles.

Mr Johnstone's like for Mr Nawaqa did not end there as he then took him to Melbourne to learn English.

While in Melbourne, his mind was hooked onto being a successful businessman. Mr Nawaqa did extra jobs and saved enough to buy a second car.

“The business started to grow with a good cash flow so we withdrew from Natadola Beach and based ourselves back in the village.”

He had by now learned how to find work for his vehicles online through the internet and soon started receiving bookings from overseas.

“I started off getting business through *Facebook and Instagram* and soon after got my own website created and it was up online.”

Mr Nawaqa soon got attached with two travel agents, Hideaway Holidays and Essence Travel, both Australian based companies.

He than got the contract for the Marriott Resort Fiji Momi Bay and soon beefed up his fleet to the present size of seven vehicles.

“I have a desk at the Marriott and this is looked after by my staff.”

He soon signed the contract for the Natadola Bay Championship Golf Course and Momi Surf.

“We are busy as the vehicles are always booked.”

Mr Nawaqa’s mum is also involved in her own way as she prepares lovo for tourists during the village tours.

He presently employs 12 staff which includes his brothers and sister Laisa Peckham.

“Always believe in the Lord and appreciate everything he gives you,” is his message to young Fijians growing up.

“Drinks is not everything so be careful how you spend your money.”

He presently travels between Fiji and Melbourne where he works for Mr Ross in the mornings, does his company work from his high rise flat in Melbourne City in the afternoon and by night, is a bouncer at a bar.

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