

First black woman set to be bank CEO

Basani Maluleke looks set to become SA's first black woman bank CEO.



Basani Maluleke, incoming CEO: African Bank. Photo: Kellogg School of Management

The 40-year-old attorney has been earmarked to succeed African Bank CEO Brian Riley, who will step down at the end of March 2018.

"I'm pretty excited [but] I hadn't thought about it that way," said Maluleke on Wednesday.

She was appointed an executive director in July, having joined the African Bank board as far back as 2015

"I've been part of the creation of the strategy, I like the business, I understand it and want to make a meaningful contribution," she said.

African Bank was placed in curatorship in 2014 after it was sunk by an explosion in bad debt and a funding crunch.

The "good bank" " which is still known as African Bank - was recapitalised to the tune of R10bn by a consortium of local lenders, although the process of righting it has taken longer than expected, according to Riley, who will stay on as an executive director.

"When I started I said I'd come in for a set period and I stayed a bit longer than I anticipated. I tend to get out of the way when the time is right," he said.

For former colleagues, Maluleke's rise may have seemed inevitable.

She began her legal career at law firm Edward Nathan Friedland and joined RMB in 2005. She was nominated for a National Dealmaker of the Year award after being a member of the team that advised, structured and implemented a R25bn transaction for Sasol. While at RMB, Maluleke was also part of the team involved in the unbundling of Kumba Iron Ore from Exxaro Resources.

She then joined FNB in 2011 as the head of private clients.

Formal approval for Maluleke's nomination is still required from the South African Reserve Bank, which spearheaded African Bank's rescue in 2014.

And while a listing is on the cards, it's not imminent. "There's a lot to be done still," Maluleke said.

African Bank recently axed 636 employees, 515 of whom were let go under a voluntary severance plan, which cost the bank R60m. At the time, the bank said that it expected to save about R50m a year.

"We would list if we could stand alone and get funding at competitive rates, [but] our rating is lower than investment grade [and] if you take away shareholder support then the costs of funding would be prohibitive," Riley said.

Source: *Business Day*

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