

'Know your value and own it' - Leandri Erasmus, Interwaste

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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A supervisor at Interwaste, involved in the processing of hazardous and strictly confidential waste streams earmarked for safe destruction, Leandri Erasmus is passionate about ensuring the safe and ethical disposal of waste. While women remain underrepresented in the waste management industry, she notes that those who are involved are making exceptional strides in promoting the impact that women can have in business, the sector, and wider communities.

This Women's Month, we chatted to Erasmus to find out more about her journey so far in waste management, her favourite trends in the sector, and how Interwaste is supporting and empowering women in the organisation.

■ Tell us a bit about yourself and your background?

Leandri Erasmus: I was born and raised in a small town called Nigel in Gauteng where I lived with my grandparents on a farm until I had to go to school, at which time I moved with my parents to Joburg. I always enjoyed sports and competed in netball, swimming, athletics, cross country running and gymnastics. I was also a top performer in academics and studied very hard to achieve above-average marks.

After I matriculated, I studied to become a qualified personal trainer, nutritionist and sports coach. I worked as a personal trainer for two years after completing my studies.



Leandri Erasmus, supervisor, Interwaste

Venturing out into the working world, I needed to earn a salary and was offered a job at Bidvest Protea Coin as a receptionist at Interwaste Security. I was in this role for three years during which time I went out of my way to ensure that I could show value and be an asset to the business. This didn't go unnoticed as I was then offered a job at Interwaste in January 2017 as a supervisor of the Safe Disposal Facility. Today, I supervise two such facilities (including the Aerosol Destruction Facility) and look forward to more growth in the next few years.

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

Erasmus: I am the supervisor of the Safe Disposal and Aerosol Destruction Facilities. These facilities aim at safely destructing products to ensure a zero-waste to landfill target can be met. A diverse set of convenient destruction services are undertaken at these facilities – anything from jewellery to detergents and aerosols, to sensitive documents, e-waste, redundant assets, consumer products and other high-value items. This is largely dependent on industry, product profile and business requirements.

During a typical workday one of my biggest tasks is checking in on my staff and assessing progress on various projects. I like to meet first thing each morning to discuss our priorities for the day, then meet again in the middle of the day to check progress, and once at the end of the week to discuss goal-setting for the next week. Making sure our clients' product destruction is done professionally and compliantly is a critical priority and so I need to ensure that the team are following processes and that everything is accounted for and well managed at all times.

I ensure that all timelines are met with regards to the destruction process – which ties in closely with our clients' reporting processes – and this means that the team is closely managed each week to ensure we can meet these targets and that any

issues are addressed proactively.

“ I am responsible for improving efficiencies within the process and ensuring that all progress is reported to the value chain each day. ”

Safety, compliance and reporting are other critical areas of my job role too and so I have the task of keeping and maintaining all relevant records from the two facilities and sending these in report form to management.



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■ **What do you love most about working in the waste management sector?**

Erasmus: I love that there is always something new to learn and that we are making a difference in the world.

■ **What's your favourite trend in the sector right now?**

Erasmus: There are two key trends that are really exciting in this sector currently. Firstly, the increasing awareness and move towards the circular economy is fundamental. If we really want to encourage the 'nothing wasted' mindset, investing in a circular economy model must be taken seriously. This model offers significant opportunities to truly deliver far more inclusive growth for the economy and includes an increase in job opportunities as well as positive environmental practices.

Secondly, the digitisation of waste collection is becoming more relevant, providing important benefits, like being able to efficiently guide waste collection routes, making collection of waste as well as recycling materials fuel efficient and, more importantly, reducing the use of energy.

“ Today, so many complex industrial processes can be automated, and we must embrace this. ”



CONSTRUCTION & ENGINEERING

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■ **When you're not busy working, what do you do for fun?**

Erasmus: I enjoy spending time with my family, exercising and playing pool.

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

Erasmus: Yes, definitely. As women, we do get treated differently as people tend to think or assume that women cannot work as hard as men physically or mentally.

For example, if I want to physically work with my team, the men usually tend to stop me from lifting boxes as they are afraid that I cannot lift them or that I might get hurt.

“ There is a common misconception in an industry such as ours that women 'shouldn't get dirty' and hey, we're in the business of waste, everyone should get dirty at some point in time! ”

Another challenge has been having a voice. Conversations are often male dominated where they tend to forget to ask women in the business for input or thoughts. As such, facing these challenges means demonstrating and proving that we a) have a voice and b) are smart and capable of doing everything that is required of us and more.



Leandri Erasmus, supervisor, Interwaste

■ ***Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in the waste sector today?***

Erasmus: Know your value and own it; do not allow the smallest of comments or actions from others to bring you down.

■ ***How is Interwaste supporting and empowering women in the waste sector?***

Erasmus: Since I joined Interwaste, there has been a significant increase in representation of women in senior positions across the business. We now have four women on our exco team, and many women leading teams in both operational and support functions.

Historically, the waste sector has been male dominated due to the operational nature of the industry but as the industry continues to evolve and the services diversify, it is wonderful to see more and more women joining across all occupational levels.

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

Erasmus: Success isn't about how much money you make, it's about the difference you make in other peoples' lives.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com
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