

WiE support for Women in Entrepreneurship

When an organization sees diversification as not merely a “must-do” or “Nice-to-do”, but an opportunity to create an inclusive environment which brings new opportunities, creative operational options and possibility, then this can transcend merely meeting demographic targets and/or equity criteria

Most industrial sectors in SA (and elsewhere) are traditionally the domain of men. Recent times have however seen woman emerging into these sectors and adding value. WIE is a case in point.

As in any circumstance (irrespective of gender or other factors), when starting fresh, be it in a new industry, organization or sector it is important that there is an environment which facilitates the initial integration into the existing systems. Once any person has had the opportunity to fit - the subsequent progress and growth is more effective.

What is my experience regarding support of gender mainstreaming?

It has been supported in the following:

1. Appointment of a black woman in management position; with so many cases where such appointments has never resulted in fruitful results from both the company and the person appointed. It became very critical to induction to the business and its processes.
2. Leadership development – this included the understanding of the culture of the organisation, its mission and vision and growth strategy. The role that management is expected to play for the success of the organisation.

3. Coaching and mentorship – to coach is to hold your subject’s hand and push them into the deep end after telling them to doggie paddle to keep the head above the water. It is a continuous process that started with industry history and analysis, economics of the industry, current players, positioning and product improvement and extension. This is the area where business intelligence and acumen are developed which supports leadership development.

As entrepreneurs we must think about turning around players in the sector of fewer women.

What has been the challenge to attract women in the sector?

The challenge to in my experience has been similar to the sector’s challenge, which is fewer women interested and skilled. **The next question will be how do we attract more women in the sector?** It is the fewer women that are already at leadership positions that need to display that it is achievable. It is the opportunities presented by the sector targeting women and enabling favourable conditions in a male dominated industry. Mentorship and sponsorship are critical for the recruitment and retention of women in the sector.

Access to markets and networks

As women we need access to the markets and networks. People do business with people; therefore, networking is very critical. It opens access to markets. It is also very critical that as women we are evaluated on our capabilities of our skills rather than beauty pageant tendencies. It is the way we present ourselves to the market that will determine our acceptance and seriousness.

Building sustainable relationships

Sustainable relationships will be built on how well we perform in the sector. Some of the sensitive issues will be how do we perform our deliverables.

Are we professional with our service? Do we keep time in meetings? How is the presentation of our service?

It is very important that we don't give the impression in the sector that we need to be handled with velvet gloves. At the end of the day for any unit, division, organisation it's the bottom line that determines its success.

WiE benefiting the entrepreneurs

The exposure of WiE and being part of it has benefited entrepreneurs by extending the networks of business within the utilities especially the municipalities. It is a great advantage for entrepreneurs to be in the same room with so many municipalities representatives. I therefore urge entrepreneurs out there to extend their networks during this convention and beyond.

