



**OUR INDUSTRY  
WILL BE  
STRONGER IF  
MORE WOMEN  
ARE INVOLVED**



## HANSEN MANUFACTURING | EMPLOYER



**Profile:**  
Erik-Hagedorn  
Hansen



**Sector:**  
Manufacturing,  
Engineering



**Number of  
Employees:**  
70



**Position in Company:**  
Chief Executive  
Officer



**Location:**  
Eastern Cape,  
Gqeberha



**Percentage  
of Female  
Employees:**  
31%



**Company Size:**  
Medium  
Enterprise





I LIKE TO BELIEVE **WE HAVE GENERATED A CULTURE** AT OUR COMPANY THAT **ALLOWS WOMEN TO FEEL THEIR GENDER DOES NOT RESULT IN NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES** FOR THEM OR THEIR CAREERS.



**DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT AND WE ACTIVELY MONITOR IT AND ADDRESS BARRIERS THAT WE FIND**

We are aware that women face challenges in this industry, and we do our best to create an environment that supports them to reach their goals and achieve their ambitions. We know where our challenges lie: our administrative department is dominated by females and the shop floor is still heavily dominated by males.

One of the challenges is that there is a perception that certain environments, especially jobs in the factory, might be better performed by men due to the component of physical strength required. We have never had a situation where we have appointed a female to a position and had them come back to us and say that physically, they can't do the job.

Additionally, although I would not want to generalise, I have also found the women in my team are well suited to engineering as they are often more conscientious, thorough, and measured when solving problems when compared to some of the men.

We actively monitor the equity situation in the workplace, both racial and gender equity, as part of complying with the employment equity legislation in this country. We have a Workplace Skills Plan and employment equity report, and we constantly adjust based on the situation in the company.

One of my principles in life is to treat others the way I would like to be treated and I always try to put myself in peoples' shoes. I would not like to be treated differently or disadvantaged due to my gender, race or age and I conduct my business in this way.

I like to believe we have generated a culture at our company that allows women to feel their gender does not result in negative consequences for them or their careers. This is also a family business – I took over the business from my father who took it over from his father and I feel I have a responsibility to conduct my professional affairs in a way that is like dealing with an extended family.

**THE VALUE OF MENTORING: WE LIKE TO DREAM TOGETHER ABOUT CHANGING THE WORLD**

I also have a passion for mentoring people, it's like my calling. I have been fortunate that one of the women I have been mentoring for almost 12 years is now a partner in one of my businesses and is part of my succession plan. She is the perfect candidate to mentor and has always had a passion and willingness to learn.

Our mentoring relationship is dynamic and comes naturally, it is not overly structured or something we feel we are forced to do. It is also mutually beneficial, and although I have taken her under my wing, so to speak, she has paid me back over and over.

**OUR ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT IS DOMINATED BY FEMALES AND THE SHOP FLOOR IS STILL HEAVILY DOMINATED BY MALES.**



We have a similar outlook, and we like to dream together on how to change things - and the world! - for the better. We also like to 'pay back' and she is now mentoring a few female engineers who report into her. Seeing her accomplishments as a young leader is very rewarding. I can't take credit for her achievements, she did that all on her own, all I did was provide the platform.

We all need to have role models who are people we identify with, and so female role models have the potential to be hugely influential figures for aspiring women engineers. There is a responsibility to ensure that the achievements of female role models are visible as examples of how it is possible to reach your goals even as a minority in this industry.

A key highlight for me is when I see the women in our organisation achieve their ambitions and reach their potential. It is very rewarding knowing that I have helped create an environment that enabled them to reach their potential, to accomplish their goals.

### SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT

As a company, we contribute to and support iGEMS (Incubating Great Engineering Minds), an initiative that identifies disadvantaged grade 10s who have the ability to achieve academically, and we support them on their path into employment. We get to know the young people involved in the programme very well as we walk a long journey with them.

We first meet them in high school where their education is supported through tutoring in maths and science, and each year, when the graduating class finishes matric, they become available for a one-year in-service training internship. We integrate them into the business, and give them responsibilities from day one. This allows them to experience their anticipated career path before they embark on their tertiary education. After their internship, they hopefully go onto university. All our interns have gone onto study fully funded by their tertiary institution.

Once qualified, they have the option to return to us for employment if they wish and interests align, and we are hoping to receive our first returnees at the end of this academic year. Although we have had a few females coming to us through the programme and we continue to support them, the initiative supports young South Africans in general and is not specifically focused on young women.

One of the challenges we face in South Africa where there are so many inequalities, is that it can be hard to put gender as a primary criterion above some other hardship. However, when given the opportunity, we do place a focus on gender equality as it is a goal we are pursuing.

### WE NEED TO ADDRESS THE IDEA THAT MALES NEED TO BE DOMINANT IN THE INDUSTRY

I certainly would not want to speak for all men or all women, but I get the impression that some men believe women are better suited to supporting roles. I have my suspicions that in some cases, this has resulted in women believing that to be true. To help women remain in this profession we need to support and encourage them and help them believe that they can truly achieve anything.

The problem is that toxic masculinity still exists in certain industries and there is this idea that males need to be dominant and be leaders. I totally disagree with this, and I believe time is slowly addressing the issue, but we all have a role to play in accelerating change.

Unfortunately, there is no quick fix, but I will keep doing my part and I believe that if we are open and talk about it while making sure we give opportunities to females in the industry, we will eventually get there. People need to recognise that the industry will be stronger if more women are involved and stakeholders across the industry should identify their role in attracting and retaining females.

