

Invest in your career, never stop learning - Nomalungelo Mbokazi

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Nomalungelo Mbokazi started her career at bp Southern Africa (bpSA) in 2014 as a chemical engineering graduate in its product optimisation team. By consistently demonstrating her leadership skills and qualities, she's since scaled the ranks and was recently appointed midstream performance senior manager.

In this role, Mbokazi will lead the overall functional supply and demand balances and commercial performance of bpSA's midstream business.



Nomalungelo Mbokazi, midstream performance senior manager, bpSA

Her experience in performance management, strategy execution, managing commercial supply and asset optimisation, building relationships with and influencing internal and external stakeholders, combined with her passion for leading and developing people, have set her on a path for continued success.

This Youth Month, Mbokazi shares with us a bit about what excites her about her work at bpSA, how the organisation is supporting and empowering young people, as well as words of encouragement for those just starting out in their careers.

■ ***What sparked your initial interest in chemical engineering?***

I could attribute this to my strong interest in wanting to understand the intricacy of problems with the aim of solving them. In high school, I really enjoyed maths, physical science and biology – I constantly had chemical engineering and medicine competing but was eventually drawn to chemical engineering as I was very intrigued by and loved the idea of pursuing something that was categorised as hard and unique.

■ ***How did you break into the industry?***

Towards the end of my undergraduate studies, I was crystal clear that I wanted to pursue a career in the oil and gas (now

energy) industry. I then completed a master's degree in chemical engineering, which allowed me to start understanding the fuel industry. Ultimately, I joined bpSA in 2014 as a chemical engineering graduate, which ushered me into my career in the energy industry.

■ ***Your career so far has taken you from the technical to the commercial end of bpSA. What did the transition entail?***

I believe the technical part of bpSA forms my base for knowledge - that's where the physical molecules of our product move. Key to the transition is understanding what that technical base is made up of, understanding how work happens to advise the commercial side of things. To be honest, the technical and commercial end of bp coexist and even though I'm steeped in the commercial side of bpSA, the technical part strongly features in understanding the commerciality of decisions, processes and what moves the dial commercially.

■ ***What excites you the most about your work at bpSA?***

I've been privileged to have bpSA being my first and only employer, and what stood out for me was how the culture is held in the same regard as business priorities. I believe bpSA invests in its people and I have seen that happen for me and my colleagues. With bpSA belonging to a global network, it is filled with opportunities for people to unlock, in terms of developing yourself and continuously improving how we do work through sharing with colleagues across the globe.

Into the future, I am very much excited about the type of person the company identifies as a leader of the future – which is a leader who drives performance with care - this resonates with my personal values.



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■ ***Tell us about some of the achievements of which you are most proud.***

This one is hard as I believe I've only scraped the surface. My biggest achievement I believe is a bit reflective, mostly attributed to the fast pace in which I've been able to anchor myself in technical, commercial and strategic thinking with the aim of being a well-rounded leader.

“ I also believe I've been able to advocate for calm leadership in my organisation, one built on influence to achieve results. ”

■ ***What are some of your short- and long-term career goals?***

My short-term goal is certainly to anchor myself as a leader in the bp organisation, spanning commercial and strategic parts of bp. I intend on being a notable thought leader within this country and assisting and mentoring the youth as they navigate corporate South Africa.

▣ What are some of the challenges young people face in your industry? How would you suggest they be overcome?

I believe some of the challenges we face as young people particularly during tertiary education is access to resources. A lot has been done to overcome this both from government and business through bursaries and scholarships, which is very encouraging. The first few years coming into the industry can be a bit challenging as it's quite a big one with many moving parts that can sometimes discourage youth.

It's also an industry where I heard a lot of "this is how we've always done it, don't change something that's worked for years" and can be an industry young people believe has a lot of red tape or is resistant to change. I believe learning first, understanding the boundaries with which you can work as a youth wanting to implement change, continuous mentorship and having thinking partners can be assuring as a young person.

▣ How is bpSA supporting and empowering young people in the organisation?

- Staff bursaries and opportunities for self-development,
- Scholarships and bursaries through the Energy Mobility Education Trust (EMET) that bpSA funds,
- The graduate/early careers programme as a good way to enter the organisation,
- Career development opportunities with reputable institutions – GIBS, Duke University, Wits University,
- International assignments,
- Mentorship and coaching, and
- Culture creation compatible to the youth of today: inquisitive, high-energy, innovative, very agile, involved, colourful.



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▣ As we celebrate Youth Month in SA, do you have any words of encouragement for those starting out in their careers?

- Never stop learning - the truth is that you never reach your destination in the learning journey. Know that you learn from people at all levels within the organisation.
- Invest in your career and have clarity of where you want to be in the next five years at any given point in time.
- Be clear on your personal values; that is who you are and it sets the tone of how you treat people.
- Welcome constructive feedback, it helps you as you learn more about yourself and as you work towards the type of leader you want to be.

▣ You've been voted president for the day. What's the first thing on your to-do list?

I would certainly make cabinet changes to result in one that is more diverse in thought, skill set and age. Our economy needs to be turned around to favour all, particularly the youth. I'd probably push for a deal that advocates for high-quality education for skills of the future at affordable cost.

Access to good education really sets the youth up for success and gives them a better chance at a successful future, which would in time better the overall economy.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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