

## Employment opportunities for women in security

Women are making their way into traditionally male-dominated industries and the security industry is no exception. The ADT Central Region (Johannesburg, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Welkom and Vaal) has four female heads of department and a growing number of female Level 5 managers, security guards, technicians and even a female reaction officer.



Standing, from left: Madelyn van der Westhuizen (Operational Manager, JHB Commercial Guarding); Portia Mshali (Kusela Guarding); Sharon Barkhuizen (HOD Sales); Tarryn Carr (Marketing Specialist); Charlotte Southwell (HOD Human Resources); Lana O'Neill (Communications Manager) and Adré Wagner (Reaction Officer). Seated from left: Dikeledi Matlakala (ADT Guarding), Portia Hakoane (Technician); Kerrie Thurtell (HOD Control Room) and Goodness Makopo (Technician)

Roy Rawlins, managing director of ADT Residential and Small Business, says women are coming into the own in the security industry and there are many employment opportunities for women in what was once perceived as a male-dominated sector.

"Traditionally women held mainly administrative positions. Now we are seeing women assuming leadership positions as well as on-the-ground roles as security guards and reaction officers. These women are highly capable and are proving they can do the job just as well, if not better, than their male counterparts," he says

### **She can take the stress**

Rawlins points out ADT's control room head of department, Kerrie Thurtell, who joined ADT in 2010. "Being in charge of the Control Room can be highly stressful but Thurtell has taken it in her stride and excelled."

She spent 20 years in the pharmaceutical and veterinary medicines industry before joining ADT. Quite a radical change in career, but Thurtell's all-round experience has put her in ADT's history books as the first-ever female Control Room HOD.

"I am very results driven and am embracing the challenges of this new service industry. One of my key roles has been to communicate my vision for the Control Room and to guide strategic planning. I have involved my team at all levels in strategic planning because I believe it helps to build a shared vision and increases each team member's motivation to see plans succeed," she says.

### **Never discouraged**

On the subject of being 'the rose amongst the thorns', Thurtell says that in her experience gender wars are alive and well in most corporate passages, but it has never discouraged her.

"It will only ever be an issue if you allow it to be. Women have proven themselves very capable in business and I think they have the ability to bring a calming, unemotional slant to the table. In the time I've been at ADT, I recognise that the company's management team reinforces an equal-opportunity playing field."

Thurtell is among four other female HODs who head up Sales, Human Resources and Finance. "These women all manage large teams that directly front our business. Their abilities to multi-task, keep a level head and build relationships all contribute to the successes that we see in these departments," says Rawlins.

## **Many roles out there**

Looking at other traditional roles such as guarding, technical services and armed response, Rawlins believes women are definitely coming into their own. "While we currently have only one female Reaction Officer, we have over 100 female Security Guards and several technicians. These women have successfully completed stringent training processes and are now active in the field. Reaction Officer Adré Wagner has apprehended several criminals during her time at ADT and has often done so single-handedly, which proves that women are definitely excelling in these male-dominated positions," he says.

Wagner was ADT Johannesburg's first female reaction officer when she joined in January 2010. Wagner was first assigned to the Springs area when she joined the ADT team.

ADT's operations manager for the Benoni/Springs area at the time of her employment, Joseph Mahase, says Wagner was hungry for a position at ADT the day she walked into his office to give him her CV. The company wasn't hiring and her proactive determination impressed Mahase. After a final interview with the operations executives at ADT head office, the decision was made to give Wagner a chance.

## **Right up there at the top**

"We were concerned about the seven-week training; about whether Wagner would be able to keep up and complete it because it is very tough, especially physically," says Mahase. "She was an absolute star, however, even showing up the men, one of whom dropped out after only three days. She passed her training with 94%."

Wagner admits the training was tough - very tough. "There certainly were days when I thought I would rather quit. Mahase and my Reaction Force Manager, Siphon Nkosi, supported me through it and I gained so much personally from the experience. This industry isn't for 'sissies' but it is for those who love a challenge, like me," says Wagner. She is looking forward to moving through the ranks in ADT.

"ADT gained valuable assets the day we employed these women and we hope their stories and attitudes will spur other women on to take up the diverse challenges of the security industry. Everyday new opportunities are opening up for women and if they are willing to look past the traditional perceptions there are skills to be learnt and jobs waiting," concludes Rawlins.