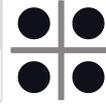




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Mashudu Lembede is a business developer at Bureau Veritas

Female leadership at its best

There was a time when the idea of woman professionals was a far-fetched one – even more so in industries perceived as being suitable for men only. Having female leaders in a male-dominated industry such as mining was previously unheard of, but change is afoot. **By Dineo Phoshoko**

Today, there are many women in leadership positions in organisations across various industries. The mining industry is one of those where many women are heading up key roles once only filled by men. Bureau Veritas is an example of an organisation that has female leadership in important divisions. **Inside Mining** catches up with two phenomenal women at the forefront of female leaders in the mining industry.

Mashudu Lembede

A geologist by profession, Mashudu Lembede is currently a business developer at Bureau Veritas. With a BSc (Hons) in Geology, Lembede's career started as an exploration geologist in platinum mines.

From a young age, Lembede always knew that she wanted to pursue a career in the mining industry. "I love the outdoors and I'm fascinated by nature," she explains. It was her love for the outdoors that drove her towards registering for a qualification in geology. She adds that, while she didn't know it at the time, getting into the mining industry was a natural progression because one tends to be driven towards something that they like.

During her career, Lembede has been fortunate to work on projects that started out as exploratory but went on to become operating mines. "It's amazing because

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not a lot of geologists get to see a project transform from a bushveld to a developed mine," she explains. When an opportunity presented itself to work for a coal mine in the Waterberg region in Lephalale, Limpopo, Lembede grabbed it with both hands. "That's where my experience with coal comes from." Here she gained experience in geology exploration and grade control. She adds that all the experience she obtained in both the platinum and coal sectors allowed her to take up her current role at Bureau Veritas and establish herself with the mining service provider.

Navigating the challenges

One of the biggest challenges Lembede faced in the mining industry was having to go on site visits – which meant being away from home for prolonged periods of time. "The work balance was a bit difficult," she explains. As a primary caregiver, it was not always possible for Lembede to take the time off required for a young family. "As much as that is a challenge for women in mining, I'm glad that the companies that I've worked for had taken on the responsibility of supporting women in mining by understanding those types of challenges and being there for the family," she says.

A challenge such as this is one that many women would relate to; however, Lembede explains that there will always be challenges faced by women in any industry. She found that, in her case, the mining companies she worked for were very practical about the challenges faced by women. She adds that, as employers, the companies were very supportive of her needs.

In addition to the support she received from organisations, Lembede explains that the support she received from family was integral in overcoming various challenges she experienced in her career. She highlights that women often feel that they must prove themselves. "You really need to prove yourself, but you also need to accept support. It's part of achieving the goals you've set." For her, achieving goals and aspirations meant accepting support offered to her by employers and family.

Life has ups and downs and when the chips are down, everybody needs something to motivate them to keep them going. For Lembede, the success of other women in the mining industry inspired and motivated her to keep going. "Personally, I'm inspired by the success of others – other women in the mining industry that have gone before me," she explains.

Warm reception

When she started out in the industry, Lembede says

that she received a warm welcome from everyone, including male colleagues. She adds that at first, it is not unusual for anyone to find themselves in a situation where they must prove themselves, especially in a new job and environment. "If you take two or three months of hard work and prove yourself, your colleagues accept you within a few months," she explains. She adds that the industry has systems in place to support female miners new to the industry. "As with any new job, you need to display an honourable work ethic with a desire to learn and be a team player."

The first day at a new job can be scary for some, especially in an industry where women are few and far between. However, for Lembede, fear was never in the picture as she hit the ground running from her first day on-site. "I don't remember feeling scared. When you have spent four years at Wits training to be a miner or a geologist, you've already gone through the scary part," she says confidently.

Instead of fear, Lembede was excited for what she believed would be an exciting adventure. Upon arrival on-site, she found that the mining companies had made all the necessary provisions to accommodate her needs. "It's quite an adventure; you get to meet different people from different parts of the world," she says.

Women in mining in SA

There is no doubt that South Africa has come a long way in terms of having greater female representation in the mining industry. Lembede acknowledges that a lot of progress has been made, although she feels that more can be done to achieve gender equality in the mining industry. "In 2020, we shouldn't be finding women in mining an intriguing topic anymore. I think we should be achieving gender balance."

