



**YOU DON'T
NEED TO
BE ONE OF
THE GUYS**



THANDEKA MHLANZI | EMPLOYEE



Name of Company:
Smiths
Manufacturing



Highest Qualification:
Advanced Diploma in
Project Management



Age:
30 years



**Position in
Company:**
Quality Engineer



Academic institution:
University of
KwaZulu-Natal



**Years in the
organisation:**
Four years



Location:
KwaZulu-Natal,
Pinetown



I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A 'MECH' GIRL!

My interest in Mechanical Engineering goes way back – when I was a kid I loved tomato sauce, and there was this memorable tomato sauce TV advert that showed the production line for tomato sauce from the start of the process to purchase point. I found the advert fascinating. I also used to watch Mega Factories on National Geographic when I was still in high school. I explored various car manufacturing processes, all the assembly line processes involved in manufacturing a car, up to the Quality Assurance stations. I loved it all!

My parents sent me to a Technical High School, and from Grade 8 we had to do technical subjects like Electrical Technology, Mechanical Technology and Woodwork. My high school really paved the way for me, as we were taken to Science Expos, and to the UKZN Edgewood campus career day where we were exposed to a vast array of Engineering Field studies. I suddenly saw the possibilities of this field.

HARD WORK, PERSISTENCE AND DRIVE ARE THE THREE THINGS I LIVE BY

University is extremely hard, and you need to know what you are there for. It's the first time most people are independent, and it can be easy to lose your way as no one is following up on you. You can miss class if you want to, you can go to groove if you want to go to groove. It comes down to the person you are and the goals you have set for yourself. Hard work, persistence and drive are the three things I live by. I ended up in the world of work by reaching out to someone on LinkedIn – I remember scrolling through LinkedIn one day liking each engineering post I saw. I came across a guy who also went to Mangosuthu Technikon and was working at Smiths Manufacturing at the time.

I messaged him and told him about myself and my field of studies and said that I was looking for an opportunity to do practical work. He replied and sent me the email address of the HR manager at Smiths. Luckily, they were taking students for vacation work. I was called in for induction and that was the beginning of my career here. After 2 months, I was accepted for 12 months of in-service training, and after the in-service training I received a permanent post and have worked my way up from junior product engineer to junior quality engineer where I am today.



I KNOW THERE IS A
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WHEN THEY THROW YOU IN WITH THE SHARKS IT'S NOT BECAUSE THEY WANT YOU TO DROP DEAD

The largest challenges I have experienced since I started engineering have been more internal. I am a sensitive person, and it has taken me a while to realise that when words are exchanged in a pressurised situation, it's not that I'm being lashed at, it's just that the job needs to be done now. I have also learned that when they throw you in with the sharks, it's not because they want you to drop dead, it's because the team wants to help you learn and grow.

Back when I was a trainee engineer on the line, there was a breakdown. I was told to go and make a light box at the workshop and was given no guidance. I just had to do it, and I managed. My mentor told me afterwards that he knew I would be able to do it and that's why he didn't give me any guidance, because he trusted me and wanted me to receive full credit for it. I know there is a stereotype that engineering is a man's world and is tough for females. I can't speak for other women, but I have never experienced any form of gender related challenges in my career. I have found that if you stick to your work scope and perform well, people turn around once they see that you are capable because ultimately the brain is what counts.

YOU DON'T NEED TO BE ONE OF THE GUYS

When I first started working, I thought that I needed to change to be 'one of the guys.' I even found myself trying to walk like the guys, I stopped doing my nails because I thought I needed them to see that I am capable. Most of them are big built and I am very short, and I would be running in the plant trying to keep up with them.

I am the only female in my team here, so I make sure I put in the hard work, learn from my mistakes, and do better because I don't want to be regarded as not good enough and having this being attributed to me being female. I have felt supported, trusted, and encouraged by my male colleagues here. Diversity is a big focus in our company, and they strongly support females in manufacturing.



WE MUST SHOWCASE PROFESSIONALS IN DIFFERENT FIELDS WHO COME OUT OF THE TOWNSHIP AND NOW HAVE SUCCESSFUL CAREERS



WE NEED TO BE OUT THERE AS BLACK FEMALE ENGINEERS SHOWING WHAT IS POSSIBLE.

Growing up as children in the township, the only role models we knew were entertainment people. I think it's important to show children that life is not all about entertainment. People working in professions can also be role models and those who grew up in similar circumstances to us can also succeed. To help with this I have a Foundation that hosts career events for township schools in my community.

We showcase professionals in different fields who all come out of the township and now have successful careers. I have also brought in high school learners from a local school in my community to a tour at of our manufacturing plant as part of the CSI initiatives here.

They were able to see what engineering is about and it was a memorable event as the kids were so fascinated about seeing auto manufacturing in real life. To change things for the better, we need to bring information to the people and so maybe we need to be out there as black female engineers showing what is possible.

The Engineering field is so exciting for me. We have an opportunity to solve real-world problems and that is amazing. Knowing that my field impacts the world so much is amazing. Being involved in the design, development and manufacturing of automotive components is fascinating.

6 Lessons that I have learnt:

- 1 Be goal oriented and believe in your dreams
- 2 Put yourself out there and network to find opportunities
- 3 People may doubt your capabilities, but you must believe in yourself
- 4 Develop a thick skin and don't take things personally
- 5 You don't need to act like a man, just be yourself
- 6 Be a role model for young people in your community