

Women power at Engen prepares to pay it forward

Nhlokomo Mhlophe has made significant strides to realise her ambition of becoming a “strong, independent black woman”.

Now, thanks to her place in Engen’s Graduate Development Programme, she is preparing to focus on the second half of that goal – to empower other women like her.

Speaking out to mark Women’s Month, Mhlophe recalls how she was once among those who believe they’re not enough – not good enough at sport, not clever enough, and not popular enough.

Today she is a proud Bachelor of Commerce graduate of Rhodes University, and has a job in Engen’s Enterprise, Risk and Assurance department in Cape Town.

“During my school years, I lived between my father in Isipingo and my mother in Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal, attending school in Amanzimtoti.

“But my family always stood behind me, including sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts and grandparents. Without them I wouldn’t be half the person I am today,” she says.

Mhlophe knows, however, that it was her own motivation that sent her in search of a spot in the Engen Maths and Science Schools (EMSS) programme at Mangosuthu University of Technology when she was still at high school, setting her life on its current trajectory.

“I used to see the scholars coming out of the university and I wanted to know what they were doing. I asked someone one day and they told me all about the EMSS programme, so I decided to join too,” she recalls, adding that the extra lessons proved crucial during her matric year.

Internal Audit manager Bea Ndlovu, her mentor in Engen’s Graduate Development Programme, has been another source of inspiration, providing her with support but also teaching her by example the value of good reasoning skills, and of critical analysis.

The empowerment of black women is a top priority for Engen, according to Unathi Njokweni-Magida, Engen’s head of Transformation and Stakeholder Engagement, who says they are focused on integrating more women across the entire value chain.

The statistics point to the success of the strategy, with a total 48% of Engen’s retail dealerships now black, 10% of them women. The Engen board also comprises 40% black members, and the executive team 31% black women.

On their commitment to education, Njokweni-Magida explains that Engen supports excellence and opportunity amongst the youth right from school through to university.

Citing Mhlophe as an example, she says they are working actively to build a pipeline of black and female graduates, for the future good of the company and the country.

Mhlophe says she is proud to be an example in her neighbourhood that it is possible to break from a common circle that sees many youngsters dropping out of school, incurring teenage pregnancy and abusing substances.

“One day I will start a youth organisation to give back, to show them there is another way,” she says.

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