



Barbara Makhubedu
– CFO

C Suite is Possible

The road to a C-Suite office is usually long, takes dedication and can be lonely. For many women, it also means devoting energy to breaking through stereotypes and proving by achieving a corporate goal that they are worthy of being behind the desk they occupy.

At Shell, women are found at all levels of the company and occupy roles that a decade ago would have been viewed as being primarily for men. Women holding executive positions, however, are still rare, making the accomplishments of Shell SA's CFO and Board Executive Director, Barbara Makhubedu, more noteworthy. The first woman to fill the position, she has done so for three years after building a career with Shell over ten years.

Reflecting on women who wish to climb the corporate ladder, Barbara says that self-examination is required. It is about deciding how far you want to go and grow and identifying those who can inspire you to achieve your aims. Black women also face the additional pressure of having to work exceptionally hard to prove they deserve their positions. As they move up the promotional ladder, they also must show others just starting or building careers, that the only criteria for occupying a senior position are ability and performance.

The pressure is on not to quit, not giving it anything but your best is not an option because as the first black woman in this or any role, you are considered as a role model and a symbol that affirms that others can also accomplish whatever they set their hearts on.

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Ultimately, although you are doing things for yourself, you have to remind yourself of the fact that there's more at stake.

Keeping perspective means remaining as you always have been, by staying approachable and maintaining relationships.

"I regard resilience as the most important pillar to build on. This means being able to remain focused on what you want to achieve and being able to deal with the obstacles that are part of any life journey."

Choosing Shell SA as an employer not only matched her aspirations but also had several other attractions. These included being a global brand - something that promised the possibility of seeing different places and countries. Most significant, however, was the opportunities that Shell offered a dedicated professional.

Joining as a tax specialist, Barbara says she had a personal development plan handwritten on paper which she referred to when applying for the position – it is a document she still possesses as it provides a checkpoint on her progress.

"I joined as a tax specialist but made it clear that this was a steppingstone to enable me to understand the business, as once you are a specialist it is generally difficult to move into a more generic finance role. I have always had that ambition."

"Shell lived up to my expectations in every way."

Attaining and keeping a work-life balance becomes a challenge as a more demanding career can impact on family and life outside of work. Finding out that she was pregnant just after joining Shell, Barbara always felt that the company supported her.

"Shell cares about family. It was not an expectation I had, but the family orientation played a large part in me committing to this company."

Her advice to younger woman looking to build their careers is:

- Join a company where you do not have to compromise your values. Look for company values and make sure they resonate with your values.
- Be open-minded. When you grow, your career may not follow a straight line. Shell offers opportunities that you may initially think are detours to your personally held ambitions. These opportunities will often develop you from a 'depth' and substance point of view that can prepare you for a leadership role.
- Join a company that will allow you to grow and build character. At Shell, there are many stakeholders, and it can get confusing, but this helps develop your leadership attributes.
- When you ask, you will be heard. It may not mean that you will get an immediate answer, but you will be heard.

Although acknowledging that things have changed over the years and that the status of women in business has changed, Barbara feels that there is still much more to be done. "Shell has made a great deal of progress, but women are still a minority in the company's more senior structures."

The girl who grew up in Bushbuckridge as one of seven siblings has come a long way

since her formative years in rural Mpumalanga. Barbara attended and graduated from the University of Cape Town with a BCom in finance and economics and has a qualified as a Chartered Accountant. She has garnered experience both locally and internationally.

Her most defining moment in Shell was being offered an assignment in the Hague and being able to experience a new way of life with her then seven-year-old daughter.

It was also natural, she says, that instead of staying in the Netherlands and enjoying the many benefits offered by the 'ex-pat' lifestyle to come home to take up the role of Chief Financial Officer.

It is here in South Africa that she wanted to build her career. She has inspired many with her achievements. The future, she has shown, is open to women at Shell who wish to excel.