

Balancing the books on equality

Newly appointed vice chairman of the South African Institute of Professional Accountants (Saipa), Kantha Naicker, is on a mission to ensure more inclusivity by bringing more women into the profession.



Kantha Naicker, vice chairman of Saipa

“I have a very clear vision for my role over the next two years,” says Naicker. “We will be providing the mentorship and support that women need as they enter the profession and rise up through the ranks.”

She believes that a leadership position should be used to benefit the organisation and fellow accountants and showcase how every person plays a role in making a difference.

Redressing the imbalance

“If I look back to 2005, I remember attending a conference where you could count the number of women on one hand,” says Naicker. “It was a sad reflection of the gender divide. This is changing and today we have an almost even split between female and male trainee accountants.”

While the trainees are redefining the gender divide, there remains a challenge in evening out the odds in the full membership category at Saipa. It is an imbalance that Naicker is planning to redress.

“There are challenges that we have to overcome,” she says. “Women often have to wait until they have overcome the hurdles of family and children before they boost their careers, and then they have to face the work/life balance battle. Men and women can work on the same level, but it doesn’t happen because the mechanisms that allow this are not in place.”

Women are often forced to open up their own small practices, so they can juggle the pressures of work and children in a way that suits the realities of life. Naicker is looking to find ways of resolving these challenges in the corporate space by introducing networking and working opportunities that cater to these issues.

“Traditionally networking events take place in the evenings and mothers can’t do evenings,” says Naicker. “Corporates also need to look to encouraging creches at work or flexitime or finding solutions that work for everyone. It is also important to equip women appropriately by giving them training on things like boardroom etiquette and how to run a meeting.”

Things are a’changing

Today, Saipa’s membership sits at around 46% female-led representation and, with Naicker behind the wheel, it looks set to crack the 50% mark by introducing a culture of acceptance and awareness.

“We do work in a fast-paced and competitive world, but we also need to recognise the value of giving back,” she concludes. “We need to be there to provide the mentorship and support and the knowledge that women need to thrive in the professional accounting world.”

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