

Female leadership in SA's property sector needs to be prioritised

By [Nonhlanhla Mayisela](#)

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We've made significant strides in the last decade and there is visible progress of women being integrated into various roles within different segments of South Africa's property sector. However, a significant challenge we still face is in ensuring that women are represented in senior roles within the industry.



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If one looks at the listed property companies, there's only one female-led real estate investment trust (REIT) company in a pool of about 30 REITs. Apart from this company, the composition of senior executives within most organisations is still very much male-dominated. We need senior women in key decision-making roles in order for visible and sustainable change to continue.

What's positive to note is that there's great effort being made to encourage females at an undergraduate level to pursue property studies. Therefore, more women are entering the sector than ever before.

Female property entrepreneurs need better market access and industry support

The biggest hurdle that female-led businesses need to overcome is access to markets and the ability to sustain and grow a solid client base. Most female-led businesses are in the services segment of the property sector, which is still very male-dominated. We need to get to a point where we achieve critical mass where women are meaningfully participating along the full property value chain.

Businesses require varied support depending on where they are along their journey. To a large extent, there's been a focus on enterprise development for these businesses. This is great as a starting point because it gives these businesses a kick-start and the necessary support in their early stages. However, the remaining challenge then lies in ensuring that there's a transition from business support to providing access to markets where these businesses can operate independently.

Both male and female leaders need to pave the way for diversity in the workplace

In my view, one of the prevalent barriers that exists is the inability for big business to make gender parity a strategic imperative within their organisations. The only way we'll see change is if the leadership team enforces the importance of gender diversity at all levels within the organisation.

Admittedly, another barrier is perpetuated by women themselves. That is, we not only lack the belief in ourselves but we also don't take the necessary steps that will ultimately ensure that we progress. The reality is that we operate in hostile environments that don't naturally embrace change. This means we have to equip our minds to forge ahead despite opposition.

Support networks can help us grow and thrive

I believe that a big part of progression and achieving success and fulfillment in a career is about building relationships and networking. A professional shouldn't isolate themselves – they should actively seek people, men and women, with whom they can engage to get advice and the necessary support.

I think women are naturally wired to 'grin and bear it', which results in us trying to solve and overcome every challenge on our own without seeking help. Like all human beings, whether male or female, we need support and guidance, which comes in different forms.

In conclusion

Progression may be slow, but the wheels of gender equality and diversity in South Africa's property sector are turning. Gender parity is a lifetime battle. Women need to continue pushing boundaries without relenting and big business needs to realise the importance of having female representation within the work environment.

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