

Lianne Williams, Vumatel's marketing director



By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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Lianne Williams, Vumatel's marketing director, boasts a 19-year career spanning various industries. Her expertise lies in marketing, communications, market research, and data analytics. Williams has worked for brands such as Discovery, FNB and Momentum.



Lianne Williams is the marketing director at Vuma. Source: Supplied.

■ ***How has your background led you to where you are now?***

I was fortunate enough to have attended a school that was well equipped with computers. The exposure to STEM in school was pretty much limited to maths and science. Maths and Science were a big push for most students, more so for admission into university, not so much for entering and building a career in the technology space. It was very rare to find a female seeking to build a career in technology.

■ ***What challenges does marketing face in the telecommunications industry?***

The experience of being a woman in a male-dominated industry is not unique to tech or telecommunications industries. Business in general has been more geared to developing and investing in males for growth and building their careers. As a woman, I generally had to work harder, longer and feel like I had to sacrifice more of my authentic self, so I could 'fit in'. Be quieter, conform to business and boardroom 'norms', speak a certain way, use particular words and language, dress a certain way, etc.

I have experienced the cost of going against the grain, as I'm sure many women have, and it is higher for women than it is for men. I eventually built up the courage, with much help from mentors and coaches, and chose to not sacrifice who I am, for anybody, at any time. It robs one of time, energy, happiness, and productivity. It is exhausting having to manage the different ways of having to show up depending on the environment and audience. For me personally, it's just not worth the sacrifice.

■ ***What are some of the highlights you have experienced throughout your 19 year career?***

I'm not sure I would single out any specific examples, I would rather look at the experience as a whole.

I have managed to build authentic, meaningful relationships over the years, that have stood me in good stead across various roles and businesses.

These relationships with business partners, internal and external, across sectors and industries have enabled many positive outcomes for opportunities that may have been overlooked or missed.

Resources are often stretched in companies and it's not always viable to spend more money or hire more people to get the job done. It's in these instances that I have always been able to lean and rely on great internal teams and business partners who will find a way of getting more than just 'the job' done.

■ ***Why is GirlCode such an important programme for Vuma?***

GirlCode helps bridge the digital literacy gap for young South African's by creating a space for women in STEM fields. We want to help in enabling opportunities for individuals and communities that allow them to reach their full potential through the power of technology. Through our partnership with GirlCode, we can create exponential opportunities for all and because of this, also increase the female representation in STEM.



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I further believe that empowering more female youth with STEM skills to be able to pursue careers in tech is a major priority. This year's theme was AI4WOMEN and together with GirlCode, we can spark their interest in coding and the STEM fields.

■ ***What do you think makes you a good leader?***

I see people as people, more than employees. There is a difference between human 'being' and human 'doing'. I believe that our jobs as leaders is to get people to be their best selves so that they can deliver their best efforts in the team they are a part of and the business in which they work.

I've had the privilege of developing and leading teams where I have made a concerted and made developing people an intentional process and outcome, and I have seen people grow in leaps and bounds. I believe when people want to be a part of the business and feel 'seen and heard' they are more engaged and willing to do more than what is 'expected' of them. Their output ultimately speaks to and shows in improved individual and business performance.

■ ***What inspires you?***

I am a utopian thinker with deep belief, I believe the distance between how things are and how they could be, as

opportunity rather than becoming the cost of doing nothing.

This is not to say that I am always optimistic, there are times when it's just plain hard and I am tired... like everybody, I'm human.

With this thinking, it is only by treating people with respect and kindness, helping them grow, that we can do more to bring about change and I would hope that all of us work and strive for a world and future, that is better.

■ ***What advice do you have for young women who want to go into marketing or the telecommunications space?***

Find your passion, don't be afraid to look for an environment that works for you, and be you, always. Be true to who you are and don't lose yourself in the noise that so often is too easy to get lost in.

When you lose yourself and your way to the noise of others, your own hopes, dreams, and goals get robbed of the time and energy that could be spent on building or moving closer to them.

There will always be 'noise', it's there for everybody. As a woman though, I do believe that we face more of a challenge than men in the workplace where we feel the need to mask our femininity and being vulnerable. I believe this to be the case because vulnerability is viewed as a weakness, when in fact, in the workplace, it speaks to having the courage to be authentic and build meaningful relationships. There is a significant amount of research that highlights the profitable impact of this on businesses.

My advice is to stay the course, even when there is an underrepresentation of women in leadership and management positions or when you feel overlooked, unseen or not heard. Learn to identify and separate yourself from the noise, how to navigate it, and find support in working towards being confident and comfortably yourself.

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

Karabo Ledwaba is a Marketing and Media Editor at Bizcommunity and award-winning journalist. Before joining the publication she worked at Sowetan as a content producer and reporter. She was also responsible for the leadership page at SMag, Sowetan's lifestyle magazine. Contact her at karabo@bizcommunity.com

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