

■ **BREAKING BARRIERS**

Ekurhuleni City boss Champions Women Empowerment

High-flying Ekurhuleni City Manager Dr Imogen Mashazi Rewriting The rules Of Women's Empowerment

Pearl Rantsekeng

HEROES come in capes but not this one – she comes adorned in a dress!

She is none other than Dr Imogen Mashazi, the City Manager of Ekurhuleni Metro.

Despite her powerful position the feisty, hard-working and self-driven Dr Mashazi has no airs and graces about her.

She has agreed to our interview, on-line via Microsoft Teams, but is quick to add that she is only giving us 10 minutes of her time as she has other matters to attend to.

“After all,” she adds, “I don't like the media. Zweli (Dlamini) – Chief Specialist Media Relations and spokesperson in her office – will give you all the other things that he has written about me.”

However, twenty minutes later, the accommodative and very passionate Dr Mashazi is freely chatting away about her life. From her days as a nursing sister in Soweto, then her move to Ekurhuleni where she joined the city as deputy director health services and welfare.

She rose up the ranks by not only burning the midnight candle – today she holds a DLitt et Phil (Nursing Science) Degree – but has also made

sure that she leaves footprints in the sand everywhere she has been.

So, it came as no surprise when last month (July 23rd) the Soweto born and bred mother of three, scooped the award for Public Sector Leader at this year's first Virtual Top Empowerment Awards.

The City of Ekurhuleni won the award for Public Service category.

The awards, launched 19 years ago, celebrate the country's

leaders in transformation and empowerment.

The platform provides exposure among empowered industry players, honouring those who've displayed innovative leadership and made a significant impact on the communities in which they operate as well as society at large.



Ekurhuleni City Manager
Dr Imogen Mashazi



Ekurhuleni City Manager Dr. Imogen Mashazi with two of the graduates during the recent Academic Excellence Awards.

Both these achievements are no mean feat and Dr Mashazi is the first to acknowledge that.

“The strangest thing is that I was not even aware that I had been nominated until someone called to congratulate me. I had no clue what they were talking about and asked them to forward me the info,” she relates.

“The win came as a surprise to be honest. If it was not for my personal assistant (Linda Naicker) I would not have won. Linda decided to nominate me behind my back probably because she knew that I would have said no as I am media shy.”

“Nonetheless, I am quite excited for the fact that at least one is recognised for the type of work one is doing especially as a woman empowering other women.”

Ekurhuleni’s Head of Department: City Planning, Palesa Tsita, says the award couldn’t have gone to a more deserving candidate.

Tsita should know, after all, she is living proof of Dr Mashazi’s determination and drive to see more and more women empowered in the city.

Dr Mashazi appointed her to the position in June last year.

“What I love about her is that she is tough and decisive and is not threatened by women like her but instead embraces and mentors them to ensure that they reach their full potential,” says Tsita.

Naledi Modibedi, Head of Department Human Resources, concurs.

She, like Tsita, was appointed by Dr Mashazi into her position three years ago.

“What I love about the CM is that she is the kind of boss that will give you space to do your stuff. If you mess up though she will give it to you there and then. But, with her somehow you know that it is not personal.”

“She speaks her mind and moves on and has no time to be holding a grudge. She personifies professionalism

and perfection and expects it from all around her,” she adds.

Under her leadership, from her days as Chief Operation Officer, the city has achieved an unqualified audit with a clean audit on financial statements; Zero unauthorised expenditure; Zero fruitless and wasteful expenditure; Irregular expenditure has decreased from R215 million in the previous financial year to R5 million in the 2018/19 financial year; Collection rate stood at 91 percent. She is described by those who know her as a no-nonsense woman who knows her story and expects the same from those around her especially women.

Dr Mashazi is passionate about women empowerment and does not only talk the talk but she walks the talk.

In 2017, she was instrumental in introducing The Women in Uniform Community Safety Project, aimed at ensuring that more women are appointed into meaningful positions in the workplace hence the appointments of the likes of Tsita and .

Modibedi and many others. She says: "Remember I've been in the system for 20 years and as I worked my way up the ranks from my days as executive director of health and social development, I noticed that it was mostly men who were appointed into the senior and decision making positions like your HODs and managers.

"So, when I was appointed City Manager in 2016, I told myself that I wanted to change the status quo."

