

# 60 SECONDS WITH AN ENTREPRENEUR...

## CLAIRE ALEXANDER

**Role:** Director

**Company Name:** Africa Scotland Network  
/ Firecracker Marketing & Events

**Sector:** International Networks, Trade & Investment / Event Management, Marketing & Graphic Design

**Founded:** 2019 / 2012

**Base:** Cape Town & Stirling / Cape Town

**Purpose:** Building Africa's most impactful business network / Event management, brand and marketing solutions at the intersection of international governments, corporates and diplomacy in Southern Africa

**Tell us a bit about your business?** Africa Scotland Business Network is an international business network connecting multi sectoral organisations across Africa to each other and to Scotland and back, triggering business and skills exchange cross continent and internationally with Scotland. Firecracker is a leading, award winning event management, marketing and graphic design company working for international and local clients from South Africa.

**How did you come up with your business idea?** Firecracker was born from personal survival in 2012 and Africa Scotland Business Network was born in 2019 from a conviction (and subsequently, a well researched gap in the market) that Africa needed a refreshing, new business network to connect organisations across the continent to each other. We then investigated stakeholders involved in international trade and relations between the continent and Scotland and there wasn't enough. Step in Africa Scotland Business Network.

**How did you come up with your business name/s?** Firecracker is a nickname given to me by a former boss and Africa Scotland Business Network says exactly what it does.

**What's been your biggest challenge to date?** Patriarchy, but It doesn't challenge me anymore. If it gets in my way, it's gets moved out the way.

**How has SE (or any other support organisation in the Scottish ecosystem) helped you on your journey?** Working in an international capacity for Scotland in Africa, I deal with many SE employees who are hands down the most helpful and supportive people in any public sector. Some of which have spoken in our events and even hosted our events. I was also selected for the Principally Women accelerator in 2021 which was a fully funded development opportunity thanks to SE.

**What's been the highlight of the last year for you?** I helped make someone else's dream come true, without any expectation of him doing something nice for me.

**What's your favourite thing about being an entrepreneur?** Freedom, creativity and being able to say no without explanation.

**What's the best thing about being an entrepreneur in Scotland?** My nationality counts for a lot in the global marketplace. Scottish people are admired the world over. Generally, I don't think Scots give ourselves enough credit for our ability to connect with people, our incredible culture or our country's entrepreneurial track record.



**What's the best piece of advice you ever received?** Be your authentic self in business.

**What advice do you wish you hadn't listened to?** I was told I wasn't competent enough to be doing a certain job by a former boss. I was only 25, had just moved to a new country and was vulnerable and impressionable. I did listen to it at the time because my boss authority and education informed me at the time he must be right. Clearly, I've unlearned this shocking advice because I have an industry leading business in this exact subject!

**What has been your proudest achievement since starting your businesses?** Building two businesses from scratch in industries that I'm not qualified in and crossing them both into international markets with a miniscule amount of resources.

**Is there anything on your business bucket list?** I've only got 60 seconds.... We're opening up an office in Scotland soon. I also want to meet Vusi Thembekwayo, one of Africa's most successful businessmen.

**Who's been your biggest supporter?** My late grandmother, Mary. She told me I could do anything so I believed her.

**How do you care for each other's wellbeing at work?** Wellness is a huge priority in our company culture. I basically don't enforce anything that I personally didn't enjoy when I worked in a company myself. I give staff trust and that is usually reciprocated. I'm dedicated to our team's mental and physical wellness and that's why we have low staff turnover. I find it's the smaller, consistent allowances that matter more for our staff than a big annual bonus or party. For example, allowing staff to take walking breaks, take time outs and allowing them to leave the office early to gym and beat the traffic. I can view their work outputs through our systems and they always make the time up without me having to ask them.

**How do you start your day?** Meditation and a power walk along my local beach.

**What do you do for fun after a busy week?** I'm a former athlete so I'm still active in sport. I go training on a Saturday morning then I hang out with my family and friends. I enjoy reading to chill out at night once the bairns are in bed.

**What's the best business book you've read?** It's a close call between Napoleon Hill's Think Rich Grow Rich and The Talent Code by Daniel Coyle.

**Any office pets?** Our team works from Africaworks Cape Town office, the continents no1 coworking space. The interior décor is so beautiful that I'd be constantly walking on eggshells worrying about my dog jumping on their posh couches!

**What's your best tip for achieving a good life/work balance?** Be present and conscious in every single moment. Balance is like success, it's a matter of perspective for different people. I rather focus on being present with what's in front of me than being obsessed with finding balance.

**What would you say is the secret to success?** On a business level, create solutions which meet the needs of the market in interesting ways and become an expert in those solutions. On a character level, a disciplined routine, exercise, hard work, grit and practical optimism fuel my performance as a successful business woman.

**What's your big dream?** To create the world's most impactful business network.

**How would you like to be remembered?** As a good soul who cared about life, everything in it and made it a wee bit better.

**Where can we find out more about your businesses?** [www.africascotland.network](http://www.africascotland.network) /

[@africa\\_scotland](https://www.africa_scotland) / [www.firecracker.pro](http://www.firecracker.pro) / [@FirecrackerZA](https://twitter.com/FirecrackerZA)