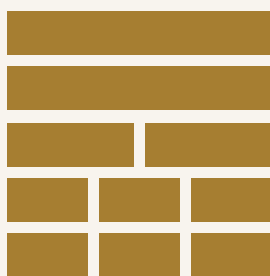


STACKED

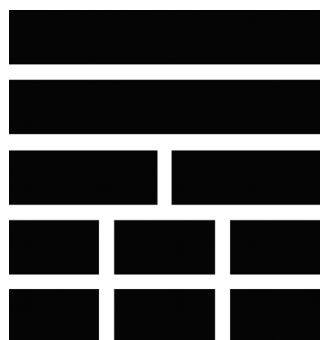
A New Operating System inspired by the
Back-to-Back World Cup Rugby Champions



PAUL STEENKAMP

"While many will see it as a book about rugby, I see it as a blueprint for building organisations, teams and careers that thrive in an increasingly complex world."

JOHN SANEI, *Leading futurist and Global voice on AI*



STACKED

ENDORSEMENTS

Most leadership books describe success after the fact. *Stacked* does something rarer: it gives you the operating system before you build. Paul has turned the Springboks' transformation into something any founder, CEO or team leader can actually use.

Michael Jordaan, Chairman of Bank Zero and former CEO of FNB

An absolutely must-read. The analogy with rugby truly resonates. Each chapter provides simple and very effective tools, tips, techniques, exercises and experiments with helpful workbooks that you can immediately action as you read. Results will follow as you implement this sage advice and insight. Get started as soon as possible. Make your dreams, purpose and goals a reality through disciplined execution and decisive action. Measure your "*Stack*", your impact, your legacy.

*Dr Shirley Zinn, Chair and Independent Non-Executive Board
Director: Sanlam, MTN (SA), V&A, Spur Corporation*

The *Stack* process offers a practical blueprint for building resilient, high-performing teams. Its strength lies in creating a culture where unity and diversity are valued as foundational strengths, not just acknowledged. Like the Springboks, it shows that when people from different backgrounds unite around a shared purpose and every voice is valued, excellence becomes sustainable.

Luvuyo Mgidlana, Managing Director, Electech Power Solutions

Paul has distilled one of the greatest team transformations of our time into a practical blueprint for leaders. *Stacked* is not a book about rugby; it is a thoughtful and actionable operating system for building organisations, developing people and creating cultures that compound over time.

*Arno von Helden, Chief Information Officer,
Business & Commercial Banking, Investec*

The best teams build the ones who come next. Meaningful change is no short-term endeavour. *Stacked* shows how we can learn from the Springboks to build lasting change in companies and societies.

Johannes Wedenig, Representative, UNICEF South Africa

Stacked is far more than a book about the Springboks. It is a compelling study of how exceptional teams, organisations and careers are deliberately built over time through clear standards, honest feedback, strong relationships and a shared sense of purpose.

Paul Steenkamp takes the extraordinary success of South African rugby and turns it into a practical leadership framework that travels well beyond sport. What makes the book especially powerful is that it does not romanticise high-performance. It shows the hard work underneath it: the difficult conversations, the discipline of continuous development, the responsibility senior people carry to build those who come next, and the patience required for talent, trust and culture to compound.

The Springbok stories give the ideas emotional weight, but the value of *Stacked* lies in its transferability. Leaders in business, education, public service and sport will recognise the challenge of turning talented individuals into a coherent, resilient and high-performing collective. This book offers a language and architecture for doing exactly that.

Most importantly, *Stacked* is deeply South African without being narrowly South African. It captures something profound about what the Springboks have come to represent: proof that diversity, accountability, belonging and ambition can reinforce one another. It leaves the reader with both a challenge and a sense of possibility: build environments where people grow, where standards matter, and where success is measured not only by what this generation achieves, but by what it enables the next generation to become. That is leadership with a lasting legacy.

Dr Jacques Faul, CEO of the Titans and President of the CEOs in Sport

The South African population sees itself as a winning nation through the eyes of its rugby supporters. The Springboks not only have the most World Cup wins but also hold consecutive World Cup titles. *Stacked* offers a practical comparison of the strategically aligned approaches Rassie uses as head coach of the Springboks to secure sustained performance. The book is organised around five themes related to elements of strategic management: *The Foundation, The Organisation, The Team, The Career* and *The Country*. It also offers a practical approach to similar planning in different environments. This book could interest not only rugby supporters but also the South African public at large, as a source for understanding how sport, like any business, large or small, can approach the business world. This book is recommended for all rugby supporters, coaches, administrators, technical officials, business owners and those who want to learn more about strategic management in an applied, practical way.

Wim Hollander, Emeritus Professor in Sport Management at the University of Johannesburg and co-editor of The Management of Sport in South Africa

Many management stories can be told about Springboks coach Rassie Erasmus's impressive approach to his job and his phenomenal success with the team. These range from strategic planning and execution and human resource selection and deployment through to astute human capital management. It is these skills, combined with the brilliant ability to get all team members motivated and working in harmony in pursuit of a common goal, that have made the Springboks almost invincible, twice becoming Rugby World Cup champions and winning a series of other international tournaments.

It is to his enormous credit that Paul Steenkamp – who has been studying the chemistry that makes great teams for three decades – has distilled critical leadership lessons from Erasmus's Springboks. As Steenkamp so aptly demonstrates in *Stacked*, Erasmus was wise to lay a very firm foundation for his team, which constituted a candid exchange of views and the adoption of shared values. Only then came strategy development and execution, the selection and induction of

personnel, rigorous performance management and ongoing human capital development.