In 2017, she made it clear that her intention was to see female employees at EMPD and DEMS prosper academically and career-wise.

She explains that she did this because she understood that their field of work is male dominated and that despite

them doing the same work with their male counterparts, they still have to double their efforts to be recognized.

"I did this because as a woman I had experienced some of the things and decided that as the first female CM of the City, I have to do something. Gone are the days when women have to experience gender discrimination in society and the workplace. Together we must prove that we are equal to our male counterparts one way or the other," she explains.

Dr Mashazi, a married mother of three, is a team player who always acknowledges the support of others whether be it at home or work.

She says when she took the decision to have female HODs

in the city, the Council obliged and today nine of the city's 23 HODs are female. Meanwhile, more than 400 women have been absorbed as traffic wardens.

While in the area of disaster management, two new female divisional heads have been appointed and now more dominate the space with a figure of 110 females compared to 63 male counterparts.

"We've also witnessed great progress in promotions in the EMPD with a number of women occupying senior positions such as deputy director, chief superintendent, superintendents and inspectors. Quite a huge achievement I must add.

"All these appointments and promotions have seen a number of ladies prioritising their studies to enable them



Dr. Mashazi handing over blankets to Gabisile Khoza founder of Siyazigabisa Children's Home in Tembisa.

Dr. Imogen Mashazi



City of Ekurhuleni

selves to be considered for senior positions. Today we are in the company of women with MBAs, Honours, BTech Degrees and Diplomas.

“We are now steadily moving into the Fourth Industrial Revolution and therefore we must equip ourselves with the necessary skills to navigate our way out of any situation that comes with this revolution. Who knows maybe among you we have someone who will invent the most innovative way to fight crime and deal with disasters,” she recently told guests at the city’s 20th anniversary of it becoming a conglomerate.

Asked if women can have it all, Dr Mashazi believes yes, but is quick to add, she needs all the support from her family.

She credits her husband of 30 years for the reason why she has been able to succeed at work.

“If it wasn’t for him I doubt I would have even been able to take up some of these positions like this one of City Manager because it is demanding and we spend hours at work. She adds that in earlier days, when the kids were small – now the first born is 30 years while her set of twins is 23 years of age – her mother-in-law, who has since passed on, played a great role.

“My husband took the kids to school. I was blessed in the sense that I’ve never had to take time off to rush my kids to a doctor or something because my mother-in-law was there for me,” she adds.

Her parting words to women this women’s month is that they need to go to school and work hard so that the system can recognise their efforts.

“Your work must speak for you don’t wait to get favours from people. When I joined the system as a public servant, my aim was to change the lives of the people of Ekurhuleni and I believe I did that. From my days as the director of health to my current position, my work speaks for itself from our TB cure rate which was at its lowest but by the time I left it was sitting at about 89 percent. We were among the first to buy ARVs for our patients and built world-class clinics for our townships.

“As the city we have changed the life styles of our citizens and continue to do so. My passion to empower women all these things will be the legacy I leave behind.”

Young, Energetic Ekurhuleni City Planning HOD Shattering Glass Ceilings

Pearl Rantsekeng



City Planning HOD Palesa Tsita

It doesn't take much time for one to see why Palesa Tsita is making big strides in the male dominated field of city planning.

Tsita is one of the many new women who are breaking barriers and unapologetically making a name for themselves in the City of Ekurhuleni.

Thanks to her boss, Dr Imogen Mashazi, as much as the rise has not been meteoric, Tsita concedes that having unwavering support from a woman of

Mashazi's strength and conviction has made things a little bearable in the workplace.

She is one of the rising number of women who have taken up significant positions in the city.

Last June she was appointed, by Dr Mashazi, to the position of Head of Department: City Planning.

A position she defines as robust.

"I've only been there for a year

but it feels like forever. I guess because before taking over as HOD I worked, in the same department, for five years as divisional head," says Tsita.

A job, she adds, she found exciting and is very appreciative of her team for the technical support she received.

Describing her new post, Tsita says it has been thrilling in the sense that she has learnt a lot but in the same token has been able to also give back.

"The professional support from my principal has been wonderful but I also have been pushed to my limits. The infrastructure cluster is not for sissies I tell you," she adds. The cluster, explains Tsita, consists of planning, which is herself, roads, water, human settlements, real estate, energy and transport.

