



Masedi Koeë

– Chemical Operations Learnership

A Spirit of Learning

Learnerships, which provide the practical and theoretical skills needed to build careers at Shell, are a vital component of Shell's educational programmes.

Opportunities are provided at the company's depots, installations and other areas across the country. It is at these sites that learners, of whom a growing number are women, concentrate on learning the technical skills that are needed to ensure the smooth operation of a company which has a multifaceted customer-centric operation supplying services and products across many economic sectors in South Africa.

Whether they learn their skills in a city or rural environment, qualifying from a learnership programme is the first steppingstone in a Shell career that can develop and take the learner into new areas of activity and development as they grow within the company.

It would be natural to reconsider a career choice if you found yourself climbing around a fuel terminal very early on a Free State winter morning. This would especially be so when you have a science degree in hand that would guarantee regular working hours in a warm space.

This didn't apply, however, to Masedi Koeë whose real desire was to be working in the engineering field at Shell. There was very little, including being outdoors in Kroonstad in early midwinter mornings, that was going to deflect her from the learnership programme that would help her achieve her career dreams.

After matriculating with thoughts of becoming an engineer, Masedi found herself instead studying for a BSc. in medical bioscience. However, her heart wasn't in pursuing this career avenue. She filled some time with community work and then heard about learnerships being offered at Shell – something for which her excellent grades in maths and physics was well-suited.

Starting work in Kroonstad, she found her preconceptions about work at Shell being tested. It was a challenge. Instead of an office, she found herself being introduced to a world dominated by fuel storage tanks, PPE and the hustle and bustle of a busy industrial facility. In a male-dominated field, she found that expectations about her ability to do the job were governed by others' observations about her physical size and strength. It wasn't plain sailing.

Masedi admits that some of the 'doubters' could be quite forthright when comparing her youth to their years of expertise and experience. "The key for me was about having a teachable spirit. This spirit is a path to learning and means staying humble. I wanted to learn and so listened to what was being said. The people had the experience and the knowledge – exactly what I needed if I was to get where I wanted to be," she says.

Her 'can do' attitude soon turned things around.

"What I loved about the environment was the support I got from senior people and operators alike. They were always ready to share advice or knowledge about the terminal. Doing theoretical studies and practical work at the same time was great. At the same time, I wasn't scared to approach people when I felt I didn't understand something or thought that I had made a mistake. I was shown what I had done wrong and how to avoid making the same mistake in the future. The focus was on teamwork and team performance, not about criticising an individual."

"Doing operations and studying taught me to multitask effectively. I wasn't treated like a learner; I was treated as an operator and was allowed to explore and find out what the business was all about."

She pushes aside suggestions that early Free State mornings could have caused doubts about her career choices. "We have doubts in life. But opportunities are often covered by risks and challenges, and the path to them is often difficult. To discover whether an opportunity exists and knowing what you want to achieve means looking forward and thinking about where you are going, rather than concentrating on doubts and obstacles."

"I knew what I wanted and that I couldn't be scared. I knew that I had to take personal risks and see where what I was doing would take me. Yes, there were times when it was freezing, and I was shaking with cold, and I wanted to cry. But I had to see where it would all lead."

When she felt ready to move, she applied for a head office post in Johannesburg - a significant change in responsibilities, more training and more challenges. The future?

"There are many opportunities within Shell. Ultimately, I would like to work in finance," says Masedi. And what about her initial ambitions in engineering? "Life is a journey. You may discover things that you were not exposed to initially now have some appeal. If it hadn't been for the learnership at Shell, I wouldn't have become aware of what is available in the company or thought about eventually changing my route."

"Involvement in significant projects illustrates that Shell is willing to provide opportunities for those it believes have potential and are ready to learn and grow," says Masedi.

"Shell assists by providing a supportive environment, rather than one that is based on a hierarchy and limits discussion."

As an inspiration, she points to a colleague who started with a Shell learnership and is now a manager. "If it was possible for him, it is possible for me. I know, too, that there are always people here willing to help and guide me," she concludes.

"SHELL IS IN THE BUSINESS OF DEVELOPING PEOPLE. I BELIEVE THAT THEY DON'T WANT ME TO STAY IN THE SAME JOB FOREVER. THEY WANT US TO PURSUE OUR DREAMS AND ALSO DO THINGS THAT WILL MAKE AN IMPACT ON THE BUSINESS."