

The value of female leadership in mining

By  Cari Coetzee

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By the end of 2015, women made up approximately 18% of the total workforce in the mining industry representing roughly 53,000 women working in the industry, according to the Chamber of Mines of South Africa - a significant improvement from the 11,400 recorded in 2002.

Out of this number, 15% of top management were women and 22% of the professionally qualified employees in the mining industry were women. While significant improvements have been made, a lot more remains to be done to transform the industry.

We chat to Hazel Bomba, AEL Mining's product manager about her career, female leadership and gender equality in the mining industry.



Hazel Bomba, Product Manager, AEL Mining

“ Be bold and speak up. You do no one any favours by hiding your voice and your ideas. The industry needs your input. ”

■ **What made you choose a career in mining? Tell us about your journey in the mining industry and share some of the important lessons you have learned.**

The industry found me via my chemistry degree. Chemistry is called the “central science” as it opens up doors to so many diverse industries including the mining section. My company supplies mining explosives to the industry and I started out my career in the research and development division.

A lesson I continually need to be reminded of is to be bold. Be bold and speak up. You do no one any favours by hiding your voice and your ideas. The industry needs your input.

■ **What does a day in your life look like?**

Coffee, meetings and more coffee. The role of product manager requires you to drive the product forward through working with all the people and systems involved in the product value chain. So I spend a lot of time communicating and coordinating with the various people and systems to get the job done.

■ ***What barriers did you face, as a woman, becoming successful in your field, and how did you overcome them?***

Within AEL itself, there have been several successful women who've gone before me. Thankfully, these women set a precedence, and AEL values the contribution from its women. However, it's the times when I have to go onto mine sites, sometimes in areas outside South Africa, when people are surprised and sometimes weary that I'm a woman. In those settings, I find that if I merely do my job and do it well (with the backing of my management), all tends to go well.

■ ***What are your views on gender equality in the mining industry and what are some of the key challenges that are faced by women?***

Gender equality has come a long way in the industry. Over the years, you can tangibly see the increase in the number of women on mine sites. Although I'm not intimately involved in the mining ministry, I think that the biggest hurdle that still needs to be overcome is the engrained notion within the industry that mining is not a place for women. Fighting against such stereotypical views which have long been held will only be done by consistent display of female excellence in the industry. It's a slow process, but progress has been made.

“ It's this diversity of thought that creates the synergy required to drive any organisation to even greater heights. ”

■ ***What is your take on leadership, particularly female leadership, and what role do women still have to play in transforming the industry?***

I just don't see enough female leadership in the industry. The beauty of women in mining, and more specifically in women in leadership capacities within the sectors, is the increased diversity of thought which arises. Men and women think differently, women bring a different way of looking at problems and coming up with solutions that men won't always see. It's this diversity of thought that creates the synergy required to drive any organisation to even greater heights. Women are late entrants to this party, so I can only imagine how much further the mining industry would have evolved had women been drawn into the sector decades ago!

■ ***What is your message for Women's Month?***

It's a beautiful time to be a woman in this country. I appreciate the willingness of the industry to give women more opportunities and allow them into spaces where they weren't before. Grab those opportunities - learn from them, grow through them and be bold in them.

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

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