By studying Erasmus's work with the Springboks, Steenkamp has done the world of business a great service. This book is an important contribution to the study of leadership and successful team formation.

Dr Kaizer Nyatsumba, Managing Director, KMN Consulting

What a great book. *Stacked* does for the Springbok environment what *Chasing the Sun* did for the changing room – it pulls back the curtain. What sets this book apart is that it isn't really a rugby book. It's a leadership book that happens to be set in rugby. Anyone building a high-performing team – in sport, business or anywhere people have to pull together under pressure – will find themselves taking notes. And if you're a Bok fan, you'll find the moments that made you proud, explained from the inside. A fantastic and compelling read.

*Niël Steinmann, Founder of People's Dynamic Development,
Author of Finding Your ROAR and Crucial Mentoring Conversations*

This is a proudly South African story which takes the reader on a journey through the different phases of how the iconic brand of the Springboks has risen over the last decade. The "Stack" depicts this journey as different building blocks added on top of each other. It starts with developing a sound foundation that then guides the formulation of strategy and highlights the importance of attracting the right human resources. This enables sound performance management, which supports the professional development of every individual who ultimately forms part of the bigger puzzle.

I would strongly recommend *Stacked* to executives, coaches, emerging leaders and anyone committed to building high-performing teams and organisations. It provides valuable insight, practical thinking and a reminder that lasting success is something we build, one layer at a time.

Heinrich Strydom, CEO Hollywoodbets Dolphins

Copyright © KR Publishing and Paul Steenkamp

All reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that the contents of this book do not, directly or indirectly, infringe any existing copyright of any third person and, further, that all quotations or extracts taken from any other publication or work have been appropriately acknowledged and referenced. The publisher, editors and printers take no responsibility for any copyright infringement committed by an author of this work.

Copyright subsists in this work. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the written consent of the publisher or the author.

While the publisher, editors and printers have taken all reasonable steps to ensure the accuracy of the contents of this work, they take no responsibility for any loss or damage suffered by any person as a result of that person relying on the information contained in this work.

This is an independent work. It is not endorsed by, sponsored by, licensed by or affiliated with the South African Rugby Union (SA Rugby). The facts draw on publicly available sources; the analysis and conclusions are the author's own.

First published in 2026.

ISBN: 978-1-991272-85-0 (Printed)
eISBN: 978-1-991272-86-7 (PDF eBook)

Published by KR Publishing

Tel: (011) 706-6009
E-mail: orders@knowres.co.za
Website: www.kr.co.za

Printed and bound: HartWood Digital Printing, 243 Alexandra Avenue, Halfway House, Midrand

Typesetting, layout and design: Cia Joubert, cia@knowledgekr.co.za

Cover design: KR Publishing Team

Editing and proofreading: KR Publishing Team

Project management: Cia Joubert, cia@knowledgekr.co.za

STACKED

A New Operating System inspired by the
Back-to-Back World Cup Rugby Champions

PAUL STEENKAMP



2026

DEDICATION

For Olivia, and the ones who come next.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword by John Sanei	iii
How to Use This Book	iv
Prologue	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
PART 1: THE FOUNDATION	13
Chapter 2: Environment Creators	14
Exercises and Templates for Chapter 2 – Environment Creators	26
PART 2: THE ORGANISATION	37
Chapter 3: Strategy	38
Exercises and Templates for Chapter 3 – Strategy	55
Chapter 4: Planning for Execution	65
Exercises and Templates for Chapter 4 – Planning for Execution	84
Chapter 5: Hiring	97
Exercises and Templates for Chapter 5 – Hiring	116
PART 3: THE TEAM	129
Chapter 6: Team Development	130
Exercises and Templates for Chapter 6 – Team Development	148
Chapter 7: Performance Management	161
Exercises and Templates for Chapter 7 – Performance Management	175
PART 4: THE CAREER	191
Chapter 8: Professional Development	192
Exercises and Templates for Chapter 8 – Professional Development	207
PART 5: THE COUNTRY	223
Conclusion	224

Acknowledgements	232
Measure your Stack	237
About the Author	238
Endnotes	239
Bibliography	261
Index	275

FOREWORD BY JOHN SANEI

The Springboks have become far more than a rugby team. They have become one of South Africa's greatest healing forces, reminding us that a nation divided by its past can still build a future together. Nelson Mandela understood this in 1995. Rassie Erasmus's Springboks have shown us what it looks like three decades later, not through symbolism alone, but through the deliberate creation of a culture built on trust, diversity, humility, accountability, and long-term thinking.

That is why this book matters. While many will see it as a book about rugby, I see it as a blueprint for building organisations, teams and careers that thrive in an increasingly complex world. The Springboks succeed because they think beyond the next match, developing people, strengthening the collective, and making decisions that compound over years rather than quarters. It is precisely this long-term mindset that so many organisations have lost.

Few people understand that better than Paul. Having spent decades leading innovation and transformation across banking and major organisations, he has a rare ability to connect strategy with humanity, performance with empathy, and leadership with purpose. He understands that great organisations do not simply produce results; they develop people, strengthen teams, and create cultures that endure.

