

'We should push ourselves to discover our full potential' - Lynne Africa, Konica Minolta SA

 By [Katja Hamilton](#)

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The proportion of women in leadership roles within financial services firms is [projected](#) to grow to 28% by 2030, and yet this is still below parity. It's imperative that more be done to change this outlook for women in South Africa.



Source: Supplied. Lynne Africa, chief financial officer at Konica Minolta South Africa

This is the message of Lynne Africa, chief financial officer at Konica Minolta South Africa, a division of Bidvest Office.

Her challenging but rewarding role sees her straddling finance and tech while using her skills to ensure financial operations for the company.

She doesn't shy from tackling the topic of working in a male-dominated environment and is generous with her tips for women in finance looking to climb the career ladder.

"I believe my role is still very male-dominated in many industries. Although our company has done - and is continuing to do - a lot to promote females who are deserving, into senior and even technical roles, the industry can still do more.

"There is not enough female presence in the office automation and tech industry. There are many brilliant female minds in the industry, and I believe it is up to senior management to nurture their skills and talents, and give them the opportunities they need to grow further and to prove their potential."

In a quest to address this, Konica Minolta aims to support and empower women in the workplace by offering technical learnerships on an annual basis.



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The 12-month certified technical support Level 4 learnership programme for young BEE candidates, from 18 to 25 years of age, combines a structured learning component with practical work experience.

"Women who apply for these learnerships are evaluated on the same basis as men," Africa says.

The learnership programmes, started in May 2012, have been in huge demand ever since. They are available for both young men and women and have nurtured and grown fantastic talent.

"We have had great success with the women intakes thus far."

Improving the lives of individuals

"For Konica Minolta South Africa, these learnership programmes and their B-BBEE contribution are about more than just bragging rights; they are about empowerment and improving the lives of individuals and communities in South Africa," Africa adds.

These programmes drive equity and inclusion.

"Women with the necessary qualifying credentials are given the same opportunity as men to penetrate the industry. Some graduates have been taken on by businesses in the IT industry while others have found permanent employment within Konica Minolta, its branches and dealerships.

"Evaluation for promotion is done on the individuals' skills and performance and this process is no different when evaluating men or women, hereby giving everyone an equal chance at promotion," Africa says.

Thinking ahead, thinking big

Africa's hope for future generations of women in her field is that more and more women would believe and invest in themselves and their careers, and her advice to up-and-coming young women in the financial industry remains true to the advice she would give her younger self: "Be more confident in your abilities. If you don't first believe in yourself, others too will find it difficult to believe in you.

"Always persevere and don't settle. Hard work always pays off; I am a testament of that."

But while finance industries do their bit to transform their workplaces, women ultimately should make their voices heard, stresses Africa.



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"Too often we find brilliant women with extraordinary potential sitting in roles where they are overshadowed by a male counterpart.

"Woman should not be afraid to speak out and to grab hold of opportunities when they arise. Very often, women don't apply for senior roles because they doubt their abilities.

"I believe that we are just as capable as men and that we should push ourselves to discover our full potential by raising our hands when opportunities arise.

Drawing support from community

Last, but not of least importance, Africa speaks of the importance of women surrounding themselves with the support and inspiration of a community of strong, capable women.

"I am blessed with valuable friendships. These women take the form of friends and family, and they each played a role in my growth and success, some of them are still in my life and they continue to encourage and support me on my journey.

"Two of these special ladies have passed on, but I hold their memories, lessons, and roles very dear to my heart.

"My two daughters too are the driving force behind me. They are the reason I never give up! I hope that my testimony will encourage them to reach greater heights, just as my late mother's testimony did for me.

"I watched and admired her strength as I grew up and every time I face obstacles, I think of her and the strength she portrayed in the face of many adversities," Africa says.

"She never gave up and therefore neither can I."

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

Katja is the Finance, Property and Healthcare Editor at Bizcommunity.

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