

MAPONYA INC: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE WORK PLACE

"Feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength." —*G.D. Anderson*

Traditionally a woman's role is seen as the home maker. This role is multi-faceted with women caring, for and nurturing their families. Women in the home are often responsible for cooking, cleaning, nursing, budgeting, teaching, counselling and so much more. Women are very often a pillar of strength keeping their families together in the most trying and difficult times.

Black women in South Africa particularly have had to face many obstacles in pursuing their dreams. Poverty, a patriarchal society and discrimination are challenges which many face every day. The black girl born into an impoverished household does not face an easy road ahead. The answer to these many problems is to empower girls and women in order for them to reach their full potential.

An empowered woman is a strong force. To be truly empowered is quintessentially about freedom. This freedom most importantly includes freedom of choice and thought. It is all too easy to say women are empowered in South Africa. We have an advanced constitution and a myriad of laws and platforms to promote women's rights. In reality, however, we are daily accosted with a multitude of abuses relating to women's rights. Some are obvious like physical abuse, sexual abuse and financial abuse. Others are more insidious. They include the patronising name calling in the work place or the tacit acceptance that a woman won't be able to perform in certain roles. Many times the abuser is not even aware of the offence and more often than not the abuser is not always a man and can easily be another woman.

It is accepted that the environment adults are exposed to as children greatly contributes to their attitudes in life. The change with regard to societal opinions and attitudes to women and their rights starts in the home. This is particularly the case in South Africa where we have a legal framework to protect these rights. This issue can only positively be addressed when children are brought up in homes where mothers and sisters are treated as equals. Homes are so important in engendering freedom of thought in girls as well. Parents who allow their daughters to dream and achieve, who provide them with the belief that they are no different to their brothers, are part of the solution. Providing a child, whether it is a boy or a girl, with the mind-set that they are free to make choices beyond the confines of the negative roles placed on them by society is the greatest gift a parent can give a child. There are so many woman and girls out there who pliantly accept their lot in life only because they do not have the ability to believe in themselves and the opportunities available to them.

Maponya Inc seeks to provide this environment promoting this very ethos. The firm prides itself on a “family” culture whilst still maintaining its professionalism. This culture is aimed at developing and empowering its staff to reach their full potential. It is an ethos applied to all levels of the workforce, from messengers to management. Maponya Inc is particularly proud of its achievements in empowering women. More than 90% of the staff complement is women. Senior management statistics are just as remarkable with 7 of the 13 directors currently appointed being women. In addition the CEO and co-chairperson are both women.

It is pleasing to know that a supportive environment exists in the firm which allows women to pursue their dreams. Evidence of this is the successful career path followed by one of the firm’s attorneys who began her career as a secretary at Maponya Inc. Another example is that of a cleaner who was successfully trained and appointed as an administrative assistant. In fact the proof is in the pudding you may say. The current CEO, Mrs Antulay, was first employed as an attorney at Maponya Inc and was subsequently appointed as a director in 2010. In 2017 she was appointed CEO of the Firm, following in the footsteps of the previous CEO, Mrs B. Rangata. Mrs Rangata was appointed as co-chairperson of the board after completing her term as CEO in 2017. She continues to fulfil her dreams by being appointed as an Acting Judge in 2018.

The impetus behind the Firm’s belief in promoting women’s rights, making it one of the most representative in the country, is firmly steered by Maponya Inc.’s founder and owner, Mr Phatudi Maponya. Few can argue that he has long supported the rights of women and is an honest and firm believer in uplifting women. This is a leader who by his own admission is what and where he is today due to the efforts of his mother.

Thanks to Mr Maponya we have trained, uplifted and supported generations of women who have passed through our doors. Those who do not stay leave equipped with skills and knowledge which they can put to good use. Those who do stay regard Maponya Inc as home.

Ms Palesa Ledwaba has joined the board of Maponya Inc as a director on 1 September 2018. She will be the 8th female director to serve on the current board. Ms Ledwaba has come up through the ranks of the firm serving her articles at the firm from 2013-. She was admitted as an attorney in September 2014. Her appointment is once more the fulfilment of Maponya Inc.’s promise to support and guide its female employees to reach their full potential. Her profile is provided below:

Palesa Thapelo Vanessa Ledwaba is an Attorney at Maponya Attorneys, she was admitted during September 2014 as an attorney of the High Court, after serving her articles of clerkship at the firm for a period of one year. Ms Ledwaba attained her LLB, in 2012 graduating top of class, at the University of Limpopo.

She joined the Black Lawyers Association (BLA) Student Chapter-UL at the beginning of her academic journey and in 2010 became the first female chairperson of the organisation since its re-launch. During her tenure in the student organisation she was responsible for hosting of a variety of forums, which gave her the platform of fulfilling her passion to equip and arm her fellow black peers with exposure to the legal profession at inception of their career paths.

Post her days as a law student, she continues to be an active member of the BLA as an executive member of the Provincial structure leading and advocating for the exposition of young black female excellence within the profession.

As an attorney she possesses a sound understating of tax, corporate, and third party law. A talented and ambitious lawyer who possesses a vast wealth of knowledge and has a proven record of providing indispensable advice to clients and delivering positive outcomes for them. A quick learner who can easily adapt to new situations and can communicate clearly and effectively with both legal professionals and members of the public.

Her duties within the firm include Interpretation of statute and drafting of legal opinions for client; Consulting with clients and facilitating settlement agreements; Facilitating negotiations between client and third parties; and attending to court for commercial and civil litigation.

She currently services the South African Revenue Service (SARS), Eskom, South African Broadcasting Commission (SABC), Tshwane Municipality and the Road Accident Fund as an external legal advisor and legal representative.

Beyond her day to day duties she has been actively involved in pro bono work as well as campaigns involving the empowerment of disadvantaged communities, through her role as an attorney at Maponya Inc. and position in the BLA, by partnering with institutions such as ProBono.org, Funanani Trust, Dream Team Foundation, Pledge a Pad movement, National Association of persons with Cerebral Palsy and the Soweto Association of persons living with Disabilities.

She is currently busy pursuing her Master in Law at the University of the Witwatersrand with special interest and focus on company law.