

3 women shattering the industry glass ceiling at The Glass Recycling Company

Thandi Sibanda, Thembeke Mqilingwa and Sharon Libimbi are three women making a positive difference in the often male-dominated sector of recycling. According to The Glass Recycling Company (TGRC), women are often behind the scenes ensuring recycling is prioritised.



Thandi Sibanda, TGRC

Sibanda did not know anything about recycling until she joined TGRC seven years ago. She quickly upskilled herself, becoming an expert in the field to the point where she now handles hundreds of queries about glass recycling every month, and communicates with schools countrywide, encouraging South Africa's future generations to play an active role in recycling and also compete in initiatives like TGRC's Annual Schools Recycling Competition.

"You don't have to be in front of a classroom to teach others and share your knowledge. Sharing what I know helps to make a difference in people's lives, but beyond helping them to begin recycling glass packaging, we make a big difference to the environment," she says. Sibanda and her colleagues, who work as a close-knit team, like to encourage those around them to volunteer to clean the environment, plant trees and reduce on what they throw away, and then separate their waste and ensure it gets recycled.

Supporting entrepreneurial innovation

Mqilingwa, who has been with TGRC since 2018, is another champion of recycling. She works with many glass collectors, entrepreneurs and buy-back centres to direct glass collectors to glass buyers in different areas nationally, and provides invaluable advice to entrepreneurs on the process to develop their glass recycling business.

"Being part of a company that creates value and makes a difference everywhere we engage, gives me a tremendous sense of pride that comes from helping people and making the most of ourselves," explains Mqilingwa.

Mqilingwa believes that for young women to achieve in today's fast-changing world, they need to ensure that they have a wide range of skills rooted in academic competencies such as literacy and science, but also possess the critical soft skills that include teamwork, critical thinking, communication skills, persistence, and creativity.



Thembeke Mqilingwa, TGRC

Upskilling the youth

Sharon Libimbi has also been with TGRC for over five years and is motivated by challenging tasks and the persistence required to overcome these challenges. Her work in upskilling the youth around environmental protection is an inspiration to her. Libimbi runs TGRC's call centre and manages the servicing of glass recycling banks by getting in touch with all site owners to ensure glass banks are serviced timeously. In addition, she maintains the placement, relocation and removal of all glass banks across the country. She believes that, "By providing tomorrow's leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators with the relevant information and practical exercises, you will go a long way toward changing their behaviours and attitudes towards glass recycling, today."



Sharon Libimbi, TGRC

Libimbi's advice to young women starting their careers and developing their passion is to: "Stay focused by enhancing your skills, love and respect yourself and you will go far in life."

"These three amazing ladies have proven to be indispensable to the fulfillment of our role in the promotion of recycling; entrepreneurial development in the recycling sector and capacity building within this essential space," says Shabeer Jhetam, CEO of The Glass Recycling Company.

"We salute them, and the daily role they play in conveying their passion for the environment and glass recycling to so many others, and empowering South Africans to take up this worthy behaviour for the benefit of all of us," Jhetam concludes.

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