I feel fortunate to have called Paul a friend and to have learned from him over many years. This book captures the wisdom he has accumulated throughout that journey and offers leaders a practical framework for building organisations that are more adaptable, more empathetic, more future-focused, and ultimately more successful. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

John Sanei

Leading futurist, global voice on AI, and author

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is for builders. People building organisations, teams, and careers. People building the country. It is for South Africans at home, and for South Africans abroad who still call it home. It is for people from elsewhere on the continent and the world at large who now live here. And it is for anyone, anywhere, inspired by what the Springboks have shown is possible, and willing to do the work of experimenting off the platform they have laid down.

It works like a textbook. Read it end to end first. We recommend that, because the story builds from the first chapter to the last. Then keep it close, and open the chapter you need, when you need it. Each chapter and its exercises stand on their own, and where the work leans on another chapter, it says so and points you there. If you want help choosing where to start, measure your Stack at paulsteenkamp.com and the result will show you which chapter to open first.

Chapters 2 to 8 each close with exercises and templates that turn the chapter's argument into experiments you can start this week. Most are made for you and your team to work through together. Chapter 8's exercises, on your own career, are for you to work through yourself. The exercises rest on the three Environment Creators from Chapter 2, so if your team has not done that work yet, start there.

Every chapter's exercises and templates are collected in a workbook, which you can download at paulsteenkamp.com and pass on.

PROLOGUE

Running Red Rovers

"It is because of, not despite, rugby's intensely physical and athletic characteristics that such great camaraderie exists before and after matches."

— World Rugby

I loved playing soccer. It shaped my life. It was my life. Rugby was not an option. We were a community divided by race, language, and sporting codes. But as I have grown older I have come to realise my true love was Running Red Rovers, Parkrand Primary style. Boksburg, in the 1980s.

Maybe once a year, twice if we were lucky, a game of Running Red Rovers would spontaneously break out at primary school. There were no warning signs. If there were, I was not smart enough or dialled in enough to recognise them. All I remember is sprinting as fast as I could to where the two teams were forming, on opposite sides of the dusty playground.

There was no science or logic involved in team selection. As you entered the arena, voices from both teams would scream to summon you. It was up to you to decide. The teams cut across age groups and grades. The lines the school had drawn between us did not apply. All shapes and sizes were welcome. The rules were simple. There were not many.

You chose a side. Once everyone who wanted to play was lined up, shoulder to shoulder with their teammates, facing the opposition, the excitement and nervous energy would build until one kid could no longer contain themselves and charged. All hell broke loose.

The objective was simple. Get across the other team's starting line, and on the way, help as many of your teammates as possible do the same. If you were captured, not by touch but by tackle, and forcibly held down by one or more opponents, you did everything in your power to escape, or to help a teammate escape. Some relied on speed. Some on brawn. Some on alliances and quick thinking.

If you were captured, you had to concede. You were absorbed into your captors' army, immediately, wholeheartedly, for the rest of the game. You turned and lined up with your new teammates, facing the opposite direction, and went again. You could only be captured once.

As the game raged on, school shirts ripped, buttons went flying, knees and elbows were scraped. A lone Bata Toughee sometimes lay on the battlefield between rounds. In hindsight, no fights ever broke out. It was violent and joyful at the same time. Whether you were chasing or being chased, a sense of invincibility grew as your team either withered around you or swelled with new numbers. Nothing else mattered.

By the time the last person was captured and the game was over, win or lose, the atmosphere was celebratory. Everyone was talking at once, at volume. There was so much to go over. Disappointment did not stand a chance. This was better than all the Chelsea buns in the tuck shop.

As I have fallen more in love with rugby over the years, I have come to recognise that Running Red Rovers was my first taste of it. Rugby without the ball, but complete with scrums, rucks, mauls, and line breaks. It made room for every shape and size. It rewarded different kinds of intelligence at once. Kinetic, social, intellectual, emotional. It was teamwork through physical contest. I did not like bullies, but I loved this opt-in, consensual version of it.

Running Red Rovers had something soccer did not have in my experience. It brought people together after the game almost as much as it divided them during it. The opposition I had charged at that morning were the same kids I walked off the playground with, chatting excitedly.

That is what I was chasing, without knowing it. A social architecture that finds the best in people from every side, and leaves them better friends at the final whistle. Gordon Allport would later name the conditions: equal footing, a shared goal, and depending on one another to reach it. Running Red Rovers met them for everyone on that playground, because the game needed every body type and every kind of intelligence. Whatever your shape or size, however

your mind worked, you stood on genuinely equal footing, and your team depended on you, exactly as you were, to win. Rugby asks the same. Not despite the intensity. Because of it.

I am writing this aged fifty-one, a long way from that playground, after a working life spent inside teams and companies that found the best in people, and others that did not.

For twenty-five years after readmission in 1992, South African rugby won two World Cups and still could not hold its structure together between them. It could not compound what it knew, develop its talent across cycles, or keep its best coaches. Twelve head coaches. Peaks, then collapse, then a clean break, then another rebuild. Then, after 2017, it became something else.

The Springboks built that social architecture. At national scale. With the weight of a country's history on their backs.

This book is my best attempt to work out how.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Friendship is always an act of recognition."

— John O'Donohue, Anam Cara

I am writing this in June 2026, almost three years after the night the Springboks made my wife stand on the back of our couch in Cape Town, looking back at the TV screen with tears of joy and terror running down her face, perched on one leg, stuck to the wall like a gecko. It is one of my favourite memories of her, and of all time. I will get to that scene at the end of this chapter. The book begins somewhere else.

