

# SA Express celebrates success in women empowerment

South African Express (SA Express) is seeing a rapid increase in the number of females holding key positions - from the board of directors to the pilots and the ground crew technicians - leading to CEO Inati Ntshanga announcing the carrier as one "the most transformed companies in South Africa".



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## Beating industry targets for transformation

"One might think that women would not want to train as technicians or pilots, but we are training an increasing number of women in previously male-dominated positions. This reflects the broader opportunities available for women at SA Express.

"It is with pride that within just the last year we have increased the number of females in management positions from 26% to 34%, and pilots from 11% to 14.2%. These statistics are crucial and important as it means that we have beaten the industry targets of 8% for management positions and 3.2% for pilots. Furthermore, it has increased the total number of female employees at SA Express from 38% in 2015 to 38.91% in 2016," says Ntshanga.

This achievement is even more monumental as the aviation industry is a traditionally male-dominated environment and remains largely so as women are often subliminally discouraged from entering. "We are doing what we can to change perceptions that women cannot have careers in the aviation industry," continues Ntshanga.

## Tackling the aviation gender perception

Tackling the aviation gender perception extends beyond the organisation itself and Ntshanga says it is important for SA Express to educate the youth on the matter. "In addition to our internal initiatives, we are also passionate about raising awareness among young schoolgirls that aviation not only offers a viable career but that it is a highly attractive option for them. This remains true at all levels of the industry, whether in flying, technical support or administration."

For the past three years, SA Express has supported Southern African Women in Aviation and Aerospace Industry as a sponsor of its Girl Fly Programme in Africa (GFPA). Each year GFPA hosts an Aviation and Space Camp for high school learners. "Through our sponsorship of GFPA, we hope to attract new talent into the aviation industry, and in particular to our company, so we look forward to these young women flying our commercial aircraft in the coming years," says Ntshanga.

## A diverse and empowered workforce

He explains that a key transformation performance indicator for SA Express is its ability to develop a diverse and empowered workforce, with a special emphasis on women. This is implemented through various human capital initiatives such as its mentorship programme. The programme gives junior staff the opportunity to accelerate their development by being exposed to different areas of the operation as they 'shadow' managers. "This has been specifically encouraged in the technical environment, with the aim of permanently eradicating perception barriers," he continues.

SA Express is also consistently increasing its proportion of spend and enterprise development in favour of black-female-owned suppliers, with almost R50 million having been spent with these suppliers over the past financial year.

"Women in technical jobs can still face a tough time compared to their male counterparts. With five black women on the SA Express board, our aim is that any form of discrimination and gender inequality will soon be a thing of the past," conclude Ntshanga.

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