

Why a young CA(SA) chose to kick off her career in dusty Mthatha

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Akona Gazi-Babana (34), a senior lecturer and programme director for BCTA at the University of Johannesburg, received the Influence award in Saica's Top 35 under 35 CAs(SA) competition.



The Top 35 under 35 CAs(SA) competition was launched by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (Saica) in 2014 to recognise its young CA(SA) achievers. It has proven to be a huge success in recognising and promoting young CAs(SA) under the age of 35 who are not just achieving extraordinary results in their professional capacity but are also making a significant difference in society.

'I feel very honoured and appreciative. As the winner of this award was being announced, I was ordering pizza for my kids. When I heard my name, I dropped my phone on the floor. It was so unexpected!' she laughs.

Being a part of the competition has been a validation of what Gazi-Babana deems her purpose, the work she does, and the impact it has on society. She hopes the award will also inspire her students to leave their mark on the world and make a difference.

'I believe we are the total sum of our experiences. A big part of the reason why I do what I do is the journey I've walked in life. My father also tried to qualify as a CA(SA), but it didn't go as well as one would have hoped. It was through witnessing that journey that I realised lecturing is my calling and that it has a great impact on others. I do it with so much passion and love. I have also realised that everything I do needs to have a purpose and it can't always be about "chasing the big bucks".'

After completing her academic articles at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Gazi-Babana joined the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) re-accreditation programme in Mthatha as a senior lecturer. 'Being part of this team allowed me to give back to my community and to be a beam of hope to many,' she explains.

As a black female young CA(SA), the world was Gazi-Babana's oyster, but she chose to work in a dusty Mthatha in the former Transkei. 'I understood the impact I could have on young black students and their journey to becoming qualified chartered accountants. Lecturing at WSU afforded me the opportunity to serve as an example by influencing young black potential accountants and to also refine my lecturing style and teaching and learning philosophy. I have been able to shape and influence students' behaviour and relations with others, while also guiding students in making difficult decisions.'

Gazi-Babana was also involved in the UCT/Fasset initiative where she translated financial reporting into isiXhosa – her home language. She holds a master's degree in Development Finance from the University of Stellenbosch and is currently pursuing a master's in Applied Finance at UCT.

Furthermore, she is a presenter on APT – a preparation course for the second Saica board exam – and a member of the Johannesburg Securities Exchange proactive monitoring team which is tasked with assisting in upholding financial reporting standards of JSE-listed companies.

She is also involved in a community upliftment programme in her rural village where they focus on youth development and assisting the impoverished.

‘To this day my father asks me why I chose academia as he had visions of me being the CEO of a big multinational company thanks to my academic success (I also saw myself as a big shot in corporate South Africa one day). My answer to him is I am trying to change South Africa one person at a time. My parents have always instilled the principle of helping others if you have the ability to.’

Now at the University of Johannesburg, Gazi-Babana believes that she continues to have an influence through her teaching. ‘I believe my lecturing style helped not only the quality of teaching and learning but also improved the performance and understanding of students. One of the top priority objectives of our profession is transformation. Being an agent and playing a role in meeting this objective is one of the highest honours I am privileged to have,’ she explains.

‘Not many people believe that they are in this world with a purpose of change. I believe the biggest and greatest purpose each of us has is to leave a mark. We sometimes do not see the impact of our efforts or rather, we diminish the value of our efforts because we all want the “big bang” and a notable significant change. But I have come to realise that changing or impacting one person changes the world to that individual – and that is in itself is a big change – it is significant! I call it passion for people, Ubuntu and lifting as I rise!’

She believes CAs(SA) have the ability and responsibility to make South Africa a better place and to maximise its potential. Gazi-Babana’s advice to other young CAs(SA) is to find their purpose, something that drives them, and to always remember why they started. ‘You can do anything you put your mind to. You need to believe you can. Once you believe, you are already 50% of the way there. The other 50% is the work you need to put in to achieve your goal,’ she concludes.

Find out more information on the Top 35 under 35 CAs(SA) competition [here](#).

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