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Erica Gertze

Mining Truck Operator

Trailblazer for Women in the Mining Sector

Mining haul trucks are off-highway, rigid dump trucks, specifically engineered for use in high-production mining and heavy-duty construction environments. Made to carry extra heavy loads of ore, these trucks are huge. Capacities range from 36 to 496 tons and some trucks have up to three axles. Meet 38-year old Erica Gertze, employed by QKR Navachab Gold Mine, outside Karibib, as one of its open pit haul mining truck operators. This is her story.

Young Tomboy

Erica Gertze was born at Usakos in the Erongo region. Growing up on Farm Tubusis on the outskirts of the town.

As a young girl, Erica was a typical tomboy, who always engaged in games and activities physical in nature. In an attempt to rid her of her 'boyish' ways, Erica's parents enrolled her at a girl's hostel in 1992, while still at school. "I had a strict Christian upbringing. In fact, the only place I was allowed to visit was my grandparents' home", she recalls.

Erica obtained her Grade 12 certificate from the Swakopmund Secondary School in 1996. In the same year, her father landed a new job at Karibib, and the family relocated to the neighbouring town.

Life After School

As a young girl, Erica harboured dreams of qualifying as a pilot. However, despite her good grades, circumstances made enrolling for



further tertiary studies impossible. Erica obtained her driver's license and started job hunting, landing her first job at the Karibib Tourism Centre in 2001.

"I started out as a Bistro Assistant at a monthly salary of only three-hundred dollars and after only three months, I was promoted to Saleslady. I liked the job, because it gave me an opportunity to engage and interact with people from all walks of life", she shares.

However, the low wages often made Erica feel like she was in a dead-end street. But, she remained positive and her breakthrough came in 2008, when she applied for a Truck Operator vacancy at the Navachab gold mine, then under the management of Ashanti Gold. "The vacancy advert required that one should have Grade 12 and a driver's license. I applied and landed the opportunity"

Male-Dominated World

Hard work, determination and effort have since seen Erica rising through the ranks at QKR Navachab Gold, which has since taken over the mine from Ashanti. "At one point, we were four female Truck Operators at the mine. It's daunting work that requires a lot of sacrifice, especially if you're a woman. By 2010, I was the only female Truck Operator left at the mine", Erica notes.

In 2011, Erica approached her supervisor with a request for advanced loading tool operator training. Her request was granted and she was placed under the tutelage of a seasoned loading tool operator. "My mentor, Paulus Shikongo really took me under his wing. I was assessed and found competent, only three months into the training course, which opened the doors to bigger loading operator machines", she shares.

"Regardless of whether you are a male or female operator, it's challenging work. But, I draw inspiration from my own track record of competence, as I continue to grow and master bigger equipment. My male counterparts do not intimidate me at all. I'm a trailblazer - It is not only men who can do this job", Erica adds.

Team Member

Erica enjoys the full support of supervisors and team members, alike. Her male counterparts openly share their appreciation and admiration of Erica as a dedicated and focused individual who sets an example for other young men and women to follow.

Today, Erica is the only female operator at the mine qualified to operate the 992 front loader machine. Her drive to succeed continues to propel her to greater heights and she landed another

promotion, very recently. "Just a few weeks ago, an internal vacancy for the position of Supervisor for Truck Operators arose. I applied, was interviewed and came out as the successful candidate", she says. "In my new capacity, I am responsible for supervising the work of a team of twelve Truck Operators, which include male operators", Erica adds.

Taxing Work

Operating open pit haul trucks in a demanding mining production environment is physically taxing and requires dexterity, intense concentration and focus. Erica ticks all the boxes and leads by example. "Today, I am very proud to say that I am the first female and only Caterpillar 992 Wheel Loader Operator at Navachab. I feel strong and powerful behind the controls. I just love the feeling", she explains.

Erica also assigns a high premium

to occupational health and safety and expects her team members to do the same. "I never compromise on safety and I expect the same from my team. Our shifts are demanding; we don't break for lunch, because we have our lunch while working. The machines we operate are big and we have to be well rested and focused to be productive. We also have to drink a lot of water and stay hydrated so that we keep our kidneys healthy", she notes.

Future Plans

Away from the demands of the open pit, Erica - as a single mother of two - enjoys spending time with friends and family. Those close to her know her as a reliable, talented and caring individual, who is also very good at hairdressing.

However, for Erica, the sky is the limit and she has plans to grow further in this exciting career path. "I love working in this challenging mining sector. And I want to continue to grow and acquire more competencies to demonstrate to other young women out there that they too can make it in this exciting field", she concludes.

Erica Gertze. Talented, driven and focused. Humble, loyal and compassionate. Her story teaches us that positive thinking combined with positive action can result in

success; that the road to success is never easy to navigate, but with hard work, drive and passion, it's possible to achieve our dreams. Her persistence has paid off and has made her a trailblazer for young women wishing to enter the male-dominated mining world.

She is a Mining Truck Operator. She is living her passion!

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