The Springboks lost 57-0 to the All Blacks at North Harbour Stadium in Albany on 16 September 2017. It was the heaviest defeat in 126 years of Springbok Rugby, at the hands of their greatest rival. Six years and one month later, on 28 October 2023 in Paris, the Springboks beat the All Blacks 12-11 to win their fourth Rugby World Cup. They became the first nation in history to win the title four times, and the first to win back-to-back World Cups, both away from home. They took the hardest route any side has ever taken to a World Cup title, losing to world number one Ireland in the pool stage, then beating tournament favourites France, former champions England, and three-time champions New Zealand in successive knockouts, each match by a single point. Some of this was luck, and luck cut both ways. But many of the men on the field at Albany were on the field in Paris. Many went on to lift the Webb Ellis Cup. Some twice, in 2019 and 2023. Eben Etzebeth, Siya Kolisi, Malcolm Marx, Bongi Mbonambi, Pieter-Steph du Toit, Handré Pollard, Trevor Nyakane, Steven Kitshoff, Lood de Jager, Damian de Allende. Same talent. Different result. The question is what changed in between.

Hours later, with the cup on the table and dawn approaching, Rassie Erasmus gathered his world champions in their Paris hotel. It was after four in the morning. The celebrations had peaked and subsided. The players had spent eighty minutes locked in the most intense contest of their lives. They were finally quiet.

Rassie asked them to do something unexpected.

“Guys, can we now go back to South Africa and not fall back into the trap where somebody talks kak and you keep your mouth shut, and you just say, oh, everything is fucked up in South Africa. Can you say, no, no, no, we can fix it. Let’s give this guy a chance. Whether you’re a farmer, a teacher, or just a rugby player, can you take this away from rugby, because people will listen to you.”

This book says: We can take it away from rugby and help fix it. In practice, that means we decode what the Springboks built, debate it, and experiment with it in our companies, our teams, our careers, and the country. And here’s how.

The Springboks built something that works in a company, a team, or a career: it finds high-potential talent from all walks of life, develops them, holds them to the highest standard, and asks each one to build the one who comes next. That is what this book is about.

THE MYTH OF THE LONE GENIUS

The answer is not Rassie Erasmus.

Not him alone. Rassie is extraordinary. Tactically. Strategically. As a developer of people. The players want to play for him. The coaches want to coach for him. To us fans, he’s our beautiful zombie, living rent-free in our opponents’ heads, and in our hearts. The country has spent the better part of a decade watching him do things at the top of world rugby that nobody else is doing, and watching most of those things actually work. He brings out the dog in you. The line comes from a song Rassie posted on X to thank South Africa. Its closing lines ask the country to ‘bring out the dog in you’ and rise as one. In his telling, the dog is the fight you find inside and re-direct toward something bigger than yourself, the same thing he asked of the players in that Paris hotel. None of that is in dispute.

A fair question follows. If the answer is not Rassie alone, then is it the tactics? Over the past eight years the Springboks have produced more tactical innovation than any other side in the Test game. The

reader who knows the game might well object that Rassie did not invent all of this on his own. The answer the rest of the book makes is that the social architecture produced the tactical innovation, not the other way round. The conditions are simple: people are asked to think out loud, told the truth about what is working, and trusted to run experiments without being punished when they fail. The architecture is the platform. The tactics are what the platform produces. The deepest innovations are systemic rather than tactical. They run through everything this book is about: how the Springboks set strategy, plan and execute, hire, build a team and manage its performance, and grow the people who come next. The rest of this book is the argument for that stack.

Rassie did not change Springbok Rugby alone. He built, and runs, a working group designed to outlive him. Mark Alexander, the President of SA Rugby, brought Rassie back from Munster in late 2017, backed him through the World Rugby ban he received in 2021, after he posted a video criticising the refereeing in the series against the British and Irish Lions, and in December 2025 extended his contract to 2031. Rassie could not have hired himself. Mzwandile Stick has been on the coaching staff every World Cup cycle since 2018. Deon Davids runs the forwards. Daan Human coaches the scrum. Andy Edwards, recruited from Saracens in England, heads athletic performance. Duane Vermeulen, who lifted the World Cup twice as a player, now coaches the next generation alongside Franzel September and Bafana Nhleko in a roving unit that serves every national team. Felix Jones, who was born in Dublin and won 13 caps for Ireland, returned to the staff in 2025 after a year at England Rugby. Jerry Flannery, the former Ireland hooker, rebuilt the defence in 2024. Tony Brown, who won 18 caps at flyhalf for the All Blacks and is regarded as one of the most innovative attacking coaches in the world, reshaped the attack in the same year.

The South African staff and the imported staff are co-builders, not the support cast. The country has the people, and can attract others to come and build alongside them. This book is about how that working group was built, what it produces, and how you build one of your own. A company. A team. A career.

Most of the time, this kind of building happens where you cannot watch it. It goes on inside companies, behind closed doors, and you see the results long after the conversations that made them. That is part of what makes it so hard to learn. The Springboks do it in the open, win or lose. Not just on camera, but in press conferences, documentaries, on podcasts, and in the books the players and coaches have written. Much of the material for reading the pattern sits out in the open. What follows is one attempt to name it, offered as a conversation starter rather than a verdict. The Stack is my pattern recognition, no more than that, and I may have parts of it wrong. I have watched the Springboks since before South Africa's readmission in 1992, and watched the turnaround of the last eight years up close. I hope that if we name what works clearly enough, more of us will build others like it. The book is a launchpad for your own work. Test it against your own building. Keep what helps. Discard the rest.

