

Changing the meetings industry game with Nina Freysen-Pretorius

 By Cari Coetzee

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Celebrating the top female leaders in the industry for Women's Month, we chat to CEO of The Conference Company, Nina Freysen-Pretorius, who recently [secured her spot](#) on the US-based Successful Meetings magazine's annual list of 25 outstanding professionals who have had a significant impact on the meetings industry. Freysen-Pretorius was named as one of the top strategists in the meetings industry. Arnaldo Nardone, immediate past President of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) - Freysen-Pretorius is currently serving her second term as president of the ICCA - says she has a vision for the international meetings industry. "She is a game-changer and shifts paradigms."



Nina Freysen-Pretorius

What made you choose a career in the meetings industry? What inspires and drives you?

My passion for coordinating the coming together of many ideas and principles, culminating in an opportunity for people to meet, learn and share!

What does a day in your life look like?

Fortunately, or unfortunately, not any one day is ever the same in my life. I am sure that many of my industry colleagues will be able to relate to this. What is important every day is to focus on the most important matters that have to be dealt with and then the rest have to be juggled in the changing order of priority.

I do, however, try and make sure that I have breakfast and a cup of tea with my husband to start the day. Followed by making the school lunch – I have started packing my own lunch so that I do not find myself starving at 3pm!

As we have three offices in South Africa, I make sure to be in contact with them a few times every day so that I am on top of the projects and clients we are working with.

The day ends with me leaving the office in a mad rush, there always seems to be items on the to do list. Getting home and cooking supper with a glass of wine – a well-deserved glass of wine is what I tell myself.

What are some of the highlights of your career?

As an entrepreneur, one gets to wear many hats and is faced with many opportunities and challenges. It's a case of "Jack of all trades, master of none". I do say this with the understanding that as an entrepreneur one cannot only be excellent in one area or your business will suffer. You have to have the ability to multitask and be interested in many things.

Some of my highlights in this varied career are:

1. Working with and having the opportunity to employ wonderful dynamic people. Particularly seeing how people grow and reach their potential, once you allow them the space and support that they need;

2. Travelling to different countries, meeting people and learning how to do things better or in a different way that will benefit my clients and the business;

3. Being exposed to the association that we work with and learning about different specialist areas is really fascinating and enriching.

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airtime. ”

■ ***You were recently named one of the most influential people in the meetings industry globally. What does this mean to you and what is your recipe for success?***

I don't think of myself as influential at all. This industry acknowledgement is much appreciated and very humbling. I get up every day and I just want to do what is in my heart and be the best that I can be with the talents that God has given me. I have many personal frustrations, just like everyone else, and often feel that I have not really achieved or could have done better. Unfortunately, I do not have a recipe for success and if anyone else has it – I would like to know where to buy that recipe book!

■ ***What is your opinion on SA's MICE industry and its potential and relevance to the South African economy?***

We need to continue raising awareness of what business tourism/MICE is, as leisure tourism still has much more airtime. However, the value and potential of hosting meetings and conferences have a tremendous impact on job creation, infrastructure development and knowledge sharing that will benefit our economy and people.

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

Sadly the barriers are still very much there and in place after all this time. In our sector and I assume in many other sectors, as long as you keep your head down and do the work well, all is okay. However, should one challenge any decision or the manner in which matters are approached, this is not welcomed.

I think that the best advice is to always remain professional, forthright and clear about the reason you would like to change things and that such change will ultimately benefit others, is the best approach.

■ ***Any words of wisdom you would like to share with other women in the meetings industry?***

Remain focused on your goals and what it is that you want to achieve.

Be kind to yourselves, as nobody is perfect

Be patient with things taking time and sometimes the twist and turns along the way make things turn out better than you planned!

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

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

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