

Robin Bryan Smither

A PASSION FOR BANKING AND MOUNTAIN TOPS

Banker, globetrotter, fisherman and a die-hard fan of Coldplay, Robin Smither thrives on challenges. Mauritius holds a special place in his heart, aside from having played an important role in his career success. It is also linked to his love story.

Himanshu MARCHURCHAND

Born and brought up in South Africa, AfrAsia Bank's Senior Executive – Corporate Banking Robin Smither has a special bond with Mauritius, since it represents the most challenging and enjoyable period of his career and brought him closer to Sarah, the leading lady of his life. The journey up to here however has been marked by several other international destinations.

After his primary, secondary and tertiary education in his homeland, Rob Smither decided to move to London for about two years' time; period during which he undertook various jobs. Upon his return in his homeland South Africa in 2000, he had the opportunity to join Standard Bank's Corporate Banking division which was largely focused on managing large corporate clients. After spending three and a half years within the bank, he decided to pursue a full-time Masters in Business Administration (2004 – 2005), following which he re-joined the same bank and department. One and half year later, he will be called upon to move into the Investment Banking division with specialisation in asset finance, a position he occupied till the beginning of 2009, when he was asked to come down to Mauritius to fur-

ther develop Standard Bank's role and presence over here for investing into Africa.

The rest is history, as they say or simply fate, as Robin Smither puts it. He met with his wife-to-be Sarah during his first week on the island. Coincidentally, the latter was leaving the bank one week later. *"I ran that business together with the Chief Executive Officer Chris Clarkson up till 2012. Then I went back to South Africa to look*

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after very senior relationships with large multinationals like Caterpillar, for about twelve months, after which I received and accepted an offer to join AfrAsia Bank's representative office in South Africa," states Robin Smither.

The Mauritius calling will however pull Robin and Sarah back on the island in mid-2014 and he

has been a member of AfrAsia Bank Mauritius' team ever since. *"I have a very close affiliation to Mauritius and our kids speak creole more than anything else,"* he comments.

For Robin Smither, finance and banking runs in the blood, with a long history of bankers in the family including his father, uncle and grandfather. The financial sector was thus a natural career choice for him, but also a passionate decision.

"I've always wanted to be in finance and enjoy it. I believe I am in the right space because I enjoy dealing with customers, since it is something that is meaningful at the end of the day," he says. His childhood persona however, once aspired him to being a game ranger, given that he loves the outdoors and the bush.

Looking back on his career so far, Robin Smither comments that he has been lucky to be thrown challenges, since he is not one to be able to sit down and keep still. He admits loving developmental challenges, and growing businesses, which require a specific kind of mindset. While his time within Standard Bank Mauritius was the most challenging and enjoyable experience of them all, Robin Smither states

that AfrAsia's entrepreneurial culture enthral him particularly.

"It allows for contribution and creativity from everyone. I took a risk joining an up-and-coming boutique bank at that time but we have a long way to go," shares Robin Smither. His penchant for risks and stepping out of his comfort zone is reflected in his role models and taste for literature, particularly autobiographies. Robin Smither is fascinated by people who are totally out of the box. Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Elon Musk top the list of personas who he describes as being *"geniuses in their own time"*. He also draws inspiration from his roots, coming from a country which was *"lucky to have had a leader like Nelson Mandela. The world today calls for more of his style of leadership. If he hadn't left his prison cell and said let's forget the past, he would never have been able to move forward."*

Given the choice to be a celebrity for one day, he would nonetheless rather be a famous sportsperson; golfer Rory McIlroy to be more precise, in order to do justice to the sports enthusiast in him. Golf is indeed one of the hobbies he tries to indulge into during the weekend and to unwind, along with fishing and spending time with his family.

"I don't get to see my children much during the week and so I try

In a nutshell

Favourite Mauritian food:

Gateaux piments

Favourite song:

A head full of dreams by Coldplay

Favourite movie:

007 movies all the way

Signature dish:

Boeuf Bourguignon

He likes

- Positive proactive people
- Cooking

He dislikes

- He dislikes
 - Corruption
 - Cinnamon and almonds
 - Bureaucracy and red tapism
 - Traffic jams
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Personal motto: See the glass as half empty and not half full!

Most marking life experience:

Climbing Mountain Aconcagua, the highest mountain in South America (6,691 metres high)

Nepal and several places in Africa for business. "I find cultures a fascinating thing but there is no such thing as home. Whenever I am in Cape Town I think that it is probably the most beautiful city in the world," he admits.

Success, for Robin Smither, at the end of the day is determined by being able to look back on his life on his deathbed and say that he has been able to make a fundamental difference not only for his family but to the greater business around him. "I have a passion for that and I want to make a difference in the business. It is not purely driven by financial reasons but is rather about leaving a legacy behind and being able to make a meaningful contribution to the Mauritian economy." And also, climbing Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world. One can only wish him all the best for ahead.

switching my phone off on Friday evenings, but this does not seem to work much these days," he concedes with a laugh. One of the great things about Mauritius, he pursues, is the nature. His life-

long passion is climbing mountains, a hobby he has indulged in several countries around the world. This banker is in fact quite the globetrotter, having made it a point to travel to various places

such as the US, Chile, Argentina, Peru, where he spent a night at the world heritage sites Machu Picchu and Alaska, where he went polar bear gazing. He has also been travelling to India,