In her view, mentorship would assist in achieving gender balance, as well as encourage more women to get into the industry. "Mentorship in a controlled environment with KPIs – that would make a difference," she says. Furthermore, Lembede is of the opinion that such mentorship would be effective if it came from males who have been in the industry for many years. Lembede believes that because they have been at the forefront of the industry for long periods of time, such men can share their knowledge and experiences with women who can learn and benefit.

Lembede believes the mining industry is perfect for women to establish a successful career for themselves. "Mines are very interesting; they

“With any new job, you need to display an honourable work ethic with a desire to learn and be a team player.”

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are different from anything that you will ever experience. Go for it." In addition to paying well, the industry also has a supportive culture. "Once a miner, always a miner – it's a lifelong experience," she concludes.

Beatrice Scharneck

Working in management is no easy task, even more so when one is a district HR manager responsible for human resources operations in five different countries. For Beatrice Scharneck, it's just another day at the office, as she does this daily without breaking a sweat – despite dealing with HR for more than 1 400 employees.

Having started as a petrography assistant in a coal exploration laboratory, Scharneck soon worked her way up to become an HR assistant, then HR business partner and finally HR district manager. Not only was Scharneck rising through the ranks, but she was also furthering her studies in the process.

While capturing timesheets and interacting with employees from within the payroll department, Scharneck soon discovered that her niche was in HR, realising that this was where her passion lay. "This inspired me to work my way up, as I had realised through engaging with people that I wanted to make a marked difference in the lives of others. HR is all about people. I was passionate about making a positive impact, so I worked hard and put in those hours to get a good education," she explains.

Having worked for Bureau Veritas for more than 10 years, Scharneck explains that she has only ever experienced positivity during her career in the mining industry. She explains that the company is supportive and encourages the training and development of its employees. "The company has believed in me and provided study assistance. Over the years, I have enjoyed several promotions that have allowed me to ultimately

achieve my dream," she says.

Scharneck adds that Sal Govender, vice president of Bureau Veritas Southern Africa, played a crucial role in helping her realise her dreams. "We have a strong female component in our leadership team and throughout the business," she explains.

Working through challenges and keeping going

Different people have different ways of dealing with

“Keep your eye on the ball and remain focused on your dream; then strive to make it a reality.”

challenges as and when they arise. In Scharneck's view, doing some introspection is a useful way to cope and deal with any challenges. "I believe that change should start within a person. Regardless of a situation, we all need to introspect before we tackle any challenge to ensure we take the right approach to dealing with difficulties in a mature and appropriate manner," she explains.

Part of her job requires Scharneck to interact with people who all have different personalities. Sometimes there might be a misunderstanding that arises from personality clashes. In such cases, Scharneck believes the best way to work out such issues is through education, open and fair discussions, engagement and sharing ideas. "It is important to hear the input of both sides when having difficult discussions – and then one must keep people informed as to the outcomes. In our industry, open and fair discussion is paramount," she explains.

When things get tough, Scharneck finds that having a healthy balance between work and home life can help one get through difficult times. She maintains that constantly remembering and being aware of one's priorities is also useful when it comes to finding the perfect balance between life and work. "Family is of utmost importance and enjoying a fulfilling and rewarding career is crucial for me. My personal challenge is to ensure I have fun with both – and I do!"

Female representation in mining

According to Scharneck, the mining industry in Southern Africa has improved significantly in terms of female representation. "Over the years, we have seen more and more women in mining in Southern Africa and I think it is good to see such an inclusive environment, where fair opportunities are provided to both gents and ladies. We like progress!" She adds that the representation mix is proof that changes to support and encourage women in mining have been made.

Quoting former president Nelson Mandela, 'It always seems impossible until it's done,' Scharneck's advice for others interested in pursuing a career in the mining industry is to believe in themselves and go for it. "Keep your eye on the ball and remain focused on your dream; then strive to make it a reality," she concludes. **35**



Beatrice Scharneck is a district HR manager at Bureau Veritas