

Tekwecomm: Where connectedness drives business and community growth

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Never has the world been so centred on the notion of connectedness. Maintaining, upgrading, and protecting this digital connectedness through unmatched quality and service delivery lies at the heart of telecom industry specialists, Tekwecomm. Managing director, Lilian Kistan, encapsulates the driving force of Tekwecomm: Being a lean, driven team of problem-solving change agents, passionate about how they bring sites back on air. For Lilian, the theme of connection revealed itself in her childhood.



"I grew up in a small suburb just outside Queensborough in Durban, and my favourite memory is that you could visit any aunties' house at any time. One never needed an invitation, and a meal always appeared. That sense of security, freedom and connectedness has stayed with me." As the conversation unfolds, it becomes apparent that Kistan has a heart for people and that it was in Tekwecomm that found her.

Leading through vulnerability and connection

As a woman leading in the telecoms space, Lilian believes that the landscape for SMMEs is 'bright and bold'. If you stay in play in this space, you must keep abreast of what's happening technologically. Become curious about where the market is going and about disseminating this information. Sadly, we're still not seeing many women playing in this space. So many women exist in the corporate world but do not enter the SMME space. In the last ten years, we have not seen it grow, and legislatively, there hasn't been enough to drive the SMME space for women. Lilian is a superb role model for women in her industry, imparting nuggets of wisdom.

Having bought Tekwecomm and inheriting the name, she highlights that she believes that the name alludes to telecommunication and community. This very sense of community and spirit of ubuntu is the kind of leadership that has seen Tekwecomm scale from a team of six to over 40 team members in a mere five



Lilian Kistan, managing director at Tekwecomm

years.

"I was in a comfortable position, and I didn't need the business," highlights Lilian. However, when I met the team, their hearts appealed to me, and I realised I had made the right decision. At that moment, I decided to lead through my vulnerability." Lilian's courage to reveal whom she was allowed her team to reveal who they were. Tekwecomm's company culture evolved organically from a space of vulnerability.

Lilian points out that the team dynamics cemented quickly due to this organic evolution. This evolution of Tekwecomm includes their company ideal of being change agents who bring sites back on air with efficacy and minimal delays.

The team at Tekwecomm understand that fulfilling a vision requires intentional daily focus from every person on the team. "I'm purposeful about understanding where the team is mentally and emotionally daily. Even what their uniform looks like impacts the vision for that day. Fulfilling a vision also requires anchoring information, so I remind the team of how far we've come, growing from a team of six to just over 40 in a mere five years." Beyond her staff compliment, Tekwecomm is effecting tremendous change on the periphery.

Lilian sees the ability to shape the future and impact people's lives as a privilege. She passionately shares the story of Rudolf's brilliant daughter, who couldn't afford university. Lilian and Tekwecomm stepped in, making it possible for her to graduate in BCom Law. She's now awaiting her Visa to go to South Korea in June. "Our goal is to accelerate growth in families, and education is key," shares Lilian.

Transforming the industry landscape with a fresh approach

With services that range from radio frequency tech to site securing and vandal-proofing through security enhancements, Tekwecomm's real passion remains to bring the site onto air as quickly as possible. Their motto? 'Do what we need to do in the shortest time possible' because entire communities can be left stranded, unable to contact even emergency services. Exceptional service and quality of work are not the only way Tekwecomm differentiates itself from its competitors.

"One of the things that we do differently is that we aim to be market leaders by focusing on what we provide and asking ourselves how we can do so differently and better. We are leaders in what we do in KwaZulu-Natal, which has catapulted us into signing contracts in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Western Cape. One of the ways Tekwecomm continues to innovate is because Lilian asks her team for input. "The team's input allows us to develop solutions that enable us to do things differently. Small achievements have given us more significant opportunities just because we have done things differently." These opportunities have resulted in several accomplishments that have left Lilian proud.

Their latest achievement is securing their very own steel fabrication division. Lilian explains that they now own that pipeline and can now service clients at an even faster turn-around. "It's about keeping the value chain as short as possible without the unnecessary markups, making the prospect of business with us even more attractive to the client." Great triumphs like this are undeniably linked to the challenges the Tekwecomm team has overcome.

Cashflow is a tremendous challenge for any SMME, and as Lilian points out that one needs to be creative in solving this problem. Lilian encourages engaging clients to create mutually beneficial working relationships to overcome this problem. This is where Innovator Trust enters the journey with Tekwecomm.

"We were introduced to the Innovator Trust Supplier Development programme through the Vodacom Supply Chain in 2019, which altered our trajectory immediately. The mission was no longer business survival but business growth. Through the Innovator Trust Supplier Development programme, we have attracted new talent, acquired assets to meet business demand and funded new



investments. After that, we approached our largest client, Vodacom, who quickly put up their hands to help us and assist with our cash flow by settling invoices in record time. This was significant in giving us the momentum to grow." On the note of growth, scaling a business is a process that Tekwecomm embraces.

Acknowledging that scaling one's business can be daunting, Lilian notes that it's an opportunity to test what one is made of to continue being a change agent. Obtaining the necessary supplier certifications is paramount and part of scaling.

The Innovator Trust Supplier Development programme provided us with the perfect springboard," says Lilian. Obtaining supplier qualifications and certifications elevates one to the highest tier of supplier consideration. Why wouldn't one jump at the opportunity?" Lilian advises that one should not be afraid of the administration or the numbers and embrace the simple facets that often help obtain those supplier certifications. Conquering challenges, scaling the business, and effecting change in the telecoms industry and the lives of families, Tekwecomm is just getting started with even more expansion on the horizon.

Later in 2023, Tekwecomm will be opening its offices in Bloemfontein. Lilian notes that this is their big project for the year. "This is another way we continue innovating. We create a conscious discomfort – we exercise that muscle repeatedly because if we're not uncomfortable, we're doing something wrong." Stepping out of one's comfort zone is one piece of advice that Lilian has pertaining to the SMME landscape, and her great tip for staying abreast of any industry is another.

"Read and then read some more. I spend two to three hours reading articles, research materials and books daily. Anything that will expand your thinking will put you ahead in the game."

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