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Elizabeth Kamonde

Auto Electrician

A Trailblazer for Women in Auto-Electrics

The electronic technology we put into our vehicles is getting more complex by the day. Most modern cars have a wide range of electronic equipment controlling all aspects of performance. Auto Electricians install, maintain and repair the electrical wiring, parts and electrical and electronic systems in vehicles.

Meet 38-year old Elizabeth Kamonde, a skilled Auto-Electrician, employed by diamond mining giant, Namdeb as a workshop foreman at its Southern Coastal Mines Plant at Oranjemund. This is her story.

Early Disappointment

Elizabeth Kamonde grew up at the

Onembaba village near Okalongo in the Omusati region. Her father passed away when she was very young, and it was her mother, as the sole breadwinner, who had to support the family and ensure that the children attend school.

As a product of the Oshikoto Senior Secondary School at Tsumeb, Elizabeth's Grade 12 results were not good enough to enroll for training as a nurse, her childhood dream. "I always wanted to be a nurse. Even now, if people say they don't feel well, it just comes naturally to me to help them and advise them what to do or what medicine to take", she notes.

With her dreams shattered, Elizabeth enrolled at the Namibia College of Open Learning to improve her grades, and took



on a job as a cashier at a local supermarket.

Parental Guidance

Elizabeth vividly recalls how her mother one day walked into the supermarket and confronted her about how long she still planned to work there.

“She was adamant that I enroll at the Rundu Vocational Training Centre and instructed me to complete the applications forms. Not even my excuses that I didn’t know anyone at Rundu and that I didn’t even had a place to stay, could deter my mother. She was resolute that I go there and enroll for a course”, Elizabeth remembers.

Arriving at Rundu VTC, Elizabeth joined other prospective trainees on a guided tour of the centre, during which trainers shared information about the various occupational training areas, on offer. “Auto-Mechanics was actually my first

choice, but the centre’s officials felt that my bodyframe was too small and that I did not have the physical strength and dexterity required for this trade. Auto-Electrician was my second choice and the centre accepted my application”, she says.

Exciting Training

Elizabeth excelled in her training. Being one of a handful of girls in her class only motivated her to work harder and to invest all her time and energy in her training and apprenticeship. “I realised early on that as a woman, I had to work extra hard. I had no choice: My male peers obviously had an advantage, because they’ve been exposed to some aspects of the trade. I had nothing, no background, whatsoever”, she states.

Her hard work and commitment paid off and upon graduation, Elizabeth landed employment as an Auto-Electrician at Namdeb, where she also made a good impression

during an apprenticeship stint in 2004. “I believe I impressed them, because I demonstrated to my supervisors that despite being a woman, I was able to meet expectations. That despite being a woman, I was able to compete with my male peers. That I wanted the opportunity”, she explains

Career Progression

Today, Namdeb employs Elizabeth as a Workshop Supervisor, at its Uubvley Heavy Commercial Vehicle Engineering Workshop, where she leads an 18-member all-male team, comprising of artisans and artisan assistants.

Elizabeth remains adamant that she applied because she knew she could do the job. “Although I was aware of Namdeb’s programme to support and encourage its female employees to grow and develop in otherwise male-dominated career paths, I never applied to

be appointed on the basis of my gender. Rather, I applied, because I believed that I was a good candidate, and because I’ve built up a track record of solid performance and competence”, she stresses.

Asked whether she had the support of her male subordinates after her appointment, Elizabeth highlights that although she could sense that a few had their reservations, she has been able to win them over. “It was challenging at first, but I believe that as fellow artisans, they’ve now accepted me as a competent, knowledgeable and skilled team leader. I’ve been able to earn their respect and trust”, she adds.

Women’s Ambassador

Under Elizabeth’s leadership, the workshop team has successfully put in place a planning system that clearly indicates performance and progress being made towards targets. The team also has a proud

safety record and their storeroom was recently recognised the neatest storeroom, during an environmental audit.

Elizabeth appreciates that her journey of success in what is still very much a male-dominated trade, can serve to inspire Namibian girl-children to enter technical and vocational career paths. “My message to technically-inclined girl children is simple – Don’t fear this work. Yes, you will have to work harder to succeed, but challenge yourself and take it upon yourself to show others that irrespective of your gender, as long as you are given the equal opportunity, you can succeed and deliver to expectations”, she notes.

“Success comes with hard work. I am succeeding, because I perform. And while I often still encounter instances of men doubting my ability, I’m not provoked by their doubt, because I know that I can deliver to expectations. And I always do”, she adds.

Lifelong Learner

Electronic technology in vehicles is getting more complex by the day. Most modern vehicles have a wide range of electronic equipment controlling all aspects of performance.

Although a supervisor, Elizabeth appreciates that she has to stay

abreast of the latest technologies. And often, you will find her under a bonnet checking and testing wiring and components. “It’s all about attitude. We sometimes encounter new technologies, whilst not having any training in such technologies. But, as artisans, we make sure that we apply the basics and get such new technologies under the belt, even without the manuals. Others rely on us to fix the problems, because if we don’t, production might suffer”, she says.

Away from the mine, Elizabeth tries to spend as much time possible with her husband, who is based at Luderitz and her two daughters who stay with her at Oranjemund.

Elizabeth Kambonde - Humble, but resolute. Small in stature,

but big in heart. Her story teaches us that leadership is not about a title or a designation, it’s about impact, influence and inspiration. Impact involves getting results, influence is about spreading the passion you have for your work, and you have to inspire others to strive for the best they can be. As a leader, she knows the way, she goes the way and she shows the way.

She is living her passion as an Auto-Electrician in a world dominated by men. And she believes that other young women can do the same.

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