

# The woman behind Liqui Moly South Africa



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Melicia Labuschagne is not your usual business director. From leading team line-dancing celebrations to writing a book titled *Life lessons through mountain-biking*, to establishing the Liqui Moly Superhero Academy for children in need, her earnest energy makes you want to follow her lead. An authentic and feisty female entrepreneur, she has successfully launched the Liqui Moly brand and has spent the last 11 years building it in South Africa.

## ■ Could you describe a typical day in your job?

When I first launched Liqui Moly, I worked out of a one-room office and played every role in the company – receptionist, packer, order taker, salesperson! Now I, fortunately, have a great team behind me, and my main job is motivating this team, leading our strategy and ensuring our customers are happy by finding new ways to innovate and serve them. I will often be travelling around the country to see customers and understand their needs.



Melicia Labuschagne

However hectic work gets, I make sure I get my exercise and stay healthy. I wake up at 3am every day, do my exercise and personal development work, and then I'm at the office normally by 6:10am. This allows me to have a couple of hours to start my day...without the rest of South Africa being at their offices yet. I don't answer my phone after 6pm, but after having a full day, this is the time when I start shutting down, to be fresh again for the next day.

## ■ What did you want to be when you grew up?

I was a tomboy who was interested in cars, racing and Formula 1, but never dreamt I would be in the automotive sector when I was young. I wanted to become a doctor, as I had an interest in changing people's lives in some form or way.

I had my first "shop" when I was 12, buying and selling sweets at school and delivering newspapers and magazines. I loved trading service and products for money. So, doctor or businesswoman/entrepreneur for sure.

▣ ***How did you get into the automotive space?***

I actually started off in banking, to pay the bills. I then used the 3rd party insurance payout from a car accident to take an entrepreneurial leap and started trading cars and running carwashes. This was my first link to cars.

When my colon burst and I landed up in the hospital and I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. During this time, Herbalife really helped me regain my health and also provided a new career path that brought international travel and the opportunity to train and inspire others. It was through this exposure that I was offered an amazing opportunity to bring German lubricant brand Liqui Moly to South Africa – taking me back into the automotive sector.

▣ ***What was the best advice anyone ever gave you?***

Work harder on yourself than what you ever work on your job. Make sure you are better today than what you were yesterday. Success is what you attract by the person you become, instil good habits that will inspire you every day to become and achieve more. This was the advice I received through my Herbalife journey and it changed my life!

My Crohn's disease gave me the lesson of health. I have never neglected my health and healthy living is just another building block to success.

▣ ***Who or what is your biggest motivation?***

Making a difference in people's lives is my biggest motivation. When I put my boss hat on, I always aim to leave every person better than what I found them. I think it drives some of the team crazy as I'm always recommending the next book, the next motivational session. I see their potential and just want them to see it as well. I was blessed to have the opportunity through hard times to realise I can change anything in myself and become anything I aspire to and that the problem is in me, not out there.

When I put my personal, cycling, partner, friend, family hat on, I'm driven by the same motivation to make a difference - to touch, inspire and grow.



It is not always received well, as it is easier to blame outside than to look and take responsibility for where you are from the inside, but if I can make a difference to one person's life and he/she can touch and inspire another then I am always motivated to continue what I am doing.

■ ***Are South African women getting enough of a chance to shine in the automotive industry?***

I believe women are given a chance to shine, I don't always think women take that chance. Strong women standing together can inspire others to stand up and stand out and support each other, to keep on making an impact.

■ ***As a female business leader, what's the least and most exciting aspect of your workday?***

Least exciting...let's start there. I must be honest and if I look at my workday, there is not many "least exciting" I can think of. Every business has its obstacles and problems, but if everything was without problems, how would we grow?

We have a Code Of Honour in Liqui Moly SA, rules where every person takes the same responsibility and keeps each other accountable. There's only one team, whether you are the manager or the driver. When a problem comes up, we deal with it. I ask the questions: What happened? How do we fix it? What can we do to avoid this from ever happening again? What did we learn?

This allows us not to see anything as "least exciting", but rather as a growth opportunity.

My most exciting aspect? Adding value, changing lives, meeting new people, seeing my team grow. When that alarm goes off at 3am, that's the start of my 'most exciting'. To be blessed with another day to make some difference, no matter how small.

■ ***Women are considered to be natural problem solvers. Do you think this is perfect for the automotive industry?***

Of course! I think where there is NO ego, everyone can solve problems naturally. If you are the minority in this industry, ego is not at play, but results can be noticed or taken seriously.

■ ***Could you list a few, if any, specific challenges females face in this industry?***

As a woman walking into the boardrooms and workshops of the very male-dominated automotive, industrial and mining industries, there are a number of challenges to face. I learnt early on that I had to turn my difference into a real differentiator.

While men can also perceive you as less knowledgeable or strong in these traditionally male-dominated industries, your

gender also makes you distinctive and makes the value you can add that much more memorable.

### **▣ What is your advice for overcoming these challenges?**

In a male-dominated industry, you just have to make sure you really come to the table by knowing your subject inside-out. There's no faking it when you already have to work that much harder to be credible.

You can turn your gender into a huge advantage by putting ego or defensiveness aside, asking questions and engaging as much as possible. Being a female in a world where men are used to working and bonding with men is challenging, but I also find in some ways it's easier to build a relationship, as men are more willing to share knowledge and answer your questions. There is less of a competitive edge and less ego in the interactions.

### **▣ What has been the biggest highlight in your career?**

When I first launched Liqui Moly, we were the new kids on the block and at a premium price point in the middle of a recession. People told me I was crazy, and it felt like a million doors were slamming. It has been gratifying to see that turnaround, with big retailers now knocking on our door to stock our range. We're showing growth figures of 37% per year because people really believe in our product.

It has also been a real highlight to use our success for good and launch the Liqui Moly Superhero Academy, which is changing the lives of so many preschoolers. To really thrive, you need to give back.

I must also mention my team. Some have come and some have gone, but a highlight for me is seeing how people have started as packers or in admin and seeing them grow to what they are and stand for today. This makes me proud!

### **▣ What advice do you have for the future generation of women wanting to get into the automotive space?**

Success is all about your mindset. I believe that how you do anything is how you do everything, and, irrespective of your gender, make sure you do everything well.

I'd like to see women believe they have the right to be equally seen and respected, making themselves heard, rather than standing back. Be proud of being female – it's not an obstacle but a useful advantage. You don't need to change to fit in, rather use it to stand out!

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