

Eaton investing in female engineering leadership

While the field of engineering has historically been the preserve of men, that's changing rapidly as organisations like power management company Eaton prioritise their investment in the growth of women at work.



Sidudzile Bengu and Rinah Letsebe, engineers at Eaton

Eaton introduced its Leadership Women's Skills Development Programme, which develops female leaders, identifies and addresses potential barriers in career development, helps women build strong business networks, and sensitises male counterparts to gender parity. Participants in the programme Rinah Letsebe and Sidudzile Bengu - both female engineers working at Eaton, attest to the programmes success.

Rinah Letsebe's journey

Letsebe was introduced to electrical engineering on a 2007 Grade 12 school field trip, and didn't give up on her dream to pursue this career, despite not being accepted for a university degree. She completed a three-year college programme in electrical infrastructure and construction, after which she secured an apprenticeship at Eaton in Witbank.

By 2016, Letsebe had qualified as an electrician, and was appointed to the role of 'wireman', which she complemented with a diploma in safety management. "My mom taught me that if I want to grow, I need to make myself visible, and available to opportunities," she says.

This she certainly did, embracing the opportunity to move to Eaton's main plant in Wadeville, where she became the operation's first female team leader. "It was the most difficult position I've ever been in, because I had to manage men that have been in the industry for over a decade," she says. "Seven months down the line, I was asked to assist in production planning, another opportunity that I embraced."



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In this role, Letsebe noticed a variety of inefficiencies in how responsibilities were allocated to teams, and how individuals' potential wasn't being achieved. "I plan for each individual," she explains. "Everyone needs to be accountable for every task or duty that's given to them. I make sure that all workers have all the resources they need to complete their projects, and that they understand what needs to be done to achieve clients' deadlines."

While she acknowledges that it's tough to be a woman in engineering, Letsebe says that women often underestimate their strength, their intelligence, and their innate ability to multitask.

"I have learned confidence and have learned to take the initiative to get involved in projects, rather than waiting to be asked," she says. "It's also important to have a mentor or role model."

Letsebe recommends that any young woman contemplating a career in engineering of any sort should take maths and science to matric, as they open the doors to many careers in addition to engineering. These subjects also teach innovation and problem solving – both essential skills in any engineering degree.



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Advice from Sidudzile Bengu

Bengu is Eaton's first female field service engineer, with her role being focused around commissioning, servicing and repairing Eaton's uninterrupted power service (UPS) solutions.

"It's time to break the stigma that maths and science are difficult, and that engineering is a man's job," she says. "Women can do anything that they put their minds to."

Bengu particularly relishes it when she arrives at a site to sceptical looks from clients who doubt her abilities based on her appearance – and then she fixes their problem quickly and effectively, demonstrating without a doubt that it's a person's skills that are key to success in their engineering job, and not their gender.

She agrees with Letsebe's advice that young women aspiring to be engineers should study maths and science, and reminds them that, "As a woman, anything is possible, as long as you are willing to work hard, are driven, and have the passion for it!"