



WOMEN DON'T NEED TO RESTRICT THEMSELVES TO 'EASIER' PROFESSIONS



NOKWAZI MBELE | EMPLOYEE



Name of Company:
Hesto Harnesses



Highest Qualification:
National Diploma in
Electrical Engineering



Age:
29 years



Position in Company:
Programme Manager



Academic institution:
Durban University
of Technology



Years in the organisation:
Seven and half years



Location:
KwaZulu-Natal,
KwaDukuza

THE DRIVE COMES FROM WITHIN

I chose a career in electrical engineering by following what I enjoy and am passionate about. The drive comes from within. I enjoyed physical science in high school, especially the areas of electrical and chemical and that helped me narrow my choice to electrical engineering.

My high school passion has continued into the working world, and I am currently occupying a programme manager position. I consider it a big achievement to be part of management at my age. I started at this company in 2014 as a trainee engineer, and moved up the ranks to junior engineer and then to product engineer in about two and a half years.

When my manager moved to another project, I was appointed as acting project manager. I always open myself to learning new things, and to help me transition to the new role I had to learn about other processes and departments, a lot of which I learned from my previous manager. After a year as acting project manager I was appointed as project manager, and less than a year later I was promoted to my current position of programme manager.

YOU CAN'T SEPARATE ME FROM MY WORK

Early in my career, I set my own career path and goal to become a manager in engineering. This has helped to keep me on track and focused. I do not pay lot of attention to office politics and issues one faces at work, because I always align myself to my career path and I am prepared to work hard to achieve it. The sacrifices I had made also contributed to where I am: a lot of extra effort and sleepless nights.

I remember often working and sending emails after midnight, to a point where some of executive managers raised a question why I work so late. I am that person who is willing to do what it takes for success of the project assigned to me, you cannot separate me from work because of my strong work ethics. I must say I haven't always been this confident but exposure to different work challenges has equipped me to gain confidence and a positive mindset is always the solution.

YOU NEED TO HAVE A POSITIVE MINDSET

I don't have a role model in the engineering industry. My mother is my role model. She is a very independent



I CHOSE A CAREER IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING BY FOLLOWING WHAT I ENJOY AND AM PASSIONATE ABOUT.



woman and believes she can achieve anything she puts her mind to. I have taken her positive mindset into my work as an engineer.

I approach problems believing I will find a solution rather than starting with a worry that it might not be solvable, or I won't be able to get through it. I see myself as a person who can do anything that gets thrown at me in both my personal and professional life.

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT IN THIS INDUSTRY IF YOU ARE NICE TO EVERYBODY

The development of my confidence to manage has been a journey, as a young female especially in a position dominated by men. When I have to give instructions to an older man it can become difficult, but I have taught myself to be firm and apply assertive leadership when required regardless of being a young female.

The company assisted me in this as they put me through a leadership programme which taught me different types of leadership skills and helped me realise that I can apply different leadership styles as required.

PEOPLE ASSUME MALE ENGINEERS ARE GOOD AT THEIR JOBS, BUT FEMALE ENGINEERS MUST PROVE THEMSELVES FIRST

The engineering field is dominated by men and that brings some challenges for women. When I first started out as a project manager, I found myself in a boardroom full of men and I wondered how I was going to get my voice heard. Women are not seen as having the same capabilities, skills, and intelligence as men, and there is a perception that men can lead better than women.

People automatically give male managers respect and assume they know what they are doing and that being a leader is built in but for a woman, to be recognized and respected, we need to first prove ourselves.

This does not mean we should let men intimidate women and I think there are a lot of opportunities for women nowadays. We see it here at the company where there is a focus on developing and training women.

The company has sent me on management and leadership training and also on courses aligned with my specialties. Here, women are given the opportunity to work in managerial positions and we are trusted with big projects. It was quite scary when I first started managing projects, but I think my boldness, together with the support from my team and management, and the training opportunities I've been given, have helped me succeed.

FOLLOWING IN MY FOOTSTEPS

Friends and family now see me as a go getter, and I think that seeing me progress and prosper in the engineering industry has encouraged people in my community to follow suit. My older brother and his wife both studied electrical engineering, so engineering is something that runs in our family, and I think my success has influenced my younger brother to choose the same industry and study engineering.

I have also shown that if you want a good career, you need to study and take the right courses and so I have been encouraging people at the company, especially women, to study.

Something that helps with this is that the perceptions about the type of work that women can do are changing. People are beginning to realise that women don't need to restrict themselves to the so-called 'easier' professions. We are intelligent enough to study difficult courses like engineering and succeed as engineers.



HERE, WOMEN ARE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS AND WE ARE TRUSTED WITH BIG PROJECTS



7 Lessons that I have learnt:

- 1 **Having a clear vision and career goals early will help you stay focused and confident**
- 2 **Open yourself up to new things so you can progress further**
- 3 **Don't second guess yourself, develop a strong voice so you can be respected**
- 4 **I have learnt to assert myself so I can have the courage to lead**
- 5 **Women are equally capable; you don't need to choose a seemingly easier careers**
- 6 **The support from work is very important to help you push through**
- 7 **It's important to inspire other women as they can see themselves in you**