

'Work at a company as if it's your own'

Issued by [JNPR](#)

2 Sep 2022

Meet Abida Parker, the key account manager at Lift who shares her journey, some of her career highlights and her message for women in the travel industry.



Abida Parker, key account manager at Lift Airlines

With nearly 29 years in the travel and aviation industry, Abida started her career journey at South African Airways (SAA) at the age of 19. She believes that once you work for an airline, it will always be in your blood. Her current role has taught her to never give up, but to persevere and to be confident in everything she does.

Below Abida shares her pearls of wisdom:

What drew you to work in Aviation and what do you love most about your work?

I always had an interest in the airline industry. When I finished my matric I went to study Travel and Tourism with the hope of getting a foot in the door. The final stage of studies included a reservation course with SAA. On completion of this course, I secured a permanent position with SAA. I had to relocate to Johannesburg at the tender age of 19.

I immediately fell in love with the aviation industry through the relationships I built with my colleagues as well as being able to be part of the travellers' experiences. I was very curious and had a hunger to learn more about this amazing industry. This motivated me to explore various avenues within the airline industry. That is how I found my niche as a key account manager.

Tell us about yourself – what is your background?

I am a key account manager at Lift. I have been in the travel industry for 29 years having started my journey at South African Airways (SAA). I worked in various departments from reservations, international fares, ticket sales as well as, as sale executive for a travel company. Even though I was very happy at a travel company, there was something amiss. I realised that once you worked for an airline, it will always be in your blood and I was drawn back to the airline industry.

I joined another airline as a relationship specialist. Another great experience, as I was exposed to every department within the airline. These seven years allowed me to grow professionally and personally.

Tell me about your work as a key account manager at Lift. When did you join the Lift team and what does your job entail daily?

In 2020 I joined the most amazing team for Lift Airlines. I started with the airline at the Cape Town International Airport in the operations department.

This is a company where your strengths are recognised, and your voice is heard. After a year I was promoted to key accounts manager. Lift Airline has taught me to never give up and to persevere and be confident that we will always come out tops.

Do you think the aviation industry could benefit from more female leadership?

At the moment women are underrepresented in the aviation industry, especially in leadership roles. This is partly due to the difficulty of balancing the demands of a career in this field with family life. Other contributing factors are lack of mentorship, cost of training and the lack of participation opportunities.

If these obstacles can be addressed, we should be able to have more female employees in leadership roles and I think you will agree that the benefits would be invaluable.

What are your tips for climbing the career ladder in your field, particularly as a woman?

- First, you need to realise that it is very demanding, but you are able to take all the positives as well as the negatives your job throws at you.
- Ensure that you have a career plan, setting yourself targets over a three-to-five-year period helps to assess where you are with attaining your goals.
- Be confident and believe in yourself and your worth and don't be afraid to show it.
- Find a good mentor and try to build good relationships with everyone.
- Balance your professional and personal life.
- And finally, don't be afraid to take some risks by moving outside your comfort zone every now and then.

In your view, where does the value lie in a diverse, inclusive work environment?

I believe that the benefits of an inclusive work environment are invaluable. In particular, it increases the talent pool, which in turn brings new perspectives and innovation on all levels. An inclusive environment also allows for increased engagement and better decision-making. All this results in better performance, not only for the individuals but also for the business at large.

Who are the women who have had a particularly positive influence on your life?

The woman who inspires me the most is my mother. She was able to manage our small family cafe business while taking care of the household responsibilities. My parents have taught me the valuable lesson that I should treat people with respect and dignity and also work in a company as if it's my own.

With this approach I am always able to deliver my best.

What have been some of your career highlights?

A highlight of my career was when I received the Salesperson of the Year award, but the one that stands out the most is the CEO's Recognition Award I received at SA Express.

How do you maintain a work-life balance?

My job is very demanding and requires me to be available at all hours of the day. So it is important for me to prioritise my main tasks and also know when to detach myself from work. I tend to spend quality time with my family cooking and going for walks.

What is the life quote you live by?

A quote that I love by Simon Sanek: "Working hard for something we care about is called stress, working hard for something we love is called passion."

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