

South African Institute of Professional Accountants
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The feminine touch

“Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.” Nelson Mandela.

Nelson Mandela was as active in his work towards changing gender attitudes as he was in changing racial ones. He knew that sustainable transformation in the workplace demands commitment from everyone, and that genders need to work together towards an inclusive future.

The results recently released by the Commission for Employment Equity for 2016 have shown that only 47.1% of those who are professionally qualified in the finance sector are women. We need to find a way of not just encouraging women to choose a career in accountancy, but allowing them to inspire one another to greater heights.

The idea of Shine Theory is built entirely around this concept. The premise is simple – women who are perceived as brilliant, successful and professional should not be envied, but befriended. Their abilities and talents don’t make other women look worse by comparison, they make them look better and give them aspirational heights to achieve. It is commitment to recognising the greatness in us all.

In South Africa, we need to each play our own part in bringing about gender equality. This is from potential accountants brought onto our premises, to women who have successful careers, to those who are still trying to understand who, or what, they want to be when they grow up. It is time for us all to highlight the issues and pay attention, to earmark women in accounting and to be supportive of the challenges they face. This applies to both men and women, to the office and the home, to the school and the school yard.

A future together

Currently the South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA) has a 46% female membership and I do not believe that this is good enough. We are 23 years into democracy and the Employment Equity Act was passed in 1998 with the goal of facilitating workplace transformation and the elimination of unfair discrimination, including gender discrimination. Women take up 51% of the population and therefore they should have the same numbers within the accounting profession.

We need to address the key challenges which face working women. These include the work/life balance and giving women the tools and time they need to keep up their Continuous Professional Development, understanding the challenges around balancing childcare and career, and highlighting how SAIPA can support them throughout their professional lives.

Of course, the other challenge facing women in the workplace is harassment. There is not enough being done by those in authority so we need to make a change ourselves – personally and professionally. The attitudes we bring to bear at home reflect in the workplace so we need to challenge old ideas and attitudes, shift the ways in which boys are raised and behave towards women, and introduce new ways of thinking.

Together we can build that bridge over the gender gap. As members of SAIPA we can reach out to the women in our lives, the women who supported us, and thank them for helping us to become who we are today. And we can give them, and the generations to come, a future to look forward to.

ENDS

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