

Women in hospitality championing the torch of change

Women still face many challenges in the workplace and are still under-represented in leadership roles. The senior management profile of the tourism industry still shows a lack of women representation. The benefits of alternative voices and ideas are needed in the tourism boardrooms. A Statistics SA report indicates that women comprise 60% of all employees in the accommodation sector. In the wider tourism industry, every four in 10 employees are female.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

"Women have carried the industry on various platforms and their leadership is gradually being recognised. Whilst women leadership is being developed through advancement programmes, women need to be accepted into leadership roles at an accelerated pace. The appointment of a woman in the role of FE CEO is one of the clear signs that the sector is ready and willing to open itself up to women in leadership across its platforms," says Lee Zama, Fedhasa CEO.

An industry of opportunities

Ruth Kamau, chairperson of the Fedhasa Cape small accommodation sector, believes the success of women in this industry comes down to the love of adding value to others' experiences.

"This could be in food, conferencing, experiences or accommodation. This means they don't mind going the extra mile, shrugging off the long hours and the frailties of humans often said to be difficult to please. A smile, a kind word and genuine desire to add value not only pleases the recipient but generates the tenacity required to keep doing it each day," she explains.

There is a range of opportunities for women in the sector, including in leadership roles, explains Noli Mini, chairperson of Fedhasa Cape young professionals' sector.

"Opportunities for women in the hospitality industry are various and plentiful, including in management and senior management, both at property and hotel level. There are also opportunities for entrepreneurs with supporting services to partner and collaborate in the hospitality industry," she explains.

Working towards a better future

Fedhasa demonstrates a real commitment towards promoting transformation and equality within the industry, believes Rerr Wiese, executive officer at FEDHASA Cape.

Wiese started at Fedhasa as a sales representative, before working her way through roles in member relations, regional coordination and later managing the Cape regional office.

"In the hospitality industry, Fedhasa is committed towards transformation through various initiatives. We have appointed the first women of colour as CEO and we have two women appointed as regional managers. We also have three women serving on the Cape region's board, two of which hold director positions."

Having more role models, along with hospitality establishments encouraging a culture of inclusion, will go a long way to inspiring the next generation of female hospitality leaders, says Tshidi Mkhosana, Fedhasa Inland general manager.

"Growing up as an African child I wasn't really aware of the industry and was encouraged to pursue traditional careers such as law or medicine. I have realised that I can be anything and be a success. But there are still young women out there who need to realise this. Seeing women succeeding in the industry, as role models, is especially important in an industry dominated by men."

Wiese adds: "It is important to inspire, motivate and mentor, up and coming women leaders in the industry. It is so much better to learn from someone else's experience; especially woman-to-woman."

Legislation has come a long way in encouraging transformation, Mkhosana adds, with the B-BBEE Act and the Tourism Charter providing guidelines for transformation in the industry.

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