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Message from the CEO - Ladies leading the way at the ASB

As we honour Women's Day on the 9th of August, it is an opportunity to celebrate women and all they bring to the workplace. Many of you may not know, but the ASB is a team of 6, and the team is entirely comprised of women – Amanda, Elizna, Julianne, Nabeela, Shereen and me. I am proud to lead this incredible team of ladies who make an enormous contribution to strengthening democracy in South Africa.

Women fulfil so many roles in society – leaders, employees, mothers, daughters, grannies, aunts, friends. All of these roles mean that ladies have both a diversity of strengths and capabilities, but also many tales of hard work, resilience, and overcoming obstacles that just come with being a woman. It is important to recognise the diversity that women bring to the workplace - their unique approach to problem-solving, diligence, devotion, teamwork, kindness and empathy. It is also my responsibility - along with other women in leadership positions - to empower, develop, and nurture women wherever we can.

This month you will get to know the ladies in the ASB team and what it means for them to be a woman. Join us in celebrating Women's Month and feel free to post your stories – or stories about the special ladies in your life – on our social media pages.

Time – our most precious gift By Jeanine Poggiolini

I recently had the privilege of tasting a rare cognac which made me think profoundly about time and what it means. This special drink is made by blending together eaux-de-vie (loosely translated as “water of life”) made from grapes from the Grande Champagne. This sounds pretty ordinary, except that there are 100 year's worth of vintages of these “eaux-de-vies” that go into a single bottle. One sip, is a century's worth of effort, experience, passion and devotion.

What made me think profoundly about time, is that the cellar master today is not creating something that he or she will get to experience in his or her lifetime. He or she is creating something for the future. This is an enormous responsibility in terms of creating something that can withstand the test of time and change, and be relevant 100 years from now.

This made me reflect on my role as a professional accountant and the impact I can make - not just on the profession - but also to advancing the cause of women in the workplace. I did the calculations – for an average career of 30 years, at 240 working days a year, that means there

are 7 200 opportunities to make a difference. While there are opportunities to make a difference in so many areas, the one I would most want to be remembered for is building strong, capable women for the future.

Many of my past experiences – particularly in the work environment - have been about proving that men and women are the same. This even went as far as employers imposing specifically dress codes that required women to only wear pant suits, shirts and closed shoes. There was an active drive to “assimilate” women into an often masculine work environment.

To ensure that women truly have a place – at work or anywhere else – I believe it is critical to acknowledge that men and women are different. Differences do not result in weakness. On the contrary, difference result in diversity. Diversity means having different ways, different ideas, different strengths, and different capabilities to leverage when you need them most. Being labelled the “fairer sex” does not mean that women lack strength; it means they are compassionate and empathetic - which are critical character traits critical to the success of any team.

In each of the opportunities we have to make a difference, I would like to spend them being a role model for women today to build the women we want to see in the future. For me, this means embracing being a woman and what this means, and developing and inspiring others to do the same. It’s okay to be different – it’s okay to be feminine and nurturing; and bold, assertive and courageous at the same time.

This Women’s Month, let’s think about how we use our time – the most precious gift we can share with others – and invest it in the women of our future. We may never get to see them, but let them look back at us with a sense of with pride.

9 August 1956, how far have we come since then? *By Elizna van der Westhuizen*

I get chills when I imagine what it must have been like on this day, 66 years ago, to march alongside 20 000 other women for a common cause - protesting against the carrying of pass books which restricted the movement of black women. Government has made great strides since that day towards improving the rights for black women, and all women really. The day has evolved – like international women’s day – to focus on gender equality.

Despite all the work done to give women equal voices and equal opportunities, the reality for many women is still discrimination. It may be subtle – work meetings at odd hours, or offensively blatant. A previous work experience comes to mind where I had to write notes for a male colleague to speak on my behalf because, as a woman, I was not allowed to speak directly to other males in the workplace. In my opinion, the subtle discrimination is worse as it is often difficult to address.

