

How Thuthuka changed my life: Lerato Mathibela

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'A career that is more than just a job'

Some people find the right employer early and stay on to make a success of their career there. Lerato Manti Thato Mathibela (29) has been employed with Nedbank since 2015 and has progressed from being a chartered accounting trainee to today holding a leading role in training at the bank. "Nedbank has been my first and only employer and I also completed my articles while with Nedbank," explains the young chartered accountant [CA(SA)].



"I grew up in Mafikeng, in the North West Province. Although Mafikeng is the capital of the province, it is far from what a typical 'capital city' looks like. It feels very much like a small town with people engaged in a simple way of life. I felt that it was not the ideal place in the long run for young lady with goals to make an impact on South Africa's business landscape."

Lerato's dreams were spurred on by her mother, who is passionate about education. She taught Lerato that "once you have an education, it can never be taken away from you. All academic achievements and qualifications are yours forever and will always bear fruit." She also believed that Lerato and her two sisters should drive their own career aspirations and work towards achieving their own career goals.

"As a result, I was a star performer at school with a drive to excel. I matriculated cum laude and as the top performer of Mafikeng High School." Lerato adds that although she did well in all her subjects, she had a passion for accounting at a young age, and that this passion was driven by her interest in economics, finance and financial markets.

"I was also influenced by the economists featured on *Morning Live* – a TV show that I watched before school every morning. I was intrigued by how they understood the world economy, the global flow of money, and how this is influenced by how interconnected countries are. I grew to believe, as I do now, that financial literacy has the ability to unlock the potential of South Africa and the continent."

So it makes sense that Lerato's dream was to obtain the highest qualification in finance and accounting "and to use my qualification to have a positive impact as part of the South African economy - and particularly on the youth. I dreamt even then of a career that had meaning and purpose, and was more than just a job. I had academic talents, and was eager and driven. I had a support structure led by a mother who believed in my potential. My main and only obstacle lay in finding the financial resources to fund my university studies."

Enters Thuthuka – "one of your biggest motivators"

"I have always been proactive. I found out about the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants' (SAICA's) Thuthuka Bursary through my own research efforts as I was looking for possible funding opportunities. I saw that unlike many other bursaries on offer, Thuthuka was more than just a source of financial support on your university journey. They partnered with their beneficiaries by assisting them with academic study support, mentorship, and end-to-end holistic care during your period at university tenure. In short, they offered a home away from home for their beneficiaries and you became part of a family," Lerato explains.

She remarks further on the holistic support of Thuthuka that makes the programme different from those of others: "They care about where and how the students lived, offer mentorship and psychological support, academic interventions and

study support." She then adds that importantly, "they are one of your biggest motivators."

While studying at the University of Pretoria (UP), the Thuthuka programme itself held no challenges for her. "The trials I faced were typical of any BCom Accounting university student. The CA qualification is very challenging, and that is what makes it so highly sought after," she comments. Particularly enjoyable was the "community we built as fellow students, motivating and supporting one another to achieve our goals. We had relatable backgrounds and similar goals that kept us focused and ultimately successful."

"Thuthuka has university mentors who oversee the Thuthuka programme. While I was studying I was privileged to have access to some great female CAs(SA) working at the university who influenced me to remain driven to become a chartered accountant too. They were smart with heart! They had a heart for developing and mentoring the youth. They believed in young talent and the potential of educated young South Africans."

Indeed, "their role in my journey has now influenced me to be a training officer and the graduate programme manager for the Nedbank CA Training Programme – a very similar role to that of a Thuthuka programme manager," Lerato enthuses.

From trainee to influencer

She completed her CA(SA) articles while working at Nedbank. "After completing my articles, I was an investment banker within Nedbank Corporate and Investment Banking (CIB) in Debt Finance. During my article period, and within CIB, I always had a keen interest in recruitment and career development and became passionate about the Nedbank CA Training Programme. In 2019, I was appointed as Head: Specialist Training Programme as well as the Quants Graduate Programme managing a team of 60 trainees. In this role, I help mentor and develop CA trainees into chartered accountants, signing them off through my role as a SAICA training officer."

Lerato says her immediate plans are to continue her involvement with young talent within Nedbank and possibly move to a more strategic role within the young talent segment.

She is enthusiastic about the role of Thuthuka in helping her and other young talent realise their dreams. "The magnitude of this ripple effect of Thuthuka's impact in my life and the lives of others has become vast and indeed immeasurable."

She adds: "My role as Graduate Programme Head helps me equip the youth with work readiness skills through vacation work programmes as well as mentoring and guidance on their way to becoming CA(SA)s. I also influence Nedbank decisions regarding funding bursary programmes such as the Thuthuka Bursary. Thus, it truly feels like a full circle: from being a Thuthuka beneficiary to having influence as a Thuthuka Corporate Donor."

Lerato's advice to young people is to develop a career vision or dream at an early age. "The only way to have a clear vision is to understand your own unique talents and strengths, and proactively research and find out what careers align with your strengths. Once you have found a career goal that resonates with you, dedicate and sacrifice all your efforts to achieving this. Be relentlessly determined!"

She also suggests that young people looking to discover where they are heading should find their own answer to the 'why' question. "Why do you want to become a CA? What does the possibility of this designation mean for you and to those people who matter to you? There is a quote that says those who know 'why' to live, can bear almost any 'how' - and if you know why you want to become a CA(SA), you can bear the daunting yet rewarding journey towards becoming one," Lerato concludes.

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