THE PATTERN

In 2025, in Wellington, the Springboks beat the All Blacks 43-10. A 33-point margin against the All Blacks at their home. It was the heaviest defeat in All Blacks history, in more than a hundred and twenty years of New Zealand Test rugby, going back to their first Test in 1903. The same rivalry that had handed South Africa its worst day, the 57-0 at Albany eight years earlier, had now produced New Zealand's.

Wellington was not a freak result. South Africa have spent most of the time since late 2023 at the top of the world rankings, and they sit there now. They are back-to-back Rugby Championship title-holders, the first time the country has ever defended that trophy. They beat the All Blacks four times in a row across 2023 and 2024, the first such streak since 1949. In 2025 they won twelve of fourteen Tests and went through their European tour unbeaten for the second year running. The last two World Rugby Players of the Year are both Springbok forwards.

The Junior Springboks won the World Rugby U20 Championship in 2025, their first World Cup title in thirteen years, and in May 2026 went through the U20 Rugby Championship unbeaten to claim the

southern-hemisphere title for the first time. The Springbok Women reached a Rugby World Cup quarter-final for the first time. The Blitzboks, whose resurgence began with a bronze medal at the Paris Olympics, won the SVNS Series, finally lifted gold in Hong Kong after losing four finals there, and in June were crowned SVNS World champions.

The turnaround shows off the field as well. In 2025 the Springboks broke into Brand Finance's ranking of South Africa's hundred most valuable brands for the first time, at R2.2 billion, the first sports team of any code to make the list. The same research named them the strongest sports brand in the country, ahead of the football giants Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs, who have carried South African sport for generations. More than half the nation's sports fans, fifty-six per cent, named the Springboks their favourite team, a clear lead over the Proteas, Pirates, and Chiefs. Eight years after the heaviest defeat in their history, and the lowest world ranking they have ever held, the Springboks were the country's most valuable sports brand.

These are not isolated wins. A system keeps producing them, season after season.

What is actually being recognised, and developed, that produces this?

PEOPLE GROWING PEOPLE

Makazole Mapimpi grew up in Tsholomnqa, a rural village in the Eastern Cape. He walked ten kilometres each way to school. He grew up without a father. His mother, his sister Zukiswa, and his brother all died before he reached the Springbok squad. His brother died after losing a leg in an electrocution accident. Before the 2019 World Cup, the Springbok management asked players to bring photographs of family members. For the farewell Test against Argentina, the photographs would be placed behind the squad numbers on the back of their jerseys. Mapimpi gave them photographs of himself, because there was no one else. He was twenty-three before the national set-up noticed him at the Border rugby union in East London, reaching into a union its pipeline had mostly passed over to give him his first

structured pathway. He scored the first try by a Springbok in any World Cup final.

Kurt-Lee Arendse was packing pork sausages at a butchery in Paarl when Chester Williams found him. Williams had been the only player of colour in the 1995 World Cup-winning squad, and he scored four tries in the quarter-final against Samoa. Williams bought Arendse his first pair of rugby boots and brought him to the University of the Western Cape, where he was coaching. Williams died in September 2019, aged forty-nine, before he could see what came next. In the 2023 World Cup final, with the Springboks ahead 12-3, Arendse caught Rieko Ioane and dragged him into touch with a low chop tackle drawn from his Sevens years. The Springboks won the final by a single point. In a match that close, the tackle that stops a try is the tackle that wins it. Arendse has scored a try in every other Test he has played in the green and gold, one of the highest try-per-cap rates of any Springbok in history. The cup Williams had lifted in 1995 was lifted again that night by the boy he had recognised at a youth week.

Malcolm Marx grew up in Germiston, raised by a single mother. He came through the King Edward VII School pipeline and the Lions academy. He did not begin as a hooker. At school he played in the back row, at flank and number eight, until a coach saw what he might become in the front row and moved him there in his final year. For most of his Test career he has shared the hooker jersey with Bongi Mbonambi, two world-class players locked in a rivalry the team has shaped into co-opetition. They push each other in training. They make each other better. The team gets both at their best.

Ox Nché grew up in Bloemfontein and went to HTS Louis Botha, never one of the city's celebrated rugby schools. Years earlier, the same school had produced Daan Human, who played four Tests for the Springboks, then 169 games over eight seasons at Toulouse in France, learning the dark arts of the scrum and winning two Heineken Cups. When Human came home and moved into coaching, he took Nché under his wing at the Cheetahs from the age of eighteen and stayed with him for the better part of a decade, all the way into the Springbok scrum that Human now runs. A Black African loosehead and an Afrikaans coach, two old boys of the same Bloemfontein

school, building one scrum across ten years. In 2025 Nché became the first prop ever nominated for World Rugby Player of the Year. No prop has won it in the award's history. The set-up found him, and a coach from the same school corridors developed him into one of the most feared scrummagers in the world.

Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu's grandfather Barry Feinberg spent thirty years in exile as an anti-apartheid activist. He was a member of the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress, and he founded the ANC's Cultural Ensemble. His grandson, at Kings Park in Durban in 2025, scored thirty-seven points in a single Test against Argentina. Sacha has said, ***"I'm a product of what he fought for."*** The Western Province academy and the Stormers coaching staff brought him through. The Springbok set-up caught him at exactly the moment a young flyhalf needs catching.

