

How Hlengiwe Ndlela replaced failure with success

Giving up is just never an option for Hlengiwe Ndlela (33). She knows exactly how hard failure can knock one down. But she has overcome 'fail' multiple times, settling it with the final stamp of success. Today, she mentors scores of students into confident professionals because she knows sometimes all you need is someone to give you that rainbow of hope.



Hlengiwe Ndlela

Ndlela's vibrant personality spills over into every facet of her life, from the students she inspires to achieve more with their lives right to the bold, beautiful colours of her African attire she is often dressed in.

Strong women

She's a humble, strong woman, raised by strong women, who loves nurturing in any space she finds herself in. "They were all domestic workers. I am very close to my grandmother, and I think this is because of her attitude towards educational excellence. I remember in primary school, as much as she was a live-in domestic worker, she always attended my awards days and supported that part of my life strongly."

Ndlela's Grade 6 mathematics teacher played a critical role in who she is today. Her uncle, a principal at Zamazulu Secondary School in Pietermaritzburg, was also a role model for her as a young lady, and always encouraged her to push for better results.

Besides her analytical abilities that steered her towards the chartered accountancy profession, it was a woman who presented at a South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (Saica) Development Camp in 2003 who drew Ndlela to pursue a career as a CA(SA).

However, in her second year of studies, she fell pregnant and sought support from her family. She promised to be done with her studies in 18 months to take over the parenting.

So, when Ndlela failed CTA for the first time in 2008, she had no choice but to start working as she had an eighteen-month-old baby and a family that needed her support. She managed to find a job as an accounting teacher for grades 10 to 12 and did this for two years. After failing the CTA exam again on her two attempts post 2008, the CA(SA) dream began to fade, she admits. To make things worse, she was in an environment that had nothing to do with what she was studying.

Life-changing phone call

A phone call from EY Durban changed that. They told her she could start articles while studying towards her CTA. 'It was at this point where I wanted it again, where I saw myself worthy of the qualification again. With it being my fourth attempt, it was easy to lose confidence and self-belief. However, giving up was not an option, especially when I had someone believe in my abilities. Being allowed to study part-time and work in an environment that was relevant and with people who understood and supported my studies, I was able to achieve my CTA,' Ndlela says.

Today she is an auditing lecturer and researcher in the School of Accounting, Economics and Finance at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Westville Campus and is pursuing her PhD. She was also a panellist on the young academics segment of the 2019 Forbes Africa Woman Leading Women Summit and she aspires to be Dr Hlengiwe Ndlela in five years' time

“ I enjoy how exciting lectures can be, how practical and colourful I attempt to make auditing. I love how easy it is for students to come for consultation, and sometimes not necessarily about the module but about their careers in general. It gives me a great position to give mentorship even in an unstructured or informal setting as it changes the lives of the students. As a “young” lecturer, there is an element of relatability and my background gives a number of my students a lot of hope. ”

Ndlela is also a Thuthuka programme manager and her students have achieved a 97% pass rate in the 2019 academic year. In addition, for the 2018 and 2019 academic years, she co-assisted with the establishment and running of an intervention programme for African CTA students at UKZN.

"My babies, the African and coloured students funded by the Thuthuka Education Upliftment Fund, call me Mah or Mom due to the relationship we have. It gives me so much joy to have the resources to help assist our 'babies' to achieve their goals."

A few of the other projects she is involved with is 1Woman1Girl mentorship, a non-profit she co-founded with the goal to empower women, one girl at a time. She runs Grade 9 career day workshops for over 900 learners, mentors high school girls and also collects donations of sanitary towels for primary school girls in a drive to keep girls in school in Inanda North in Durban.

"It gives my African sisters and brothers hope that they, too, can achieve their goals – not only just as CAs(SA) but whatever goal they seek to achieve regardless of where they come from, how they were raised, how little they have," she says.

Believing in sustainable development

Ndlela sits on the KZN regional committee for the Advancement of Women Chartered Accountants (AWCA) and is a national board member, where she looks after the trainee chapter in the region. She recently served as the secretary of the KZN region of the Association for the Advancement of Black Accountants of Southern Africa (ABASA), fostering youth

development and providing support for aspiring black CAs(SA) in the region. She also volunteered at Meals on Wheels Community Services KwaZulu-Natal and Free State Area as the finance and audit committee chairperson and board member in light of elevating poverty through providing meals for South Africans in need.

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