

CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN SHERIFFS: CELEBRATING AUGUST 9, 2016

Programme Director

All protocol observed

Thank you for inviting me on this very significant day of the important month in the history of women in South Africa. This day comes just five days after another important day in South African History, the local elections day. Would it not have been more so if we had more women representatives voted for instead of seeing the gruesome sights of those that we killed in KZN, the women who had availed themselves in a brilliantly brave manner for the good of this country?

Could this by any stroke of luck be speaking to a question: "Are women really cut out to make it to the top?" This question is one of the only two headlines of page 14 of the Times of 4 August 2016. It is an article written by Victoria Lambert, a woman who, as you go on reading this article, seems to be wondering whether there is a deliberate commitment by all to let the environment be as friendly, suitable and safe for women as it is for men in any industry.

This is the context within which South African women Sheriffs are also expected to perform as the officers of the court in pursuit of the rule of law being respected. Their challenges are reflective of the challenges that are faced by women in general in the South African landscape. This makes me wonder whether or not the quotation closing Lambert's article is correct: "We all operate in a structure where the default setting is male" trajectory"

As a female Sheriff you boast that you are a Sheriff. The corresponding response is "Never had of a female Sheriff before". This leaves you with a question whether such a response is a vote of confidence or a vote of no confidence in you as a woman. Certainly depending on the manner it is said. Remember this is said within a context that Sheriffs' industry must be professionalised as a result of its origins and the past practises where muscle was the criterion to be seen to be competent to do this job, so to be able to kick open doors of the defendants' properties. Intellect didn't seem to matter as they were expected to function like set robots. Hence a lot of transformation initiatives that have to be thought of for this industry to be a profession within the culture of Constitutional Democracy the main pillar of which is Human Rights hence the Bill of Rights as the entire chapter in our Constitution that is the supreme law of the land. Responses of this nature seem to neglect this because they are overcome by tradition. This is the first of the challenges faced by women Sheriffs. The solution to this is: don't give up. Believe in yourself and stick to your case.

This leads to another challenge that of securing funding as a start up entrepreneur if you are a women. The question is, is there any return for us in investing in her as we are not sure she will make it as a sheriff? Is it not too much of a risk. So as a woman you have to prove that even though I am a woman, I will be able to pay your loan back. The SABFS I think should also show some interest in this and find some creative ways to point these women to some funding directions. What is nice about the board is that they will be using their statutory muscle to advance women and gender issues to be exact.

They could even approach the Minister for Women in the Presidency in this regard.

The second challenge is that almost all women are appointed in jurisdictional areas where they cannot absolutely sustain in particular within the context of rights to economic activities. We do appreciate the drive and effort to ensure representivity and breaking the monopoly, since the industry used to be white male dominated. However the substantive unintended consequences thereof are dire. They seem to be defeating to the very purpose of redistribution of wealth equally to all without any form of discrimination. The SABFS needs to seriously engage with Mr JB Skosana the DDG Court Services in this regard for greater improvement. The Deputy Minister of Justice as the person with delegated authority here can also be approached directly. He is a person with a listening hear and is very sensitive to transformation issues.

The third challenge is that you get into the industry properly appointed. You employ your staff and stand a risk of having your integrity questioned by being told that "She knows nothing about the profession, she has just arrived and I have been a Deputy Sheriff for 30 years". This in the main comes from male Deputy Sheriffs.

What is interesting about this is that it was about 10 years prior to the Constitutional Democracy. That then tells you that it no longer is 30 but 30 minus 10 therefore 10 years, as the other 10 was used to debrief the culture of kicking doors. In the process it placed you as the woman, in a position of having accumulated 20 years of experience, as right from the dawn of democracy you went all out championing the culture of human rights. The solution to this insubordination is strict

compliance with labour legislative framework. Make sure that you have employment contracts with staff that cover broadly your back without violating any piece of legislation. Be professional all the way as to keep the employer employee relations unblurred. Set the rules in consultation with the staff for purposes of buy-in and covering your back as they are so quick to run to CCMA irrespective of whether they have a case or not.

The other challenge is service providers who seem to want to take advantage of unsuspecting women Sheriff and in the meantime ripping them off. Once you become awake to this the service provider has the audacity to refuse to release your information that has been in the service provider's possession. Some women Sheriffs as a result find themselves in a situation where they are unable to keep up with their compliance obligations in terms of audits and submission of financial statements as required by the law. This needs to be challenged not only by these women but also by the SABFS which has the responsibility of professionalizing the industry and to which these women have to account in terms of the law.

This type of an attitude is also portrayed by some defendants and respondents who would hale all sorts of insults at a women Sheriff with the sole purpose of wanting them to doubting themselves to disarm them from doing their work hoping that the women would personalize the situation and stop the enforcement process. My advice women is: You don't know them, you have nothing personal against them. Continue with you work as if they are not there and that they have said nothing.

In summary treat them with the contempt they deserve at that particular moment, and be professional unless they threaten you personal security. In that case call the police service for assistance.

Thank you

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