The township. The butchery. The suburb. The private school. The farmlands. The Border union, the King Edward pipeline, the Western Province academy, the Stormers staff. The set-up found them, the coaches developed them, the standards held them, and each, in turn, has been asked to build the one who comes next.

DIFFERENT IS BEAUTIFUL

Diversity, genuinely recognised and developed, is the engine of excellence. The diversity of South Africa's high-potential talent is its world-beating advantage. Apartheid was the most concentrated form of a lie far older than itself, one that had shaped this country since 1652. The mind-virus is that difference is dangerous. That people unlike you are a threat. You do not dismantle a lie like that through legislation alone. South Africa tried that for the thirty years after 1994. The lie survived. The Springboks have shown that the lie can be worn down, in public, in front of a national audience, by living its opposite for long enough that the country starts to see what is true. Malcolm Gladwell has argued that *Will & Grace* shifted how Americans saw gay people. Not in a single season, but over its original eight-season run, reaching millions week after week until an old assumption quietly gave way. The culture moved first. The law caught up in 2015, when same-sex marriage became legal across

the United States. The Springboks have done something similar with race on a rugby field, changing what the country sees as normal by showing it, week after week, shifting it.

Rassie Erasmus has said he hates the word quotas, the policy that sets a minimum number of Black African and Coloured players in South African national teams. He hates it because it is embarrassing on both sides. Embarrassing because it implies that some players were picked for the wrong reasons, and embarrassing because it implies that other players have to be defended for being picked at all. The most transformed Springbok team in the country's history is the most successful Springbok team in the country's history. That is the engine running. It has been running for long enough now to be a platform, the foundation that future seasons stand on.

Stand at a Springbok home Test when the national anthem moves through its languages, and watch the whole stadium sing all of it. The anthem stitches together two songs that once stood on opposite sides of the country's divide: the hymn sung in defiance of apartheid, and the anthem of the apartheid state itself. For years many South Africans sang the verses that were theirs at full voice, and went quieter for the rest. Watch a Springbok crowd now and they sing all of it, at the top of their lungs, many with tears in their eyes, even the lines that once marked which side you were on. The team showed the country what it looks like to claim its whole self, and the country started to sing along.

THE COUNTRY NEEDS MORE LIKE THIS

Organisations. Teams. Careers. We need more of them, built the way the Springboks built theirs. South Africa has the highest inequality of any country on earth, a gap that three decades of democracy have barely narrowed. More than six in ten young people aged fifteen to twenty-four are unemployed. Around 8.8 million young South Africans are not in employment, education, or training, a generation promised a new country and left waiting at its gate. The Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator calls them the country's largest underused resource. The talent is there. Below the formal economy, GG Alcock counts a kasinomics economy worth around a trillion

rand, most of it invisible to the companies that could be building on it. The missing piece is building more companies, teams, and schools that find that talent, develop it, and ask each person to build the next one.

The country is showing green shoots. Adi Enthoven, in his November 2025 lecture at Stellenbosch University, pointed to ports cleared from twenty-one days of delays to two, load shedding ended, and inflation back inside target at 3.4 per cent.

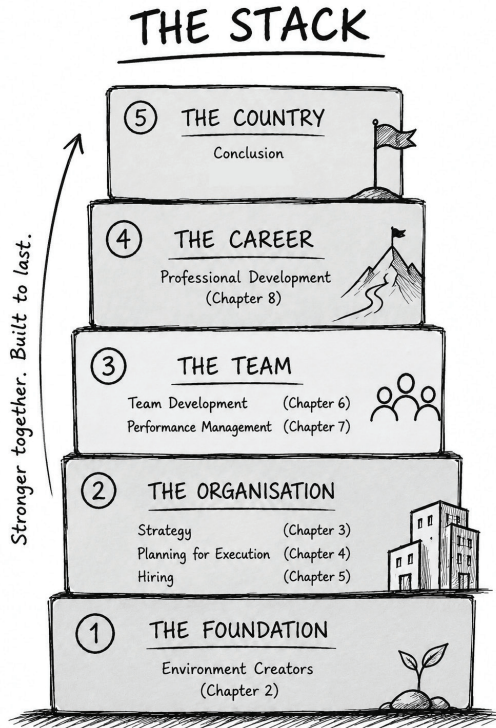
Those gains came from government and business working together. Company executives co-led the teams that ended load shedding and cleared the ports, working alongside government. The same pattern runs across the economy. The V&A Waterfront, jointly owned by a private property group and the state pension fund, supports more than eighty thousand jobs and over 1.5 per cent of the Western Cape's economy. Collective X co-funds digital placements with employers to open a path into entry-level tech roles. Small enterprises, big companies, government, and not-for-profits are all in it, and it works best where they build together.

The conditions are turning because the talent is there, doing the work despite state capture, apartheid's afterlife, and the longer histories of colonialism and slavery. What is missing is more companies like the one the Springboks built.

We have one of them. The country needs more like it. Not in rugby. In every sector that finds and develops the talent it currently overlooks.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

The Stack diagram is the whole book in one picture. Read it from the bottom up.



At the base, wider than everything above it, sits the Foundation: the Environment Creators that Chapter 2 builds first, the behaviours the whole Stack rests on. Nothing else holds without them.

