



The South African Butler Academy

By Liezl Maclean

Right. So, you know all about famous butlers. I mean really, where would Batman be without Alfred? Just as Batman needs Robin to help him fight crime, he needs his trustworthy butler to keep him on track. Or what about Niles from the hit nineties sitcom, The Nanny - what would the Sheffield family be without their infamous chauffeur navigating their limousine?

Referred to as the “gentleman’s gentleman”, butlers are noted for their gracious and dignified manner, which are essential characteristics for the role they play as they’re the first point of contact between the household and the outside world. But butlers are responsible for more, much more, than just answering the doorbell and welcoming guests.

If you plan on being a butler, chances are good you’ll be in charge of the staff, the yacht and even the jet! You’ll be the estate manager, chauffeur, handyman, accountant and sometimes even the housekeeper. Whatever your role, The South African Butler Academy will train you how to do it in true butler style.

SA’s next best butler?

“To all ambitious butlers to be, join The South African Butler Academy (SABA) and become the next best butler in South Africa. SABA trains individuals to be lifestyle managers, personal assistants and hotel/spa butlers for the very rich and nouveau rich,” says Principal of SABA, Newton Cross.

"I returned back to South Africa after working on one of the world's most famous ocean liners, the *Queen Mary 2* and the *Queen Elizabeth 2*. Upon my arrival, sitting at one of Cape Town's most highly rated hotels, I discovered how appalling the service had become," he says.

"I'm a firm believer in service etiquette, protocol and body demeanour. I've always had a vision of a new service standard seen as the very end of the private hospitality market, and as a result I opened the Butler Academy and a finishing school for those in the hospitality industry," he explains.

Newton, along with three other business partners, governs SABA's syllabus and curriculum. The course is based on the international required standards for butler service. "We train individuals from the ages of 19 to 65 to become butlers in various five to six star environments," says Newton.

And with Newton's experience working for celebs such as Madiba, Tiger Woods, Michael Schumacher, Lenny Kravitz and John Cleese - to name but a few - he certainly has the know-how to run the Butler Academy.

He dubs his most memorable moment as working for Nelson Mandela and Uma Thurman. "My dream was always to work for a celebrity and both experiences are, in my books, the most unforgettable times of my life," the 28-year old insists.

But it's not all moonshine and roses. "Once a client requested that the Ferraris' wheels had to be washed and polished at 04:00 in the morning," he explains slowly, "This was to ensure that there were no stains on the Flokati rugs that all the vehicles were parked on."

"But my most awkward moment was probably when I dropped a silver spoon down a guest's dress whilst working onboard the *Queen Mary 2*. The guest was one of the Royal Family. The spoon slipped into the back of her dress, but I rescued the situation and spoon by exclaiming 'oops, the ship moved'," he says jokingly.

Newton's top 5 business tips:

- Research
- Marketing
- Never give up
- Networking
- Always smile

Target market

If you're in the hospitality industry and looking to enter the luxury private sector, albeit via the hotel & guest house field or the passenger liners and luxury yachts, SABA should be first on your list.

"Individuals with a flair for entertaining, a passion for service, dedication to life, strong leadership skills and overall management capabilities should definitely apply," he explains. "As well as those that see themselves working with wealth," Newton adds.

The business side of things

Newton's dream was to be someone famous or to be someone working for famous people - and through his choice of study he has already achieved many of his dreams. After school he received a bursary to study BA Fine Arts at the University of Cape Town, but turned it down to start his career as a butler with the SABA. "It was this very school that today I've re-established as the South African Butler Academy."

As a company owner, Newton works seven days a week, 24 hours per day. "It sounds excessive, but in a butler's life, no time is too late, no task is too great, we operate like robots," Newton says.

"The most important lesson I've learnt about business is being patient, reliable and above all, punctual." There is obvious enthusiasm in his voice as he continues:

"For anyone entering the hospitality industry, sit and think about what your role in the industry would be, and what difference you intend to make. You were born to make a difference. As Barack Obama said, 'Yes we can'. ■

Newton's requirements to start his business:

- International affiliation
- International trainers
- Capital layout
- Top quality equipment
- World-class training facility
- Recruitment office

For more information on the South African Butler Academy visit www.butleracademy.co.za

