

Sumaya Mokgopo is breaking tech's glass ceiling

 By Evan-Lee Courie

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Sumaya Mokgopo, a business analyst at Digiterra, is one of many women in the tech industry defying the "norm".



Sumaya Mokgopo, a business analyst at Digiterra

As Sumaya Mokgopo's friends and family were involved in business analysis, it was only natural that she took an interest in the discipline. So, after completing her tertiary education in Information Science, she began to investigate the field and what it entailed.

"Speaking to my friends and family and learning of their experiences made me want to venture into BA," she recalls.

"The industry itself was already an attractive one but having that exposure to the industry and what I could do within it is what pushed me into choosing it as a career. I never thought I'd actually end up in the tech industry, so it was one of those situations where your reality deviates from your initial plan, but I think it's one of the best choices I've ever made."

We chat to Sumaya Mokgopo to find out more about her journey to becoming a business analyst in the tech sector...

Could you describe a typical day in your job?

A typical day at work for me usually consists of meetings, meetings, and more meetings. When I walk into the office I start off the day by reading my mails, make myself a cup of coffee, eat my breakfast and then go through my daily to-do list, which on average consists of at least three big items but it all depends on the project I'm working on, and tackle it one item

at a time.

So, depending on what is more urgent, I would focus on the top priorities for the day.

■ ***What did you want to be when you grew up?***

Growing up as a kid I wanted to become a chartered accountant.

■ ***How did you get into the tech space?***

When I was doing my honours in information science, one of my female friends was actually a business analyst and so was my brother. Speaking to them and their experiences made me want to venture onto this path. The industry itself was already an attractive one on its own, having that exposure to the industry pushed me into choosing it as a career.

I never thought I'd actually end up in the tech industry, so it was one of those situations where your reality deviates from your initial plan, but I think it's gone really well.

■ ***What was the best advice anyone ever gave you? Be true to yourself, be the best you can be, and give 110% effort in whatever it is that you do.***

■ ***What advice do you have for the future generation of women wanting to get into the tech space?***

There is no secret that there is a gender gap in the tech industry, as a young female in the industry don't let anyone tell you that you cannot be in the tech industry because you are women. Don't be held back by stereotypes that are been projected by society, if you are passionate about being in the tech space, go for it. No matter what people tell you, always keep your head up and give 110% in whatever it is that you do.



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■ ***Who or what is your biggest motivation?***

My parents have been my biggest motivation. They have taught me to always do what makes me happy and give my 110% in whatever it is that I do. They have taught me that things don't always come easy in life, and if you want to do and be your best you have to give it your all and to never be afraid to ask questions or ask for help when you don't understand.

■ ***Are South African women getting enough of a chance to shine in the tech industry?***

Things are definitely improving for women in tech. More women are studying IT at varsity than before and I think that's a step in the right direction to closing the gender gap in the industry.

I'm not sure it's enough to significantly close that gap quickly, but there has been an increase in companies targeting young females with support and opportunities at the tertiary level aimed at encouraging more women to enter into the IT industry. More women coming into the industry, bringing in different aspects to the field and changing the way things have been done in the past.



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There's always talk that women are just not interested in the tech field or Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines, but this is just not true. I think young women just need more exposure, not only to the opportunities within the industry but also to female role models who have succeeded in the industry despite the challenges.

■ ***As a female business leader, what's the least and most exciting aspect of your workday?***

The most exciting aspect of my workday is collaboration. I enjoy learning, sharing and bouncing ideas with people. You defiantly surprise yourself by how much you learn from each other. The least exciting aspect of my workday is having way too many meetings during the day, this can be very time consuming especially when you have a deadline.

■ ***Women are considered to be natural problem solvers. Why do you think this is perfect for the tech industry?***

Being able to solve problems requires an understanding of the problem, which requires you to listen to others. Women are uniquely suited to this because they are usually not only good listeners but also good communicators. As long as you are able to communicate with your stakeholders and maintain a relationship with them, the rest is just on the ball learning.

Women are often more empathetic, which is important to maintaining a good relationship with stakeholders because it builds trust and if your stakeholders are able to trust you then you're more likely to be able to document their needs in a way that can be converted into a solution.

■ ***Could you list a few, if any, specific challenges females face in this industry?***

The difficult thing about working as a woman in the tech industry is that it is very male-dominated. People generally don't take you as seriously as they would if you were a man, often second-guessing you or questioning whether you even know what you're doing.



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I've had experiences where people have treated me like I'm not capable, thinking because I'm a woman I probably don't understand how the systems work or what IT is about.

■ ***What is your advice for overcoming these challenges?***

My advice to other women entering this high-pressure industry is that just because you are a woman doesn't mean that you should let others make you feel that you are unable to do the work you need to do. You shouldn't let it bring you down and get in your way because you know you have the skills and knowledge and that is how you've been able to get to where you

are now.

Women should build confidence in their knowledge of the field and use it to let such instances run off them like water off a duck's back.

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