

Women in business

### **Monama takes Aon's HR service to new heights**

Disebo Monama, Executive Director: Human Resources Aon South Africa, has been with the company for just under two years and has already made marked improvements in the way Human Resources is managed.

Monama brought a BA and post graduate degree in Industrial Relations and several years of graduate training at Unilever to the Aon skills stable. One of her greatest mentors was a Unilever employee, Bongani Mageba, who she replaced as he moved up the corporate ladder. "If ever I am making a big career decision and need advice, I know I can call on Bongani," she says. His optimistic outlook and positive energy has been an inspiration to Monama. "He always believes that anything is possible and can be done. I often draw on his example when people come to me when times are tough looking for encouragement and motivation."

And it seems Monama often has people knocking at her door as she believes keeping your ear to the ground and networking is an essential key to success. Her responsibilities at Aon largely revolve around talent management in the organisation, focusing on the risks involved with employee retention; ensuring processes are in place and staying on top of employee trends in the market place. To stay ahead of the game and succeed, she learnt early on that a business partnering model of doing HR was the answer.

"When I first started in my career I was quite controlling and thought that if you wanted something done right, you had best do it yourself," she says. Through on-the-job learning experiences, Monama has developed a new style of management based on partnering with and empowering her team and 'customers' ie Aon employees. "Through the business partnering model of management the HR department colleagues are assigned to particular business areas. They are responsible for understanding the ins and outs of the business, the customer's needs and forthcoming events that may affect that business area and its employees. The HR colleagues feel empowered and confident and it shows in their customer excellence, as we like to refer to it," she says. Monama adds that there is constant research done amongst departments to see if they are happy with the HR customer service and so far, people are, she says.

Monama believes that people need to think differently and take HR to a new level. She says she attends industry conferences and business meetings in the different divisions as any issues regarding the company, its growth and

challenges in any departments affects employees and HR should always be a step ahead, anticipating these affects and crafting solutions accordingly.

A major learning curve for Monama has been entering the risk and insurance sector. "Growing up I was taught very little about insurance. All I knew was a man with a briefcase would arrive when someone died to pay out a policy," she says with a laugh. Understanding the scope of risk, the implications therefore and insurance solutions has been a challenge that Monama says she has enjoyed. "I have had to ask many questions and really immerse myself in the business in order to understand how things work. In terms of HR, I need to understand the impact that all things have on the business and when we lose a client, for example, I need to ensure a post mortem is done so that we can make changes going forward and learn from mistakes," she says.

Acknowledging that the risk and insurance industry is male-dominated, Monama mentions there is female talent coming through the ranks but that it will take some time for true change to happen. She says that in Aon's current Graduate Programme, 80% of the graduates are females and most, if not all, will be employed at Aon following the commencement of the programme.

For those women wanting to enter the HR arena, she offers the following words of advice, "The secret to success is networking, understanding the industry you are in and finding ways to keep young people motivated. Young people tend to move from job to job so to retain fresh, young people with skills in your organisation, you need to make sure they are aware of opportunities for growth and don't be afraid to address work-related issues with them. Make sure they stay motivated and pro-actively assist them in managing their careers," she concludes.

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