

Women in hospitality: Carrying the torch of change

August 2019: Women still face many challenges in the workplace and are still under-represented in leadership roles. The senior management profile of the tourism industry still shows a lack of women representation. The benefits of alternative voices and ideas are needed in the tourism boardrooms

A Statistics SA report indicates that women comprise 60% of all employees in the accommodation sector. In the wider tourism industry, every four in 10 employees are female

“Women have carried the industry on various platforms and their leadership is gradually being recognised. Whilst women leadership is being developed through advancement programmes, women need to be accepted into leadership roles at an accelerated pace. The appointment of a woman in the role of FEDHASA CEO is one of the clear signs that the sector is ready and willing to open itself up to women in leadership across its platforms,” says FEDHASA CEO Lee Zama.

An industry of opportunities

Ruth Kamau, chairperson of the FEDHASA Cape small accommodation sector, believes the success of women in this industry comes down to the love of adding value to others’ experiences.

“This could be in food, conferencing, experiences or accommodation. This means they don’t mind going the extra mile, shrugging off the long hours and the frailties of humans often said to be difficult to please. A smile, a kind word and genuine desire to add value not only pleases the recipient but generates the tenacity required to keep doing it each day,” she explains.

There is a range of opportunities for women in the sector, including in leadership roles, explains Noli Mini, chairperson of the FEDHASA Cape young professionals’ sector.

“Opportunities for women in the hospitality industry are various and plentiful, including in management and senior management, both at property and hotel level. There are also opportunities for entrepreneurs with supporting services to partner and collaborate in the hospitality industry,” she explains.

Working towards a better future

FEDHASA demonstrates a real commitment towards promoting transformation and equality within the industry, believes Rema Wiese, Executive Officer at FEDHASA Cape.

Wiese started at FEDHASA as a sales representative, before working her way through roles in member relations, regional co-ordination and later managing the Cape regional office.

“In the hospitality industry, FEDHASA is committed towards transformation through various initiatives. We have appointed the first women of colour as CEO and we have two women appointed as regional managers. We also have three women serving on the Cape region’s board, two of which hold director positions. To further our transformation goals, FEDHASA offers bursary opportunities for deserving individuals who are young entrants to the industry or students, as well as to up-and-coming leaders in the hospitality industry,” she explains.

Having more role models, along with hospitality establishments encouraging a culture of inclusion, will go a long way to inspiring the next generation of female hospitality leaders, says FEDHASA Inland General Manager, Tshidi Mkhosana.

“Growing up as an African child I wasn’t really aware of the industry and was encouraged to pursue traditional careers such as law or medicine. I have realised that I can be anything and be a success. But there are still young women out there who need to realise this. Seeing women succeeding in the industry, as role models, is especially important in an industry dominated by men.”

Wiese adds: “It is important to inspire, motivate and mentor, up and coming women leaders in industry. It is so much better to learn from someone else’s experience; especially woman-to-woman.”

Legislation has come a long way in encouraging transformation, Mkhosana adds, with the B-BBEE Act and the Tourism Charter providing guidelines for transformation in the industry.

Ends.

About FEDHASA:

FEDHASA is recognised and respected by government and all industry role players since 1949 as the prime representative and voice for the South African Hospitality Industry. The association aims to ensure a sustainable and profitable business environment for the Hospitality Industry as a private business sector voice.

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