

Breaking through mining's glass ceiling

Portia Malele is an ambitious 32-year-old blazing a trail for female talent in the traditionally male-dominated world of mining. She has just been appointed as manager mining: drill and blast, at Anglo American's Kumba Iron Ore's Sishen mine - one of the largest open-pit mining operations in Africa.



Portia Malele

She's well-equipped for the job, having spent the past six years as a manager at Sasol's Twistdraai coal mine in Mpumalanga, where she played a key role in extending the life-of-mine of the East Shaft by 18 months, and won the Sasol Mining Super League award for the best shaft at Thubelisha South Shaft in August 2017 and November 2018.

"Growing up, my parents were extremely open-minded. They always told us: 'you can do anything you want to do'. I wanted to break boundaries and make a difference, and the world of mining offers me that, and more," Malele says.

Safety first

She balances a keen eye for productivity and meeting targets with an almost fanatical obsession with safety, having recorded more than 11 injury-free months at Thubelisha South Shaft before moving to Sishen.

"I always say that I manage both equipment and people. At Anglo American and Kumba, safety is the absolute priority in everything we do. One of my main jobs is to make sure we entrench and maintain safety at all times. That way, we have a

workforce that can drive the performance and growth we need to meet our objectives,” she says.

Malele's mining career started after school with a bachelor's degree in mining engineering from the University of Johannesburg. She successfully completed the BHP Billiton Graduate programme in 2007, obtained a Mine Managers Certificate of Competency (Coal) in 2009. She's currently studying toward obtaining a Post-Graduate Diploma: Business Management and Administration.

A major focus for her in her new role will be to drive the Tswelopele initiative, which is Kumba's transformation journey to full potential and beyond. And while she's excited about the new opportunities and technologies that comes with Tswelopele as well as Anglo American's vision of 'Re-imagining Mining', her real passion is reserved for the people of Sishen.

Advancing women in mining

As the former chair of the Women-In-Mining Forum at Sasol Mining, and the chair of the Mpumalanga tripartite task-team that championed the advancement of women in mining, she's working tirelessly to help continue the transformation of the mining industry, and establish mining as a viable career option in the minds of many young South Africans.

“I want to give young people, especially women, opportunities in the mining industry. I want to nurture and support more female leadership and help to empower others wherever possible. That's the real difference,” she says.

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