As a wife and mother, who enjoys my work, I am fully aware of what is asked of women and the weight of responsibilities we carry. I have realised that there is a difference between *allowing* women an equal place at work, and *supporting* them to make use of equal opportunities. Too often, opportunities are not taken up by women simply because they do not have the necessary support to make it their reality. But the responsibility for change is not only at the doorstep of men. I realise many women that came before me have sacrificed much to effect the changes we’ve seen in the last decades, and I would like to part of the women who pave the way for those that will come after me.

My conclusion is that as women we should take responsibility to ask for help, make our dreams and realities known, and most of all – support other women. I am very fortunate to work for, and with, amazing women. This women’s month, I will look for ways to support other women achieve their dreams. In support of the International Women’s Day movement – we should strive for *“A world free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination. A world that’s diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated. Together we can forge women’s equality. Collectively we can all #BreakTheBias”*.

In celebrating Women's month during August, it is evident that more women are taking the lead in representing their female colleagues in Board meetings, leading critical planning and development discussions, and serving as key decision makers in many organisations. And this is no different in the public sector.

With the public sector being a large employer, many women are taking up a career in the sector. This is not only because the public sector is seen to provide a more stable environment, with little or no unexpected or sudden change, but it also allows women to make a positive change in the lives of others. Taking up an accounting career in the public sector is just one of the ways to accomplish this.

Being part of the Accounting Standards Board has provided me the opportunity to meet strong, smart, and independent women. These dynamic, highly intelligent, hard-working accountants all have a dedicated focus to make South Africa a better place by ensuring that credible accounting standards are developed. These standards help users to make informed decisions and hold management accountable for their decisions.

The women that I have met during my career in public sector accounting, whether a colleague, a stakeholder, or a member of our Board, have taught me that women bring together different kinds of energy. These different energies complement each other in meeting a common goal – the goal of making a difference in people's lives and in their communities. Not only are these women willing to share their experiences or advice, but they make time and space to listen to others, while being open to new ideas.

In celebrating Women's month, let us all show our gratitude towards the women in our lives that help us make a difference – whether in your profession or personal life. Let's celebrate the social, economic, cultural, political and personal achievements of all women in South Africa so that they can realise their value in your life. And let us all boost others to enable them to also reach their true potential, and raise women up instead of tearing them down. Happy Women's month.

What makes a Boss Lady? *By Nabeela Imam-Shah*

Women are faced with the most difficult choices in life. For me, it was whether to stay at home to raise my kids, or to return to work to pursue my career. Whatever your dilemma is, make an honest decision and do it with flair!

Women in the workplace have many different things to juggle, from work responsibilities to childcare and housework. When a woman aspires to work and advance her career, she carries her home and social responsibilities with her. These responsibilities are usually not lessened or shared in order to afford her the same chance that her male peer has to advance his career. This reality has led to the notion of women striving to become 'superwomen', which gained much popularity, encouraging women that they can do it all. The problem with this notion, however, is that it is not sustainable. Being a superwoman every day can lead to burnout one day... and being a superwoman shouldn't cost a woman her mental, emotional or physical wellbeing. As empowering as it can be to give women space in the workplace, society has not helped enough to support the working women.

There is so much that a woman can bring to the table in the workplace. One thing that stands out for me is the empathy, understanding and consideration that a woman naturally radiates. This trait has been identified in great female leaders. I would rate *empathy* as the number one quality of a boss lady.

The term *Boss Lady* does not have to be exclusive to female leaders in the workplace. A woman displays the qualities of a boss in everything she does - whether it be nurturing good

children, climbing the corporate ladder, or cooking up a storm in the kitchen. A woman winning in any aspect of her life is a boss lady.

With all the things a woman has to juggle, it is important to strike a balance. There is peace, beauty, and sanity in balance. And before we ask society to help us achieve our balance, we need to first be deliberate and purposeful about it.

In the spirit of women's month, let us acknowledge the boss ladies in our lives. Support and appreciate the women around us for they are, in most instances, the pillar of strength in our household. Let us harness our boss lady powers and leave a sparkle wherever we go!



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