



IMPORTANT COG IN AN INTENSIVE MINING PRODUCTION WHEEL

Heavy Equipment Mechanics maintain the big mobile mechanical, hydraulic and pneumatic equipment often used in the construction and surface mining industries. They test mechanical products and equipment after repair or assembly, to ensure proper performance and compliance with manufacturer specifications. Meet Michael Matundu, a qualified Heavy Equipment Mechanic, employed by the Swakop Uranium Mining Company. This is his story.

INQUISITIVE CHILD

Born in Windhoek, Michael Matundu was raised by his single mother and uncle in a loving family environment. The young inquisitive boy asking all kinds of questions was something the family soon got used to. However, this prying nature also landed him in trouble when he dismantled the toy cars his mother bought him. "I was always taking my toys apart, curious to see what was inside; what made them work the way they do. I was really very inquisitive and I think that's why I love being a mechanic so much," Michael reminisces.

Through his mother's encouragement and support, Michael excelled in Mathematics and Science at the Jan Jonker Primary School in Katutura. "She really nurtured my talents and made me believe that I could be anything I wanted to be. Her reassurance has brought me this far. I could never have done it without her. She is my rock," he shares.

"Performing well in Maths and Science somehow made my teachers and others believe that I was going to follow a career in engineering or medicine one day. However, I was never really sure, because there was always just this thing about wanting to get my hands dirty with more technical work, that kept on creeping up on me," he adds.

EARLY AMBITION

Upon finishing Grade 12 at Dobra's St. Joseph's High School in 2005, Michael enrolled for a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering degree course at the University of Namibia. And although he settled in well in the university environment, it was the nature of his first year studies that made Michael change his mind about his career path. "The first year was predominantly theory. I felt frustrated and started to second-guess whether mechanical engineering was really what I wanted to do. After some thorough introspection, I realised that it wasn't really my thing and I called it quits", he notes.

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Michael Matundu

Heavy Equipment Mechanic

Although somewhat dumbfounded, Michael's family supported his decision to enroll at the Namibia Institute of Mining and Technology (NIMT) at Arandis in Erongo, instead. "Looking back, I now appreciate the day when I signed up for training in Diesel Mechanics as the day I decided to follow my passion. Being surrounded by like-minded young people, who loved working with their hands too, was what I was really yearning for, all along. I felt right at home," he shares.

"The training environment at NIMT was an eye-opener. You are taught and trained by seasoned trainers with years of industry experience. I appreciated their consistent emphasis on the practical side of things, whereas the spirit of positive competition amongst trainee peers also makes you want to work harder and learn more about your occupation", Michael explains.

BURSARY OPPORTUNITY

The exposure to the production-intensive mining environment where heavy equipment and sophisticated tools make up a key component of the production process, opened Michael's eyes to a whole new world.

"It somehow just validated my decision to leave UNAM. NIMT is in close proximity to several mines, with whom the institution maintains strong ties. Through these solid partnerships, NIMT trainees gain access to the mines for in-service training", Michael shares.

It was through the diligence and drive that he portrayed during one such an in-service attachment, that Michael landed a bursary from a mining subcontractor company, Rotary Mining. "This opportunity arose in my final year at NIMT and I was told afterwards that it was my hard work and dedication that got me noticed and made me land the bursary", he notes.

Working at Rotary Mining allowed Michael to gain more real workplace experience and hone his skills. "Those early years were challenging, but fun at the same time. Working alongside seasoned mechanics in a pressure cooker production-intensive environment can be taxing. It's not only about technical skill, but about growing in other areas, as well. Things such as patience, endurance, focus and being deadline-driven, without compromising on quality output and safety, are skills you can only polish on the job. However, I was quick to adapt and soon I was able to take on more complicated tasks, which I completed without supervision", Michael shares.

FURTHER TRAINING

Heavy Equipment Mechanics ensure the proper performance of equipment and machinery through compliance with manufacturer specifications. Michael has been fortunate in having worked at two such manufacturers, Komatsu and Caterpillar.

"My stints at these leading industrial equipment service providers have really aided my résumé. At Rotary Mining, I worked on these brands. Now I was working for the same brands that designed and manufactured these machines", he explains. "The training offered by Komatsu and Caterpillar is very intensive and focused. Often, we would go to South Africa for a month for intensive training on the hydraulic part of things; then another month for only the mechanical part; then only the electrical part - very intensive and focused training", he adds. His time as a field technician at Komatsu also allowed Michael the opportunity to traverse the country. "You are given a vehicle and tools and should be ready to travel to any part of Namibia where Komatsu machines have broken down. Field work is exciting and the best training ground to hone your skills", Michael highlights.

