

Kate Elliott, Right 2 Repair South Africa's newly-appointed CEO

 By [Imran Salie](#)

5 Aug 2021

We are celebrating Women's Month this August at Bizcommunity by bringing to light influential women in different industries. One person that deservedly fits the bill in the automotive industry is Kate Elliott, the recently appointed CEO of Right 2 Repair South Africa (R2RSA).



Kate Elliott, CEO of Right 2 Repair South Africa

She is a strong leader that would love to see the automotive sector guide the way and be an example of what can be achieved in an open and competitive market. Elliott is also a seasoned expert on civil, commercial, competition, franchise and labour law having spent the last nine years at Ashersons Attorneys. R2RSA has been advocating for freedom of repair choice for vehicle owners over the last couple of years and aims to ensure fair competition in the automotive repair supply chain.

Here, Elliott talks more about her role, R2RSA and what can be done to help elevate women in South Africa.

■ Congratulations on your recent appointment as CEO of R2RSA. Tell us what motivated you to take up the position.

Elliott: I come from a legal background and prior to taking up the position I was practising as an attorney at a boutique law firm in Cape Town. I was looking for a more dynamic, proactive role that would make a positive difference in the world when the opportunity presented itself with R2RSA.

I am excited about the work that R2RSA is doing and its potential to shake up the automotive industry to the benefit of all South Africans. I am extremely passionate about South Africa and our potential to be a thriving nation where anything is possible with determination and hard work – our own version of 'The American Dream' so to speak. I would love to see the automotive industry lead the way and be an example of what can be achieved in an open and competitive market.

🚦 **Owners of new cars are now allowed to repair or service their vehicles at an independent provider of their choice. Comment on the significance of this for Right 2 Repair.**

Elliott: This is just one of the changes to the industry that the Guidelines to Competition in the South African Automotive Aftermarket (the Guidelines) have brought about.

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The Guidelines provide consumers with more choice when it comes to servicing and repairing their vehicles. This ultimately will lead to better competition in the market and all the associated benefits thereof.

The significance of it to R2RSA is huge. The Guidelines are a manifestation of our organisation's goals that we have been working towards for many years. Now that they are in effect, we are finally able to turn our attention to implementation.

🚦 **What long term goals do you have as CEO of Right 2 Repair?**

Elliott: Once the Guidelines have achieved industry-wide acceptance and implementation, I would like to expand the scope of the work we do to include all products which are capable of repair, as has been done in many leading international markets.

🚦 **Why is the automotive aftermarket so important for the economy?**

Elliott: The automotive industry is the third largest sector in the national economy. While a large portion of this can be attributed to the manufacture and retail of new motor vehicles, the repair and service sector cannot be discounted. There are about 12.7 million vehicles on the road in South Africa and all of these will need to be serviced and repaired during their lifetimes. Vehicle workshops that are operating in a truly competitive market will provide better and more affordable services and repairs.



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Accordingly, the importance of the aftermarket to the economy is two-fold. It is a contributor in its own right to the country's GDP, and if the sector is operating correctly, the savings cost will have an impact on all sectors of the economy much as the petrol price does.

🚦 **What challenges have you faced as a female in the industry?**

Elliott: Having children. As a society, we are still trying to figure out how to adapt our working practices to allow for the fact that in this day and age both parents often work.

To overcome this challenge, I identified what kind of working conditions I needed in order to cope with the demands of both parenthood and working and I looked for a company that was willing to accommodate these needs. Moms are generally great at getting things done quickly and well because we don't have time to redo work. We make sure that we get it right the first time and I feel that is a valuable skill to offer an employer.

‡ ***Comment on the importance of gender equality in the workplace and in the automotive industry.***

Elliott: Women and men often come with different skill sets and so I believe that all of the best businesses and teams should have a good ratio of both men and women to take advantage of these differing strengths.

‡ ***What do you think can be done to break down barriers that prevent women from professional development?***

Elliott: Very often it is the duties and responsibilities that come with parenthood that can hold us back. I firmly believe that one of the best ways to tackle this issue is to dismantle the traditional workplace models. Rigid office hours, a focus on input rather than output and the location of where you conduct your work should all be things of the past.

Obviously, certain roles require specific hours and in-person work to be performed. But where remote work and flexible ours are compatible with a job we should embrace this format with open arms as they open up the working world to working parents in a big way.

‡ ***What do you think can be done to address the pay disparity issue for women in South Africa?***

Elliott: We need to teach our girls to know their worth and our boys to respect them for it. Positive role models certainly help, but like many things, I truly believe in the power of changing things from the bottom up. Couple this with addressing the issues presented by traditional workplace models, and I believe you will find more women applying for higher-paying roles and advocating for themselves when negotiating salaries.

‡ ***Since we are celebrating Women's Month, what words of encouragement do you have for women?***

Elliott: Women are powerful in very different ways from men. Many well-meaning female leadership development programmes teach women to negotiate, network and make decisions 'like a man'. The unintended message this communicates is that there is something wrong with how women lead. Women in general have an innate desire to build connections and empathise with those around us. This is a huge strength that should not be discounted. So to the women of South Africa I say, own your power and show the men how a woman gets things done!

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