

Embrace your femininity

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It all started in Namibia's coastal town of Lüderitz for Namdeb Human Resources Business Partner, Izelle Cloete, where she was working as a waste clerk for First National Bank Namibia, but little did she know she would be working for one of Southern African's biggest diamond companies.

Armed with courage, determination and the right qualifications, Cloete did not take long before graduating to the position of HR consultant at FNB Namibia head office.



Although Cloete believes in sheer hard work and determination, she still cannot believe how her career shaped up after leaving the banking industry to join Namdeb.

“Career progression happened quite fast, as I was soon promoted to a team leader, which was within a supervisory capacity. The HR business model changed and the HR business partner position was introduced. I was fortunate to be appointed as an HR business partner for FNB Namibia a position I occupied until the time of joining Namdeb in 2014. I am currently an HR business partner and am responsible for driving the HR strategies/initiatives within the various services departments,” she said.

Although Namibia is one of the African economies that rely heavily on mining, with diamonds being the highest revenue earner for the government, women are still heavily marginalised in the extractive sector, especially in management positions. However, Cloete does not believe that this scenario is permanent.

“Namdeb, as part of the mining industry, has made great strides in embracing gender diversity and inclusivity. Namdeb became exemplary to other mining houses when they recently received recognition for their gender parity efforts at a state banquet held in June. Furthermore, as a group initiative, Namdeb partnered UN Women in the HeforShe campaign.

“It is, therefore, a great honour for me to be employed by a corporate where women in leadership positions are encouraged in both non-technical as well as technical environments.

It is indeed uplifting to work in a company where one is respected, valued and recognised for the contribution they bring, irrespective of gender,” she said.

Cloete believes that although most women in Namibia have ambitions for growth, most have failed to reach their full potential owing to societal beliefs hinged on patriarchy.

“It is my opinion that across various Namibian cultures, women are seen to be the primary caregivers of the household. As such, society expects the girl child to interrupt her career in order to attend to family responsibilities. While at work, the girl child is the professional woman, who has increased participation in the workplace, however, the domestic responsibilities only decrease marginally, creating a challenging work-life balance,” she said.

She urged other women to be “be persistent, work hard, know what you want and go for it”.

She added: “Equip yourself with the necessary skills and identify a mentor who can encourage you to be the best that you can be. Embrace your femininity, know your strengths and build on them to ensure that you are recognised as a professional.” Cloete revealed that her career aspirations also benefited immensely from a strong support structure at home.

“My support base is my husband of seven years, Renardo, and we have two very handsome little boys, Rezeldo (7) and Alonzo (4). It is sometimes a struggle to maintain the work-life balance. Fortunately, I have a partner who shares and supports me in achieving my goals. I have just recently completed my qualification in business administration and although challenging, it was possible with the support and motivation from them.

“My family gives me purpose and my decision making revolves around them. We are a very close family and we spend most of our time together to support each other's interests. I would describe my household as very busy and as controlled as it can be having two boys in charge,” she said.



From humble beginnings

“I am unapologetic when it comes to my capabilities and skills.” Difficult to digest and obviously easy to read but these are the stern words of Namdeb’s Safety and Asset Manager, Sonja van Kradenburg when it comes to dealing with patriarchy or any sort of unfair treatment of women in any professional environment.

For someone who has worked hard to be where she is, van Kradenburg believes men and women can do pretty much the same roles in any setup and there should never be any sort of prejudicing by the fairer sex.

“I observe a lot and learn from different people with diverse skills and experience in order to grow my competencies and confidence. So, I filter my coaches and mentors on a daily basis no matter how insignificant the engagement might be. In this environment, one needs to be very assertive and firm, regardless of whether the interaction is with men or women. My success has been driven by my endurance, flexibility and determination,” she said.

Armed with high self-esteem, a decent education and sheer hard work, van Kradenburg has worked

for some of Namibia’s biggest corporations and her professional star continues to shine.

A daughter of a bricklayer, van Kradenburg has exceeded her own expectations in terms of career growth. “I come from a very humble upbringing. My father is a bricklayer and my mother is a school teacher.

“Focus on few things that will make the biggest difference. Define what they are and get your mind-set and daily routines right to accomplish them. Tap into the experience/advise of those who have more years of experience and knowledge and use this to reach your goals. Broaden your skillset so that you become marketable for any field of work...”

My father is the most intelligent, hardworking and skilful person I know. My mother is an incredibly wise woman. Her determination, discipline and sacrifices to accomplish her success inspire me every day. I never took anything for granted and I always believe in

staying humble. It’s the only way you get to learn new things and become a better person,” she said.

“After completing my Bachelors in Industrial Engineering at the University of Stellenbosch, I worked at Namibia Dairies (O&L Group of Companies), as a graduate project engineer, and later joined Namdeb Diamond Corporation in 2014, as a continuous business improvement coordinator. As part of my career development, during this time, I got the opportunity to act in various engineering managerial positions in the aspects of business improvement, engineering projects asset maintenance logistics and safety, to name a few. “In addition to this, I also received some in-house and online training to improve my managerial, leadership and business acumen skills. In 2017, I was appointed as the BI manager and the role has since transitioned to incorporate both the aspects of asset maintenance and safety,” said.

According to van Kradenburg, gone are the days when limitations existed between girls and boys in terms of career enhancement. “I do not think there exists any tangible limitation for women in Namibia to accomplish anything they set their

minds on. It’s all so easy but we let fear limit us. It can be your most powerful motivator/growth enhancer or be detrimental to your success,” she said.

van Kradenburg is also a firm believer in working smart as a hallmark of being successful.

“Focus on a few things that will make the biggest difference. Define what they are and get your mindset and daily routines right to accomplish them. Tap into the experience/advise of those who have more years of experience and knowledge and use this to reach your goals. Broaden your skill set so that you become marketable for any field of work,” she said.

While she acknowledges that a lot has been done in terms of opening opportunities for women in Namibia, she is also not oblivious of the work that still needs to be cultivated.

“I think the female: male ratio in the mining industry still needs a lot of work. However, I strongly believe the opportunities to excel for both genders are balanced enough. It’s just a matter of seeing and seizing the opportunity.

“I married my husband, Morton van Kradenburg, three years ago. He works for Namdeb as well. He is in his last semester of completing his bachelors in Financial Management. We have no children yet but our family also comprises two dogs (a shepherd dog, Bruno, and a Siberian husky, Duchess),” she said.

