

'Learn to start with what you can control' - Simone Kuhn, Radisson Hotel Group

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Simone Kuhn is a business development manager for sub-Saharan Africa at Radisson Hotel Group. Based at Radisson's Africa development office in Cape Town, Kuhn forms part of the team responsible for growing the company's portfolio of hotels and brands in Africa and the Indian Ocean.



Simone Kuhn

Born into the hotel industry, as her father served as the general manager for Sun International Hotels & Casinos for many years under Sol Kerzner, Kuhn started her own career in the hotel industry in 2000 after being enrolled in an in-house training programme at the Savoy Hotel in London. Here, we chat with Kuhn to find out more.

■ Tell us a bit about yourself - your background?

I was born in South Africa but grew up in Eswatini where I spent 18 years of my life. I went to hotel school in Cape Town, with my own career in the hotel industry kickstarting in 2000 after enrolling in an in-house training programme at the Savoy Hotel in London.

Thereafter, I held management positions within hotel operations in South Africa and the United Kingdom within Relais & Châteaux and Starwood. I then decided to see more of the world and took up the challenge of an on-board F&B manager for Etihad Airlines based in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. It was then in May 2011 that I finally joined the Radisson Hotel Group.

■ Describe your role at Radisson Hotel Group - what does a typical workday look like for you?

The Radisson Hotel Group is a hotel operator which means we operate hotels on behalf of owners. My role in short as a development manager is to look after growing our dynamic brand portfolio in Mauritius and 10 Anglophone countries some of which include Namibia, Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia.

Covid-19 has affected how we do business. A typical day now predominantly revolves around networking and sourcing new business to ensure we are the top-of-mind operator when developing hotels. The most exciting part of the job is that no deal is the same. Each deal comes with a different owner which results in a different dynamic. Travel is, of course, exciting especially when you are doing business in countries you have never been to before.

Most importantly for me are the relationships I have built with owners, stakeholders and professional teams as well as meeting new people and learning about different cultures which is key to a successful deal.

■ ***What made you decide to go into the hotel industry?***

I grew up in the hotel business as my father was a hotel general manager for many years, so I guess we could say it is in my blood. I can't imagine myself being in any other industry.

■ ***Do you have any role models? If so, who?***

I have a few – friends, colleagues, family but one, in particular, is Jacinda Dern, Prime Minister of New Zealand. Her accomplishments in a very short amount of time are truly inspiring.

■ ***Do you think it's important to have a month dedicated to women? And why.***

Women's Month is traditionally where we pay tribute to the more than 20,000 women who marched to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956 in protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women. Should this be celebrated? Yes. Why? This day is a reminder and still draws attention to the significant issues women across the globe continue to face.

■ ***What advice would you give to women wanting to enter your industry?***

We all have different experiences which shape our approach to business, however, we as women have ingrained soft skills and emotional intelligence which adds huge value to any professional discussion, not only in the hotel development industry, but in any field. My advice would be to use and celebrate these skills.

■ ***What is the best advice anyone has given you?***

Learn your truth, sit with it, accept it, express it

■ ***As a woman, have there been any significant challenges in the workplace that stand out for you?***

I wouldn't say it has been a challenge as such, but ultimately, it's not about who you work with or the environment you work in but ensuring you create your own opportunities, network and get yourself out there. You are your own brand in short. Like Michelle Obama said: "Many of us have gotten ourselves at the table, but we're still too grateful to be at the table to really shake it up. And that's not a criticism, because for so many just getting to the table was so hard, right? So you're just holding on."

🍷 ***Do you have any pearls of wisdom to share this Women's Month or words of encouragement?***

Learn to start with what you can control. And that's ourselves first.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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