



Mpho Mookapele,

CEO of the Energy and Water Sector Education Training Authority

Creating public value for a sustainable future

CEO of The Energy and Water Sector Education Training Authority (EWSETA), Mpho Mookapele, is dedicated to serving the public sector.

Fostering an ecosystem in energy and water that creates inclusive economic development, Mpho Mookapele heads EWSETA, and is committed to enhancing South Africa's energy and water landscapes through skills development. Her career spans more than 10 years in the private and public sectors in the finance and regulatory environment. For Mpho, her enthusiasm for development goes well beyond the boardroom, and she views every opportunity to serve others as a privilege.

A calling to serve the public sector

Initially, Mpho took Architecture at Wits University. However, after a year into the programme, Mpho realised that she was more interested in the 'practical' elements of things, rather than the creative side of it all.

She made the decision to pursue a career in accounting and after obtaining her BCompt Honours degree in Finance through the University of Johannesburg, Mpho joined Ernst & Young to complete her training. She left Ernst & Young to join a small audit firm a year before qualification, but returned to Ernst &

Young, a move for which she was penalised. In 2011, Mpho qualified as a Chartered Accountant (CA).

"I was willing to take on the penalty to move back to Ernst & Young to get public sector exposure." Interestingly, at the same time of making this decision, Mpho was studying Theology. This is where her passion to serve stems from. "When I was doing Theology I thought 'where do I use my qualification being a CA?'" she expresses.



I call it **'success'** when I have actually impacted someone's life to impact another. I feel successful when I see **change** happening around me

"I had a desire to serve, and I might not be a pastor, but I found the public sector as a place for me to go and 'preach'. I really had a heart for the public sector before I went into it".

Prioritising practical experience

She then moved to London to gain international exposure and on returning to South Africa she joined the public sector technical team at Ernst & Young, and implemented her new skill set and experience.

"I aligned myself, even before getting into the sector, making sure that I understood the challenges, the legislation", she continues.

It was whilst she was part of the technical team at Ernst & Young that she became interested in strategy. This was when she

began her journey as a manager leading strategy solutions for the public sector - assisting Boards with facilitating strategic planning sessions, reviewing strategic plans and annual performance plans for organisations.

"As I was facilitating these sessions, and reviewing performance, I realised that within my role as a consultant I was advising, but I was not getting to the implementation stage", Mpho explains.

"This was when I began looking for opportunities in the public sector. I knew then that I had the right knowledge and experience to join a public entity, looking at strategy, as well as being involved in the execution and implementation of controls. This is how I ended up at the Energy and Water SETA."

EWSETA VALUES



Respect: A sense of value and trust towards each other and stakeholders.



Integrity: We act with honesty and integrity, not compromising the truth.



Teaming: Positively contributing and collaborating towards the greater vision.



Excellence: Striving for the best in all our actions.

EWSETA was established in terms of Section 9 of the Skills Development Act (SDA),

97 of 1998, as amended and reports to the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation.

An award-winning CEO

As her passion for serving the public sector intensified, Mpho applied for a CFO position at EWSETA. Mpho was not specifically drawn to the energy and water sectors, that are served by the EWSETA, but rather what it is that a SETA does from a youth development perspective.

"When you look at the mandate of the SETA, and you look at who they respond to - which is capacitating young people - that was what drew me in to serve", Mpho admits. "I saw an opportunity for me to make an impact [as a CFO at first], especially in the Finance space, and I knew I was the right person for the job - to implement and not only advise."

Mpho joined EWSETA as a CFO in 2016, and after 18 months she was appointed as the Acting CEO for two years, before being appointed to this role on a permanent basis in November 2020.

Previously, Mpho was announced as the overall winner of the 2019 Top 35-under-35 chartered accountants [CA(SA)] award - launched by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) in 2014 to recognise its young CA (SA) achievers.

"I didn't even apply for the award. Someone applied for me and I was so surprised when I was shortlisted", she says.

"Being shortlisted, I started realising that I am actually contributing to

South Africa, through what I am doing both in and outside the workplace.

“Before this, I hadn’t really realised that I was doing that much. So, I actually started really appreciating what I’m doing and appreciating myself.” For Mpho, the award was a way for people to recognise her efforts and the journey she is on, even though the steps she took did not seem “normal” to some peers in the beginning stages of her career.

“This process [the competition] confirmed that following my passion was worth it, and that in following my passion the things I am doing are actually meaningful, and are touching people’s lives”, she exclaims.

“Winning, for me, also meant a lot because of what it meant to others”, Mpho elaborates. “After winning, I had so many young people saying ‘I can’... it encouraged a lot of people to believe in themselves.”

Living her true purpose

Mpho constantly reiterates the importance of service and being lucky enough to serve the public sector to the best of her ability – reinforcing actionable solutions – and also being a role model for young people who live in the village she hails from, in Zeerust, North West.

“I believe that I was created for a certain purpose, and serving is one part of my purpose. My inspiration and my ‘why’ is linked

to the sun. I always say I’m inspired by sun. Whether party cloudy, clear skies or thunderstorms, the sun comes out every morning and serves its purpose”, says Mpho.

