



**PEOPLE HERE
ARE EMPOWERED
BASED ON THEIR
CAPABILITIES,
NOT THEIR
GENDER.**



AKASHNI KANHAYE | EMPLOYEE



Name of Company:
Volkswagen
South Africa



Highest Qualification:
BCom Honours: Supply
Chain Management



Age:
31 years



**Position in
Company:**
Logistics Manager



Academic institution:
University of
South Africa



**Years in the
organisation:**
Ten years



Location:
Eastern Cape
Kariega, Gqeberha

MY JOURNEY FROM BEING THE YOUNGEST OF THE FAMILY TO MANAGER OF A GLOBAL CORPORATE ORGANISATION

My dad was passionate about my education and insisted that I get my degree before starting a job. I studied a Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) in Supply Chain Management, completing it in 2011. I applied to a lot of companies for a job and eventually saw a post in a magazine for a position at a motor vehicle manufacturer and applied. I was fortunate to get a place on their graduate programme, which involved relocating from my home in Durban to the Eastern Cape.

At first, I wasn't sure what to make of the graduate programme position. We were labelled 'grads' and I began to realise that not much was expected of us as we had no experience or corporate skills. At the beginning, the 'grad' label made it intimidating to get my voice heard but I had this fire inside me and so I worked hard and gave my best to every task so I would be heard in the future. I also furthered my studies while I was working and completed my BCom Honours in 2014.

In 2017 I was appointed acting supervisor and sent on a supervisory training programme. After completing the training and assessments, I was appointed supervisor. I was also told that I had potential and that my career was going to be fast-tracked.

One of the courses on the supervisor training was a very stressful and intensive eight-day training programme. At the time there was a lot of pressure to succeed, but I think that course played a big role in my career because I learned so much about myself and acknowledged my existing skills.

Two years later in 2019 I became an acting manager and in 2020 I was appointed as manager. This appointment was unexpected as I did not realise the company saw me as manager material: I didn't have a background in engineering and so when I started working, the technical part of the job was intimidating. It was and still is a constant learning process.

My job is very fast paced. We order parts from our South African suppliers, and I deal directly with the production line. As long as production is running, things run smoothly, but if suppliers don't have the parts, we have to quickly find them elsewhere or there is a risk that production might stop.



I OWE MY PROGRESS IN LIFE TO MY PARENTS. THEY TAUGHT ME THAT SUCCESS TAKES HARD WORK, PERSEVERANCE AND DOING MY BEST.



SUPPORT SYSTEMS GIVE YOU THE SPACE AND FREEDOM TO SUCCEED

My dad is my role model, he had a firm policy that women must be independent, educate themselves and stand on their own two feet.

He sadly passed away in my second year of university and my mum took over as sole provider. She picked up where my dad left off and made sure I stayed at university despite financial challenges. She also became my mentor. My husband has always been my supporter, he will cook, clean or do what is necessary in order to allow me to do what I need to do. With such a strong family foundation I have been able to take on any challenges in my way.

Throughout my career, the leadership at my company have also been very supportive of my development. They have given me the space and freedom to succeed. My colleagues over the years have also assisted me with any challenges that I may have. We definitely demonstrate a one team spirit.

DEVELOPING THE STRENGTH TO MANAGE ON MY OWN

Finding the strength to do things on my own without family support was hard. I come from a conservative background and our family is close, so moving away from them to start my first job in another city was challenging.

I am naturally an introvert so it was a challenge to simply meet new people. But things got better after my husband moved to Gqeberha and together we found a little life for ourselves here. At work the various courses that the company has to offer have also helped me to develop my confidence.

I FOUND OUT I WAS PROMOTED AND PREGNANT IN THE SAME WEEK

One Wednesday in 2019 I found out that I was promoted to acting manager and that Friday, I found out I was pregnant. It felt like I was receiving all my blessings in one week. Both were unexpected as I had tried for a child for a long time and the promotion was also a surprise.

It was challenging to manage pregnancy and my work responsibilities. I remember coming in to work at two in the morning with my big tummy and walking the production line to check what we have and what needs to be ordered. It really helped that my division head was extremely supportive. And when I went on maternity leave, one of my other supervisors stepped in.

MANAGING FAMILY AND WORK IS LIKE HAVING TWO JOBS

Having responsibilities on both sides of my life, working and being a mother of two, has been challenging. For example, my husband can wake up in the morning and go to work, but I have to see to the kids, prepare their lunch and take them to crèche. It's like a second job. I can only speak from my experience, but I think many women face these challenges when they have work and family responsibilities. My husband does support a lot with the kids, and I believe that it is definitely possible for women to have a career and a family life, with this kind of support structure in place.

YOUR CAPABILITIES STAND OUT MORE THAN YOUR GENDER

I haven't experienced gender bias in the workplace. I was supported when I was pregnant and have been given growth opportunities throughout my career. My experience has been that people here are empowered based on their capabilities and not their gender. I have also seen how other women have entered the company and moved to higher positions. When I started in Logistics, the Management team comprised of one female and the rest were male, now the reverse is true, there is one male and the rest are female including the division head.

NOBODY LEARNS FROM WINNING ALL THE TIME, YOU NEED TO FAIL IN ORDER TO LEARN

When it comes to getting more women into engineering, my wish is for women not to approach the field with

a fear of possible challenges or a fear of failure. It is through those challenges and failures that you gain the most knowledge. Nobody learns from winning all the time, you need to sometimes fail in order to learn. Women should approach the field with confidence knowing that they will come through to the other side as better and more educated people.

5 Lessons that I have learnt:

- 1 Approach engineering with confidence
- 2 A good support system gives you the freedom to succeed
- 3 You have to learn to balance family life and work
- 4 Your capabilities are more important than your gender
- 5 Failure is an opportunity to grow