Four dimensions stand on that base. First, the organisation: how you design it, how it operates, who you let inside. Strategy in Chapter 3. Planning for Execution in Chapter 4. Hiring in Chapter 5. Above it, the team: the always-on work you keep doing once the people are inside. Team Development in Chapter 6. Performance Management in Chapter 7. Above that, the career: how you become the kind of person who can build any of this. Professional Development in Chapter 8. And at the top, the roof over everything, the country. South Africa is rebuilding, and what gets built inside any company here

both depends on the country and feeds back into it. The Conclusion is about that.

The Stack works at any scale: a handful of people, a department, a whole organisation. It is the same for the Springboks, from a position group to a full squad and the staff who carry it. You do not need a dedicated HR function or a strategy team to run it. You need willingness to do the work.

AN ACT OF RECOGNITION

On the night of 28 October 2023, my wife Janéne and I sat on our couch in Cape Town, watching the Springboks play the World Cup final in Paris. We had watched them win the quarter-final two weekends before, and the semi-final the weekend after that. Three weekends, three one-point wins.

I was perched on the very edge of the couch, my nerves shredded, squeaking and screeching at the television. The final whistle blew. I launched to my left to embrace Janéne. She wasn't there. I looked to my right. Not there either. I stood up and spun around. There she was. Standing on the back of the couch. Perched on one leg. Stuck to the wall like a gecko. Looking back at the screen. Tears streaming down her face, elation and terror mixed together. The Springboks had driven Janéne up the wall. Literally. For the third weekend in a row. It was one of my favourite moments. Live sport is the original reality television, except no one writes the script, the stakes are real, and nobody, not the players, not the coaches, not the fans, knows how it ends. An entire country was on the equivalent of the back of a couch somewhere that night.

Scenes like that have been playing out in homes across the country every time the Springboks have won a World Cup. The 1995 final at Ellis Park. The 2007 final in Paris. Yokohama in 2019. Paris again in 2023. South Africa missed the 1987 tournament under sporting sanctions. Every tournament since 1995, win or lose, has added something to what the country shares. The wins added the most.

Transformation was happening before 2018, in fits and starts, but it did not compound. Since then, with names like Mapimpi and Marx and Nché and Kolisi and Arendse and Feinberg-Mngomezulu, with senior coaches like Stick and Davids and Vermeulen working alongside Erasmus and Brown and Flannery, the country has been watching itself being put back together.

With the Springbok stories as our lighthouse, the Stack offers a design for companies, teams, and careers that outperform, outlast, and matter, on a global stage where this country has been isolated for too much of its modern history. And it offers a design for a country that believes in itself again.

Recognition is not agreement. It means seeing what makes another person different, and valuing exactly that, instead of wanting everyone to be the same. Those qualities, recognised instead of flattened, can be combined: complementary strengths working as one. That is the magic of what is unattainable alone.

In the end, the Springboks have given the country a way to see its own people, and to value what makes each of them different. Rugby has always had a place for every shape and size, the tall lock and the small scrumhalf, the heavy prop and the quick wing. The Springboks took that and widened it: a place for talent from every walk of life, across the economic and racial divides. A country of people learning to see each other's differences as beautiful.

The line this chapter opens with is John O'Donohue's, from *Anam Cara*, which is Gaelic for soul friend, someone in whose company you are fully recognised and known. A rugby team has shown a whole country what he meant: that to be seen as you are, and to see others as they are, is where friendship begins.

That is what friendship is, in the oldest sense of the word.

The dog in me sees the dog in you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul Steenkamp is a writer, speaker and builder. He decodes the operating systems of the world's greatest teams, in sport and in business, and puts them to work with people navigating change and disruption. His subject is the team that reaches the top and changes its society for the better. The team in this book is the first on the shelf, and the system it runs is called the Stack. His keynotes bring the evidence to the stage, and his masterclasses put it to work with your own team. For growing companies, his practice installs the system where the work happens.

He has done this work from the inside for nearly three decades. In corporate life he managed FNB's award-winning Innovators programme and launched Standard Bank's internal ventures lab. Since 2016 he has run his own practice as a founder, designing and testing leadership and management practices with teams across South Africa, Europe and the Middle East. His first book, *Character Insights for a Regenerative Future* (2022), written with Tanya Meeson, decoded the leader's own operating system: five character strengths, backed by science, that power breakthrough work. His purpose is to help people build a crazy beautiful work life, one relationship at a time.

He lives in Cape Town, where most of his thinking happens on Table Mountain, being walked by his dogs, Luna and Milo.

Measure your Stack at paulsteenkamp.com

ENDNOTES

Prologue

Epigraph

World Rugby. “Rugby for All,” *World Rugby*, official website. Accessed 15 May 2026.

Notes

1. Author’s personal recollection of Running Red Rovers at Parkrand Primary School, Boksburg, Gauteng (then Transvaal), during the 1980s. The game is a South African variation of the traditional ‘British Bulldog’ playground game.
2. Bata Toughies school shoes, manufactured by Bata Shoe Company. The colloquial term ‘Bata toughie’ is retained to reflect period usage.
3. Chelsea bun: a currant-filled spiral bun commonly sold in South African school tuck shops during the 1980s.
4. The South African. ‘Springboks: EVERY head coach since readmission in 1992’, 15 April 2023; World Rugby official Rugby World Cup records (1995 and 2007); Liv Boeree, ‘The Dark Side of Competition in AI’, TEDxRoyalTunbridgeWells, October 2023; *The Last Invention*, Season 1, Episode 7, November 2025.

