

# Diversity is about appreciating the female voice and hearing it

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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According to UNESCO Statistics, women make up [only 23% of STEM talent globally](#), and this inequality is mirrored in South Africa's science, technology and engineering industries. To unpack this topic further we chatted to Nicol Meyer, country head at specialty chemicals company Clariant South Africa, to explore why this imbalance persists, how we can drive greater gender parity in STEM-based industries, and any advice she has for women currently pursuing a career in STEM.



Nicol Meyer, country head at Clariant South Africa

■ ***Tell us a bit about yourself, your background, and your role at Clariant SA.***

**Nicol Meyer:** I hold a Master's Degree in Human Resources Management from the University of Pretoria. Upon completing my degree, I started working at Transatlantic Business Solutions as an HR manager and later worked at Standard Bank (regional HR manager), and ADT (national HR manager), before joining Clariant in 2013.

Currently, I am a mom of two children, country head at Clariant South Africa. I oversee the running of activities and projects per business unit within the local office. I also sit on the board of the National Bargaining Council for the Chemical Industry and sign off Clariant deals locally.

■ ***To what do you attribute the low percentage of women in STEM-related sectors in SA and globally?***

PWC research indicates that the reason for the low percentage in STEM-related sectors draws back to the low number of girls pursuing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects at school and in higher education. Unless there is a change in various cultural and behavioural drivers within organisations, the matter is unlikely to be resolved any time soon.

It is quite evident that as organisations, we have a long way to go. Through persistence and the correct way to go about this, we would be able to rectify the gender gap within the STEM-related careers.

■ ***How can we drive greater gender parity in STEM-based industries?***

It is important that we continue to raise awareness of STEM-related careers through programmes aimed at young women,

as they are the future to the livelihood of these careers.

There are programmes run by the Department of Science and Technology, such as SAASTA (South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement): The programme raises awareness of STEM in collaboration with various institutions, including science centres within communities.

National Science Week: Held annually from 1-8 August. During this week, the Department of Science and Technology invites learners and members of the public to workshops, science shows and lectures held at universities, schools, science centres and public facilities countrywide to highlight the STEM subjects and the careers that learners could go into.

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■ ***Where does the value lie in a diverse, inclusive work environment, particularly in terms of female representation?***

According to recent research, companies that tracked gender diversity in their management reported profit increases of between five and 20 percent. This shows that females bring a different dynamic into the work place that promotes greater output in terms of creativity and attracting skilled talent.

However, we need to bear in mind that diversity is more than a numbers game but having an organisation that appreciates the female voice and hears it. In line with the skills shortage in the STEM-related careers, Clariant provides opportunities to women in the organisation to upskill themselves for leadership opportunities within the business. We believe that through diversity and inclusion, this is the source of value that will help us move forward as an industry and a country.



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■ ***Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in STEM today?***

Go for it! Work hard, build solid networks with experts in the field and remain true to your passion. Find yourself a mentor that can assist you in your journey to personal growth. This is not only a message to women, but for everyone who wants to make a success in the industry.

■ ***Is there a female figure that has had a positive influence on your life?***

There have been a number of women in my life that have had a strong influence on me. I tend to surround myself with like-minded people – people that are passionate about what they do, people that try to be part of a solution and not the problem – be it career, sport or family. To be successful, you need to be passionate and give your all every day! These special ladies in my life have taught me this important life lesson, they have been life coaches to me.

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### What is your message for Women's Month?

Work hard. Communicate clearly. Be credible. Be trustworthy. Be fair. And you will be successful – and the bonus is you can do it all in a pair of stilettos!

On a more serious note, you need to be clear in terms of your vision for yourself. You need to wake up every morning with clear goals on how to achieve it. You need to remain honest to these goals, and ethical in the way in which you achieve them.

### ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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