

Committed to Fortis, youth development and making a difference

 By [Cari Coetzee](#)

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The Sales and Marketing Director of Fortis Hotels, Siyanda Dlamini has been honing his skills in the hospitality industry for the past 15 years, working his way up the corporate ladder. A year ago, Dlamini bought shares with Fortis Hotels - becoming a co-owner - rebranded the hotel group and now has seven hotels running successfully underneath him. We wanted to know more:



Siyanda Dlamini, Sales and Marketing Director, Fortis Hotels

Tell us a bit about yourself

I am 34 years old, Pietermaritzburg born, Alexander high school's old boy, Cape Town hotel school graduate, proud product of a single mother, older brother, leader and server, sales and marketing director.

What does your average day look like?

Colourful! It begins with a prayer, it is a huge privilege waking up in a warm bed with enough physical and emotional strength to face the day. From there, I have a strong nespresso without sugar and milk, shower get dressed, give my dogs a good morning and goodbye treat as I leave the house.

Most of my days are spent on sales calls, either with top maintenance clients or acquisition clients - these include travel managers, procurement managers, travel management company owners, etc. Our clients come first.

I spend some time, telephonically mostly, with each of the hotels focusing on red flag areas, putting together some additional actions and strategies to lift shortfalls between budget and actual performance - these calls are made mainly as I drive from one meeting to another. I have a team of sales executive in Gauteng and in outlying areas, I

touch base with each of them as often as possible to track performance, give a bit of guidance where needed communicate areas of concern, etc.

I spend time with the graphic design team designing adverts for special events happening in and around our properties to stimulate demand for our properties. I am involved in the brand development as well, I spend quite a bit of time doing radio interviews, community outreach programmes, branding work, etc.

I spend time addressing any board of directors related matters. I travel between our hotels quite a bit for various meetings which include marketing meetings, management meetings, client SITE inspections, etc. I travel to major cities as well for sales meetings with key clients.

In most cases, I deal with my mail box in the evenings as there isn't enough time during the day. I regularly keep in touch with my mother, the guys that I mentor, my friends and everyone that matters to me.

■ What makes Fortis Hotels unique and how do you contribute to and give voice to this uniqueness as the marketing director?

We are all about empowerment and equality. Our staff, from a cleaner to a departmental head each own 20% of the business with a trust. They each enjoy dividends and profit share when business allows.

We are passionate about youth development and, as a result, we started a training academy from which we train future hotel managers and chefs all of which we employ permanently within our group after they graduate.

We support a lot of local companies some of which have been with the company since the 1950s, further we support businesses that are black and female owned. We have helped start up small business for former employees 'as service providers', offering them financial aid to get started, premises to operate from, continuous business advice and mentorship, etc.

This, among many other tributes to our brand, really makes marketing and selling the brand. Not only do we deliver on the service promises at hotel level, we also deliver on levels untold to our guests by the way we treat out staff, and uplift and care for the communities where we trade.

■ **What are the biggest challenges you faced in the industry and how did you approach them?**

“ ...I stole with my eyes, asked questions left, right and centre to broaden my understanding and the wisest thing I ever did was to align myself with the old papas and mamas that had been in the industry for years. ”

When I started in the industry at the age of 17, I went against a lot of people's wishes for me and my life. I was so focused that I didn't pay attention to the risk I was taking by choosing a career that I had no reference by means of a family friend or a relative. This taught me so much about being true to myself, dedication and hard work - there was no turning back.

Growing up, I was not as exposed to hotels as some of the white boys and girls that were in my class at hotel school. My level of exposure was more limited, I refused to feel inferior - I stole with my eyes, asked questions left, right and centre to broaden my understanding and the wisest thing I ever did was to align myself with the old papas and mamas that had been in the industry for years. Because I gave them the time of day as experts in their respective areas - be it pastry, scullery, reception or chamber maid - they opened up to me and exposed me to the pot of gold which is their knowledge. Further, they protected me from the managers – at the best of times, I would get away with so much simply because they each saw me as their child.

■ **What motivates and drives you?**

“ Nothing pleases me more than seeing talent ripe. ”

Audinary people, there is something magical in each one of us. Our struggles, desires, dreams and experiences ignite so much in me.

I am inspired by the ability to create employment, while keeping those employed, employed and uplifting them by means of training and development. Nothing pleases me more than seeing talent ripe.

The risks we take in business really inspire me, most of them are daring, particularly to the industry, they keep us up at night but the end results truly bring about a moment of magic.

Conversations with my mother, when the going gets tough. She reminds me of where I come from with my craft and where my goals lie. They keep moving.

Personally, I travel - locally, in Africa and internationally. I go somewhere new as often as I possibly can. I love diversity,

cultures, architecture, fashion, a bit of the night life coupled with local cuisine and wine - this really gets my batteries recharged.

▣ ***What would you like to see more of from and for SA's youth in the industry?***

From the youth: Commitment, most youth come into the industry expecting quick results in terms of money and all things material.

For the youth: I would like to see more industry leaders reaching out to the youth starting out in the industry by means of mentorship. It is hard staying focused and driven in an industry where you serve others from the bottom of the barrel for a minimal wage. The fact that in most cases, your leaders are out of reach where support is concerned, make the task that much more unbearable. I would like to see more youth, particularly black young men and women being groomed for critical positions in the industry. I do not see enough future general managers, financial managers, etc. being groomed.

▣ ***Words of advice for SA's youth on pursuing a career in the industry?***

Take time to decide what you want to do. Weigh all your options, choose the one that works for you. Commit and dedicate your everything to it while stealing with your ears and eyes. Allow yourself to be taught and enjoy the learning process, your break will come and it will open you up to another world of learning.

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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