Chapter 1

Epigraph

O’Donohue, J. (1997) *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. New York: Cliff Street Books/HarperCollins.

Notes

1. New Zealand Rugby (2017) *Match Record: New Zealand v South Africa*, North Harbour Stadium, Albany, 16 September. See also *Sky Sports* match report, 16 September 2017; and *Rugby.com.au* match report, 16 September 2017.
2. World Rugby (2023) *Rugby World Cup France 2023* official tournament archive and match records: South Africa v France, 15 October; South Africa v England, 21 October; South Africa v New Zealand, 28 October.

3. SA Rugby (2017–2025) official staff announcements and media releases. See also *News24*, ‘Confirmed: Rassie takes up Director of Rugby job’, 30 June 2017; *IOL* and *Sport24* reports on Erasmus’s Munster departure; and SA Rugby announcement of Erasmus as Springbok head coach, February 2018.
4. SA Rugby (2025) ‘SA Rugby extends Erasmus’s contract until 2031’, 5 December. See also *Associated Press*, ‘Erasmus to lead Springboks to 2031 Rugby World Cup after contract extension’, 5 December 2025.
5. World Rugby (2023–2025) *Official Men’s Rankings Archive*.
6. SANZAAR (2024–2025) official competition records; World Rugby match records; SA Rugby historical match archive; and *News24* reporting on the Springboks’ four-match run against New Zealand and the Rugby Championship titles.
7. World Rugby (2025) official match records; SA Rugby (2025) season summary; and Tshwaku, K. (2025) year-in-review coverage in *News24*, 28 December.
8. World Rugby (2025–2026) official tournament records; HSBC SVNS official records; SA Rugby official communications, including ‘Junior Boks take U20 Rugby Championship crown’, 9 May 2026; and coverage in *SuperSport*, *SABC Sport* and *Daily Maverick*.
9. World Rugby (2019, 2024, 2025) *World Rugby Awards Archive*.
10. Note number intentionally left open for renumbering if the typeset manuscript requires it.
11. *Sky Sports* (2025) ‘Rugby Championship: South Africa thrash Argentina 67–30 to top table with Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu breaking points record’, 27 September; AFP/France 24 (2025) ‘Feinberg-Mngomezulu scores 37 points as Springboks top table’, 27 September; SA Rugby official match record; World Rugby statistics; *News24* year-in-review reporting; and *RugbyPass* Top 100 profile, December 2025.
12. Brand Finance (2025) *South Africa Sports Report 2025*; *TimesLIVE* coverage, 2025.
13. SA Rugby player biography: Makazole Mapimpi; *Rugby World* profile, July 2021; *RugbyPass*, ‘Massive, massive heart’, November 2020; SA Rugby and GoodThingsGuy coverage of *Chasing the Sun*; World Rugby official match record, 2019 Rugby World Cup Final; and *Rugby World* match report, 2 November 2019.

14. SA Rugby, BizNews, *Sky Sports*, *News24* and *Sport24* obituaries for Chester Williams, 6–7 September 2019; SA Rugby, World Rugby SVNS and *Planet Rugby* profiles of Kurt-Lee Arendse; World Rugby official record of the 2023 Rugby World Cup Final; and *Rugbydump* match analysis.
15. Kolisi, S. (2021) *Rise: The Brand New Autobiography*. London: HarperCollins. See also *Chasing the Sun* (Season 1, SuperSport/Showmax, 2020); *SA Rugby Magazine*, ‘Timeline: Springbok captain Siya Kolisi’s journey so far’; CNN reporting, 28 May 2018; *The Citizen*, 28 May 2018; and ESPN feature, 8 June 2018.
16. Kasrils, R. (2023) obituary for Barry Feinberg, *SABC News*, October; *SA Jewish Report* profile, 3 November 2022; *RugbyPass* Top 100 profile of Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu, December 2025; *SuperSport* feature, June 2024; and *Daily Maverick* profile, 2024.
17. Statistics South Africa (2026) *Quarterly Labour Force Survey*, Q4 2025. Pretoria: Stats SA. See also Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator public reporting, 2024–2026.
18. Alcock, G.G. (2018) *Kasinomics Revolution: The Rise of African Informal Economies*. Johannesburg: Tracey McDonald Publishers. See also Trade Intelligence spaza shop research and Alcock media commentary, 2024–2026.
19. Enthoven, A. (2025) ‘After 10 Years of Decline, Has South Africa Turned the Corner?’, Stellenbosch Thought Leader Lecture, 4 November. See also Mistra lecture transcript; *News24 Business*, 11 November 2025; *BizNews*, 19 November 2025; and Statistics South Africa CPI release, October 2025.
20. Standard historical records relating to the establishment of the Dutch East India Company refreshment station at the Cape on 6 April 1652.
21. The closing line is the author’s adaptation of recurring Springbok themes and the language of recognition found in greeting traditions such as *Sawubona* and *Namaste*. No external quotation is reproduced.
22. SuperSport/Showmax (2024) *Chasing the Sun 2*, final episode. The quotation is transcribed from Erasmus’s address to the squad after the 2023 Rugby World Cup Final, with minor cleanup of spoken disfluencies.