

# A wunderkind

**M**s Sinazo Mashale relishes her rise to success as an industrial engineer. A recipient of the merSETA bursary scheme, she serves as a business analyst for Mercedes-Benz South Africa. Here she shares some challenges and her recipe for success in a male-dominated field.

Ms Mashale completed her lower and higher grade education at Clarendon School for Girls. This is where her talents and abilities were noticed.

While at school, career guidance showed that she was suited to engineering, as she was technically inclined and structured in her thinking. And this is where her love and passion for industrial engineering was born ... a passion that would soon culminate in reality.

Fervent about her career choice, Ms Mashale explains that industrial engineering deals with the optimisation of complex processes or systems. It is concerned with the development, improvement, implementation and evaluation of integrated systems of people, money, knowledge, information, equipment, energy and materials. It is also concerned with the principles and methods of engineering design to specify, predict and evaluate the results of such integrated systems.

Ms Mashale was born and bred in Mdantsane, a small town in the hub of the automotive industry – the Eastern Cape. Having a parent who is a motor mechanic played a major role in her choice of career.

After passing matric with flying

colours, she enrolled at the University of Johannesburg to pursue a career in industrial engineering. While at the university, she became aware of the merSETA bursary scheme and applied for a bursary.

“Upon finding out that I was successful with my bursary application, I was ecstatic – it took a lot for an organisation like merSETA to believe in me and I had to return the favour by performing beyond expectation.”

Coming to Johannesburg for the first time can be a daunting experience, but Ms Mashale knew what she wanted and she was not going to let social pressure or peer pressure deter her.

“As a person, you need to remember where you come from; this is a principle I live by.”

Asked about her support system, Ms Mashale couldn't stop praising merSETA for its support.

“It wasn't only about the financial support - it went beyond that. The Bursary Department kept in contact with me and we often talked about my studies and my needs as a student. I am truly grateful for the support I got from merSETA.”

Taking us through the challenges she faced as a student, Ms Mashale said she attended classes from 8am to 5pm on weekdays.

“You still need to do your assignments, which involve extensive research. The hours are long and you have to set yourself a very high standard – and you need to maintain

that standard.

“I had to get my priorities straight: social pressures were there as well and you are branded boring and a stereotype if you keep to your studies. But I knew what I wanted in life, and I was not going to let anything distract me from achieving what I had set out to achieve,” she says.

“When I started my internship, males doubted my ability. I had to work twice as hard as the men. As a woman, you constantly have to prove yourself, prove your worth, and also cope with the pressure to succeed and fight the battle of being noticed. These are some of the factors that made me develop a thick skin.”

She noted that when she graduated, women made up only 20% of graduates.

When she was doing her internship in a group of 12, there were only two women, indicating the severe under-representation of women in the engineering field.

After successfully completing the internship programme, she worked in in-bound logistics, before venturing into business analysis, a position she has held for more than three years.

She offered a pearl of wisdom to women who aspire to industrial engineering.

“Engineering requires discipline, analytical thinking and a structured person. As an industrial engineer, you need to know what is happening around you – the world in which we live evolves and you have to be a part of it if you are to be successful,” she said.