DREAM JOB

With eight years of solid industry experience behind his back, Michael landed what he describes as his 'dream job' at his current employer, Swakop Uranium. As Lead Technician in the mine's mechanical workshop, he works alongside the workshop foreman in overseeing a team of artisans. "Our workshop team is a multi-disciplinary one. We have boilermakers, welders, fitters, diesel mechanics and auto-electricians under one roof. When a machine comes in for repairs or service, the auto-electricians tackle the electrical part, whereas the boilermakers at the same time may work on repairing a metal component. It's busy work", Michael shares.

Excelling in an environment where efficient machinery reparations and overhauls against strict timelines are the order of the day, Michael appreciates the value his work brings to his employer's production targets. "Without their heavy equipment, mines cannot produce. Swakop Uranium



is a leading company with ambitious production targets and our work is therefore of utmost importance to ensure that machinery and equipment are maintained and serviced, and when broken down, can re-enter the mining process without impacting production targets. The work we do is therefore very important”, adds Michael.

“Here, we focus on all aspects of the work, including diagnosing and repairing malfunctions and the disassembly and reassembly of equipment and components. Time is of the essence and so is quality work. I can’t compromise on quality. I’m proud of my reputation and quality work ensures that my reputation remains intact”, he emphasises.

SAFETY FIRST

Michael and his team assign a high premium to the establishment of a safe work environment and the execution of tasks against high quality outputs and Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) specifications and standards. Michael’s wealth of experience and OEM knowledge, having worked on a wide range of Komatsu and Caterpillar machinery and equipment at his previous employer, make him an important cog in the safety and quality wheel. “We have 38 different types of machinery in this workshop, which includes track doublers, tyre doublers, excavators, fill bousers and loaders, which load the trucks”, he highlights.

Appreciating the importance of the mine’s wide array of specialised heavy equipment in allowing it to keep to production targets, Michael pays significant attention to proactive and preventative maintenance.

“At Swakop Uranium, we take pride in our safety record. We have an important role to play in this regard and as such, we strive to be as pro-active as we can. On a daily basis, I visit the mine’s open pit to inspect and assess machines and equipment. And where I detect potential risks, I call in machines for immediate workshop repairs”, Michael stresses. “Safety is also very much about team work. It is our corporate culture. We all have a responsibility to safety”, he adds.

BIG DREAMS

Although he performs well in his work, Michael still has big dreams for himself. One of his goals is keeping up with the rapidly changing technology in the mechanical industry. “Professionally, I would like to again enough expertise to one day run and own a fully functional workshop, in which I can employ other artisans. This is the dream”, he notes. “Diesel mechanics play an important role in keeping the physical and the economic engines of the world running. Most major industries, from mining to agriculture, from transport to manufacturing, rely on machinery that needs to run efficiently;

without somebody to fix and maintain equipment, these industries would literally grind to a standstill”, Michael shares.

Michael’s work also involves grooming apprentices and less-experienced artisans. Appreciating his own journey and how others empowered him to become the productive, skilled and experienced technician he is today, Michael does so with passion and diligence. “It’s all about attitude. I appreciate the role other seasoned artisans have played in my own growth. However, it is also about my own development and growth. Technological advancement is the order of the day and I need to stay abreast of changes. In as much as I am reasonably experienced, I still have a lot to learn from my supervisors who have been in this trade for much longer.”, he stresses.

AVID FISHERMAN

During his much needed off time, Michael spends most of his days fishing or relaxing with friends. On days when the weather permits it, Michael and his good friend, Sam Nyau cast their fishing rods looking for a strong bite. “Fishing is a gamble, some days you get land plenty and some days you go home empty-handed. But for us it’s more about the soothing effect the waves have on you after a long week. It’s about unwinding, being one with nature. And if you’re lucky enough, you get dinner sorted as well, “he jokes. Apart from working and angling, Michael finds encouragement in rebuilding and restoring old cars. “I recently restored an old and run-down Nissan 1400 pickup as a fun project. It was a complete overhaul of the engine and transmission, and suspension work done with performance equipment“, he shares.

Michael Matundu: A humble, but focused artisan whose drive to succeed makes him excel in a demanding work environment. His story teaches us not to waste time comparing ourselves to others. That the best yardstick for our progress as individuals is not other people, but ourselves. That in mastering our work, we never reach the end. He is living his passion.

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