

"Aim high!" - Yolisa Nyoka, Africa Oil and Power's newest programme director, talks delivering quality and creating jobs across Africa

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Africa Oil and Power (AOP) - the African continent's leading investment platform for the energy sector - has recently just appointed Yolisa Nyoka as its new programme director. With six years of industry experience, she has produced a variety of events across Africa, and holds a dynamic background in executing top-tier, industry-specific conferences across multiple sectors. Nyoka will be lending her expertise to produce projects that are part of AOP's robust calendar of events, as the organisation further extends its portfolio of live and digital events, product catalogues and emerging partnerships across Africa. She is also looking to help AOP branch into new international markets.



In previous years, Nyoka served as a conference producer for London-based company Clarion Events – with a focus on sub-Saharan African power, water and energy markets. She also worked on projects for Trade Conferences International, which is South Africa's leading financial conferences and event organiser. Prior to this, Nyoka completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at Rhodes University, with a current completion of a postgraduate diploma in enterprise management at the Rhodes Business School.

Congratulations on your recent appointment as the new director of programming at Africa Oil and Power! How has this new role empowered you?

Thank you! Overseeing the company's content and strategic direction is definitely an empowering feeling. It is an opportunity, where I am challenged to deliver innovative concepts in our programming, which allows room for growth in my career. I am very grateful for this.

What is your vision for AOP going forward?

We are a relatively 'new' company with incredible relationships in the industry. I would say that my vision for AOP is to be at the forefront of innovation, not only in events, but also in providing original content within our programming. I would love to see us tap into various markets we deem, with the assistance of our expert partners, having the potential to be impactful

in their region's economy. I would also love for our name to continue to make its mark as a trusted, leading investment platform for the energy sector.

Please could you tell us a bit about your background. What led you down this career path?

It was all by accident! However, it looks like it has worked out in my favour. My path was initially supposed to go down the route of journalism, which I had started studying at Rhodes University. It did not work out as planned, though. So, while I was changing courses, I applied to be an event coordinator for the union of students who lived off campus. I landed the job and did it for about two years, and I seemed to have a knack for it. I learned early on, as a student, how to put together an event, secure partners and speakers - this is where my journey started.

When I graduated and started looking for a job, a friend of mine offered me an opportunity to move to Johannesburg to be a researcher. While I was chasing a dream of being in the entertainment industry, bills needed to be paid, so I took it, and after two months of employment I got promoted to be a conference producer. I started producing and executing high-profile conferences - and the rest is history.

What three tips do you have for working in the events and programming industry?

- Always aim high! There is no one in my books who is too high up to speak at your event; if you have the right product with the right message, go for it.
- Stay in the loop with the latest trends in the market. Try not to be stuck in traditionalist ways of delivering an event; the notion of 'we have always done it this way' can be dangerous - you have to move with the times.
- Build long lasting relationships. Honour your word, check up on your clients, be transparent and be personable. We are all human, so once you get that out the way, trust is built, and in that way when the roof is on fire, you know you have people to count on to help you extinguish it.

What is your 'why?'

Knowing that I am part of a platform that partners with decision makers to foster the stimulation of their region's economy, and thus creating jobs, is my 'why'. As an event organiser, you might not see this end product as much, as you have a tunnel vision 90% of the time in executing a great event. However, when you see real deals being made on the spot, scholarships for students being made, and women gathering together and actively embarking on pushing sustainable change, that is what makes the late nights worth it in my eyes.

Have you read any books or listened to any podcasts that have inspired you and your career thus far?

I would first direct any professional to articles on LinkedIn published by Dr Travis Bradberry who speaks on emotional intelligence in the professional realm. His articles really helped me with how to work smart, how to manage different personalities and stress and how to eat the frog first (if you are confused check him out and that line will make sense).

Another read, and I would say a book that changed my life, is *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. This book is known worldwide and it has changed the way I view the world and circumstances thrown my way.

The last book I would recommend is *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill. This book is age old wisdom that has been adopted by so many well-known successful people we have seen in our lifetime.

How did you reach your level of success, given the continent's gender gap, especially among leadership?

No person is an island. I would not be at this stage in my career without the formidable relationships I have built over the years. I have always shown who I am, and I guess that allowed people to see something in me and actually place me forward as someone who can deliver any project or programme. What has also helped me, is the belief that even though things may feel weary, when you put in the hard work and do things the right way with just about the right belief in yourself, you will definitely reap the fruits of your labour. Always let your work speak for itself.

Outside of work, are you involved in any extracurricular activities and/or community outreach projects?

For a couple of years I have been involved in Kids Ministry - my passion project. I love kids, I love teaching and when it is combined with my faith, it adds more meaning to my life.

Who or what inspires you on a daily basis?

I am inspired by many people and concepts. My first foundation of inspiration is my family. My family is a group of very resilient people who are unapologetic about their principles and very hardworking. My father was a very hardworking individual, and he achieved tremendous success and respect in the field of medicine. He also stressed education above all else, so literally everything I do is attributed to him. It might sound slightly cliché, but I always tell anyone who asks how Oprah Winfrey inspires me, that it's not so much of her journey to her success, but her belief in herself through a higher power - this pushes me every day.

What advice do you have for young women in South Africa who aspire to work in your industry? How can they differentiate themselves?

My first piece of advice is to know and sharpen your programme writing style; be meticulous in detail and develop a mindset of being a lifelong learner by always reading up on trends in the industry. My second piece of advice is to know your boundaries and learn to say **no**. This is something I wish I would have learned earlier on in my career or even as a student. Even now, I am still learning how to draw the line. My last piece of advice is to not be afraid to be **you**. Yes, we always need to keep it professional. However, you should also try to have the balance of being a woman who shows their professionalism at all times, but also shows their personality as a way to stand out.

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