

Zukiswa Dikana - Parts Quality Engineer - Mercedes Benz South Africa

What do you do?

I am a parts quality engineer - interior trim in the Quality Department at Mercedes Benz South Africa (MBSA). Some of the tasks my job entails are analytical investigations into vehicle body and trim, management of introduction of new parts for new models, resolving problems in plant and warranty concerns, performing audits and project planning. The main part of my work is production support.

What is most challenging about your job?

Today the management of projects is key to every area of business. There are many stages, processes and applications, therefore communication and reporting is important. You can have the best team members, the finest methodology but when there is lack of communication all the pieces can fall down. For me, all the challenges I encounter are learning points. The greater the challenges (in terms of people, systems and processes), the more interesting the job becomes.

Describe a typical day

The day starts very early by reviewing the previous day's challenges and investigating problem components and processes. We monitor production volumes and what affect the output and targets. The main part of the job is to ensure that production runs effectively with zero or minimal problems. This means we must be available at all the times to support.

What advice would you give to women entering a male-dominated career environment?

Women have to work extra hard to prove that they are able. We not only have to prove that we know what we are doing, but that we can do it as well as our male counterparts. And because of this, we are open to more learning and great opportunities because of our enthusiasm and effort. Women are gaining ground in these environments and the percentages are gradually increasing. If anyone, male or female, is passionate about a certain field, they will do whatever it takes to be successful. But women also have more to their lives than a career like managing the home and family i.e. being a mother and a wife. My advice is to mentally drop the male/female stereotype. No customer ever bought a car because it was female or male manufactured. It's advisable to be absolutely great at what you do, totally professional, trustworthy, honest and confident. Keep your "eye on the prize", whatever you want to achieve, and go for it.

What do you do when you are not at work?

I take time to relax and enjoy my family. I love to cook and spend a great deal of time trying out new recipes. I would also like to travel more this year and learn about our beautiful country.

What characteristics and qualifications do you need for your current position?

I did a National Diploma in Polymer Technology and furthered my studies with a BTech in Quality at NMMU. To drive yourself further in the field you can do a project management or business management course. You need to be very confident and focused and believe in yourself all the time because you are the only person who is responsible for your success and achievements. Equip yourself with additional skills such as Power Point presentation, interpersonal skills and time management. Remember that we all start somewhere; even the most successful people started somewhere and worked their way up. Do not be afraid to start new things, change normal ways and suggest new ideas.

What are your goals for the future?

My goal is to study further in my field and to learn another language which will help me deal more effectively with overseas counterparts. Eventually I want a business that will help empower young people and give them the opportunity to start somewhere.

What is it like being a female in a typically male-dominated environment?

It feels very powerful and challenging. One thing that is important is to remain a proud woman and never try to blend in to feel accepted or able. I do not compromise my intellect by making someone else feel manly.

If you weren't in your particular career what would you be?

I would still be in a spontaneous, challenging and interesting environment. Whether it is public, private or business, as long as I am passionate about it and it makes me happy, I would be there.