“We may not see the sun when it’s storming [dark], but the sun is always there. So, I do what I am called to do for a certain point in time regardless of circumstances around me.”

The EWSETA’s Vision is “Creating a sustainable tomorrow, today through skills” and this will be achieved through:



Research to determine the skills demand



Facilitating and coordinating skills development programmes to respond to sectoral challenges



Driving excellence through quality assurance



Fostering an ecosystem in energy and water that creates inclusive economic development

Mpho’s tips for conquering hurdles

Hurdles are there to refine and better yourself. It’s meant to be difficult to help you improve for the future. Keep jumping them and success will come. It is important to have a positive internal dialogue and talk yourself through things. Tell yourself to keep going – be your own coach. Stay open to constant learning and lead your true purpose daily.

Uplifting women in her community

Mpho believes in uplifting women around her through skills development and offering support where possible. During her time as a Trainee Accountant, Mpho became close with a tea lady who had wanted to study, but did not have the means.

“I encouraged her to register and finish Matric. I then talked to the employer to take her on as a trainee accountant. Today, she’s got a degree in BComm Accounting and a tax qualification, and has opened her own company to do tax returns, bookkeeping and registration – and she had two children at the time”, Mpho explains. “So, for me, success is seeing her succeed and impacting her daughter and son’s life.”

For Mpho, success means living her purpose daily, knowing and understanding her purpose [at work and in life], and fulfilling this purpose no matter what the circumstances may be.

“I call it ‘success’ when I have actually impacted someone’s life to impact another. I feel successful when I see change happening around me – when I see that change bringing about more change, and EWSETA has been a good place for me where I’ve been able to implement change”, she expresses.

“I measure my success when I see a successful sector; where I see employed communities, and I see the industry changing because

of what EWSETA is doing. My ‘success’ is when I am contributing to young people who are then able to contribute to communities to change.”



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Public service delivery

EWSETA exists to inform the industry and to provide a credible information-base to the industry on what South Africa’s energy and water sector requires, from a skills development perspective, in order for the country to see real growth. The SETA is committed to assisting the country in meeting the energy and water needs.

“When we address the skills needed for the country, we move the country in the right direction”, says Mpho. “It might not be where we are [right now], but that’s what we are to do. EWSETA exists

to be an authority that ensures that the skills needs which we’ve identified as a country for the sector, are addresses at the right time and the right quality. When it comes to training and skills development, we are putting both unemployed and employed people in the relevant quality training mechanisms so that they will be able to respond to the relevant sector needs. We are also responding to those unemployed individuals who can be trained and fed into the sector to meet the sectoral needs...This is the service we provide to the sector”, she concludes.

Creating Employment Opportunities in SA

As a skills development authority, EWSETA zooms in on capacity, capability and skill set. Therefore, advancement in employment and promotion to different levels, for employed workers, is dependent on additional training and experience. Mpho believes in giving people access to meaningful jobs, and giving them the ability to be promoted

and see growth in their careers through the attainment of relevant and in-demand skills. She also encourages other businesses and organisations to support venture creation and existing entrepreneurs and SMEs as they are the ones who are driving economic growth in the country.

“They [SMEs] have an important role to play in bringing sustainable solutions to Africa’s energy and water challenges.”

The EWSETA is required to:

- Develop and implement annual sector skills planning based on sector research and employer input
- Promote and provide funding for sector-relevant learning programmes
- Perform quality assurance and compliance functions delegated by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)
- Disburse levies collected from employers in the sector
- Provide career guidance services

Leading lady in Energy & Water

Mpho’s primary role at EWSETA is “providing clarity”, in terms of giving her team direction, focusing on specific objectives and monitoring and celebrating achievements. She emphasises that it is important that she develops strategies that are well-aligned to the mission, vision and strategic plan of the organisation. “As a leader, you need to be



clear about the destination, direction you're taking and how the destination will be reached", she says. "Have a clear vision and believe in your own vision, then lead your people to actually make an impact."

Mpho provides a few leadership tips:

You need to invest strategic intent into operational imperatives, and self-assessment is important to ensure credibility.

You may have many people in your team, however, you need to be able to move with your people and the times. The passionate CEO admits that COVID-19 has had quite an impact on EWSETA.

However, she mentions that the pandemic came with its own set of pros and cons, just like any other major event would. She feels the pandemic

"awakened" the SETA and the rest of the country to the notion that change is possible, and we have been able to successfully transition from traditional ways, learning new skills.

"We learned that we can change and shift faster, implement more effectively, re-invent ourselves for better implementation, and the pandemic forced us to be creative and proactive", she encourages.

Mpho adds that another good thing that came out of the pandemic was acceptance and embracing virtual training by many.

"Now, training can reach people who have not been reached before, but there is more consideration surrounding those who are underprivileged."

The future of EWSETA

Mpho was excited to fill us in on her outlook for the year ahead, explaining that she still hopes to get the opportunity to expand her mind and study further. In terms of her role as CEO of EWSETA, Mpho indicated that the organisation looks forward to the following upcoming plans:

- Relooking at the "foundations, cladding and finishes" of the organisation
- Redesigning ourselves for the 'new normal' of the sector
- A current organisational design review is underway
- Continuing to position EWSETA as an authority in the space ■

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