"All these HoDs are male except for transport. My division is key and for any of these others to move I have to be there, so you can imagine," she chuckles.

Tsita says city planning has always been her calling since the tender age of 16 while living in Soweto.

"I was fascinated by the planning of the different suburbs where I had been attending



schools and where my friends from school lived. How those areas, like Hyde Park, where I would visit my grandmother who worked there, were developed hence today I hold a Master's Degree in Development Planning," she says.

Besides her Master's Palesa has also done Leadership and Advanced Management course at WITS and GIBS Business Schools in order to strengthening her management prowess.

Tsita brings with her a wealth of experience which spurns almost two decades in the public sector across local, provincial and national governments.

She credits her mentors, throughout her career, for her continued success and has also decided to pay it forward by mentoring other young women.

She is thankful for people like her principal, Dr Mashazi, who level the playing fields.

"What I like about her is that she is not threatened by women like her. She instead goes for them. She is tough and decisive.

"And you would be surprised at how girly we are. Our hair and nails are done, we put lipstick on and yet when we get into those meetings we put on our iron pants and not just big girl panties," she explains.

Tsita says she believes in education as well as hard work, decisiveness and being results driven whilst making room to learn and teach.

She hopes for a sabbatical and to study further now that her kids are slightly grown and are "less dependent on me for their homework", she adds amidst laughter.

This Women's Day, her message to the women in: "Let's go for the glass ceiling. We have what it takes."

Tsita's portfolio alone deals with a budget of just between R100 to R200 million.

Her key infrastructure projects or strategic urban developments include Tambo Springs, which is the inland port.

"We are putting in bulk infrastructure that also includes the green reef area where we are looking at putting in bulk for the establishment of the university within the city. The last one is the building of a link bridge between the airport and the Rhodesfield Gautrain station," said Tsita.

Ekurhuleni Human Resources HOD Believes Black Women Deserves To Occupy Key Positions Without Being Patronized

Pearl Rantsekeng



Human Resources HOD Naledi Modibedi

Naledi Modibedi can easily be defined as one of the shining stars of the City of Ekurhuleni!

As the Head of Department: Human Resources, Modibedi is one of the growing number of female HoDs in the city.

Her job entails, among many other functions, managing employee relations, recruitment, compensation and benefits as well as training and development.

A role which, Modibedi explains, requires one to have solid communication skills and decision-making capabilities based on analytical skills and critical thought processes.

In our little encounter, during our telephone interview, Modibedi exudes confidence in a non-threatening manner.

She frequently bursts into bouts of genuine laughter as

she freely speaks about her not-so-new appointment and the challenges that come with it.

She was appointed in August 2017 by the then also newly-appointed, first female City Manager, Dr Imogen Mashazi. Modibedi has nothing but praises for her boss.

“There is nothing that makes one to excel at her work or be able to face any challenges that one comes across than having a supportive and trusting boss. Someone whom you know is there for you and wants to see you succeed,” says Modibedi.

“Dr Mashazi pushes you, especially us women, but you also have to make sure that you meet her halfway by doing your part which is furthering your studies and working hard.”

The North West-born mother of two – a 16-year-old boy and two-year-old daughter, says she was appointed to her current post having come from the position of Chief Director: Department of Science and Technology in Pretoria.

“I must say in the beginning it was quiet challenging. Local government is not for the faint at heart. But, with time, I found

my niche and after having established the different systems it started to become a bit easier,” she explains.

Modibedi majored in Industrial Psychology, which she explains, is a broader version of human resources, as it encapsulates issues of mental health, identifies how attitudes and behaviours can be improved in the workplace and ensures that workplace moral remains high during periods of change.

She says with the local government being mostly male dominated it has not been easy as a woman to earn the respect of male colleagues and even some of the employees including women at times.

“I’ve had to dispel a lot of myths and it doesn’t help that in stature I am very small. You find that as a woman you have to work double as hard. But, as time goes by, you realise you don’t have to do any talking. Your work speaks for itself,” she says.

Modibedi believes that every month should be Women’s Month.

“For me Women’s Month means a time to celebrate women who work hard, women who empower other women. It means strength,” says Modibedi.

“It means that as a woman you need to be happy when you look to your left or right and see that there are people, especially other women, who smile when they look at you. In this day and age let’s not be still caught up in celebrating to be called first black woman this and that.”



Naledi Modibedi

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