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Tangeni Nghiwewelekwa

Plumber

Plumbers install and repair water supply lines, waste disposal systems, and related appliances and fixtures to keep homes and businesses flowing smoothly. Plumbing is a challenging, but rewarding career, best suited to people who are motivated, hardworking and patient.

Meet 42-year old Tangeni Nghiwewelekwa. A qualified plumber and owner of the thriving Ongwediva-based company, Water Engineering Africa. This is his story.

Early Years

Tangeni Nghiwewelekwa was born at Engela in Ohangwena. In 1979, his father, Heita Nghiwewelekwa, a school principal by then, went into exile to join the liberation struggle. Tangeni's mother, Ndapewa Nghiwewelekwa, a trained nurse, decided in 1987 to take her children

and join her husband in exile. In 1988, Tangeni was selected to go and study in Germany where he was trained as a Pipe Construction Technician at Chemie AG in Halle, Germany. In 1991, he came back to Namibia and took up employment at the TCL Mine at Tsumeb.

However, after a year, he decided to enroll at the Valombola Vocational Training Centre at Ongwediva, where he obtained a Vocational Trade Diploma in Plumbing and Pipefitting in 1998. "As a child I never considered becoming a plumber, but after I participated in a short plumbing training course whilst at TCL, I saw an opportunity for reliable plumbing services in the market. I discussed it with my father who advised me to take up vocational training to sharpen my skills. That's how I ended up at Valombola VTC", Tangeni shares.



Quality Training

Tangeni immediately took to his training and enjoyed job attachment stints at a number of employers, including Oshikango Garage, Oshakati Town Council and the Ministry of Works and Transport. "The theoretical and practical training I received at Valombola VTC was much more detailed than what I was exposed to in Germany. I'm a firm believer in learning whilst doing. So it shouldn't come as a surprise when I tell you that I always looked forward to and thoroughly enjoyed all the job attachments at a wide array of companies, throughout my training years. I was like a sponge – absorbing everything about my chosen occupation", Tangeni recalls.

It was in his final year and during a job attachment at the Namibia-Malaysia Construction Company, where Tangeni's supervisor

approached him with an offer he simply couldn't refuse, even though he was still just a trainee. The company was constructing houses at Oluno and Ondangwa, and Tangeni was asked to take on the role of a sub-contractor to install the plumbing and drainage systems for five houses. "Although I hadn't done it before and had no tools and equipment, let alone a bank account for that matter, I couldn't say no. I organised a few fellow trainees to join me and we were awarded an additional thirty houses to complete, because our work met all technical requirements", he recalls.

Humble Beginnings

After graduating, Tangeni started working as a Handyman at the Eenhana Town Council. Again, it was his commitment and diligence that paid off and six months later, he was promoted to the position of an Artisan. "My parents taught me to work hard and to demonstrate initiative. I soon joined the Oshakati

Town Council as an Artisan and after three years, I was once again promoted to the position of Foreman – Wet Services, where my responsibility was to ensure that the water and sewer reticulation system in the town was well maintained in order to avoid service disruptions", he explains.

"As a Foreman, I introduced a wide range of preventative measures and mechanisms that culminated into a Wet Services Master Plan for the Oshakati Town Council, which became a blueprint for the Town Council in making informed decisions in the planning of new extensions", Tangeni adds.

Later, ELWIWA, a Windhoek-based company specialising in the distribution and installation of pump systems opened shop in northern Namibia, and was looking for a dynamic and experienced Project Manager to market its services to local and regional authorities. Tangeni came highly recommended and landed the job. "ELWIWA

appreciated my experience as I've worked alongside mechanical, civil and structural engineering firms and enjoyed valuable exposure to major local and regional authority development projects", he explains.

Entrepreneurial Spirit

Tangeni played a pivotal role in the establishment of ELWIWA's northern branch, overseeing the construction of various multi-million dollar water reticulation projects. Although he was now an established Project Manager, he couldn't forget his first sub-contracting experience.

Recognising the need for localised plumbing and pipefitting service provision to the northern municipalities, he took a leap of faith and established his own company, Water Engineering Africa, with the support of his wife and parents. "My dad signed for my first performance guarantee. Those

initial years were challenging and we often had to rely on my wife, who kept her full-time job, to keep us afloat”, Tangeni recalls. “We converted our garage into office space and landed our first big tender to service fifty erven for the Helao Nafidi Town Council. Another project followed at Ondangwa and soon we were on a path of steady growth”, he adds.

Family Business

Today, Water Engineering Africa offers expert service to commercial and domestic customers. It has over the years participated in a number of multi-million dollar projects. More interestingly, 81 out of its 180 employees are women, mainly from the previously disadvantaged group.

Tangeni’s wife of 13 years, Elizabeth, is Water Engineering Africa’s Finance and Administration Executive. As the Managing Director, Tangeni carries a lot of responsibility to ensure that the business keeps afloat. “I need to ensure that the business is going in the right direction, negotiating with clients for new projects and with suppliers on better prices. I identify new markets and ensure our offer is best in terms of both price and quality” he notes.

As a budding entrepreneur, Tangeni not only has big plans for Water Engineering Africa; he has also ventured into the construction and ground stabilisation sectors.

“We have two other companies, focusing on the renewable energy and low-cost housing sectors, respectively. We’ve also acquired an international ground stabilisation technology franchise which was developed in Finland”, he says.

Career Ambassador

Tangeni is a firm believer in the potential of technical and vocational training and does his utmost in encouraging young people, especially the trainee interns he frequently takes in on attachment, to follow their dreams. “I encourage young people to take up Plumbing and other trades to employ themselves and create jobs for others. Technical skills put you in a position where you don’t have to wait on handouts from government. You can employ yourself. The opportunities are out there. But, you must be willing to start at the bottom. Enroll and qualify at a vocational training institution, be willing to learn and work hard”, he concludes.

Managing a multi-million dollar business of this magnitude is taxing and demanding. When not engaged in exploring new projects and business ventures, Tangeni enjoys spending time with his family - wife Elizabeth and children, Ndalila, Heita and Tutunga. He is also a keen gardener.

Tangeni Nghiwewelekwa - Plumber, Entrepreneur, Employer and Father. His story teaches us that opportunity favours the bold. That opportunities are there to be seized and that when it comes knocking, we should embrace it, and not allow our fears to hold us back. He is a Plumber. He is living his

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