

Juliet Kahumuza, HR Business Partner, NEXT176

Advocacy champion for the power of women

In her role as the Head of Human Capital at NEXT176, Old Mutual's dynamic subsidiary, Juliet Kahumuza, is passionate about championing transformation, when it comes to having the opportunity to raise her voice in support of and on behalf of fellow women.

Kahumuza says she's been inspired by the book "Lift As You Rise" by Bonang Mohale, former CEO of Business Leadership South Africa. The book's central message is that ascending the career ladder shouldn't be a solo endeavor, instead, it should involve lifting others up with you.

"I've had an incredible network of powerful women supporting, sponsoring and guiding me throughout my career journey. When faced with closed doors, I knew they would advocate for me. This support has played a pivotal role in where I am today".

Acknowledging her hard work, she emphasises that her success was not achieved in isolation. "Yes, I've worked diligently, but I've had a chorus of voices nudging me in the right direction. That's why I'm deeply passionate about extending the same advocacy I received to empower other women – endorsing and supporting them and their aspirations".

Kahumuza currently advocates for the NEXT176 brand and its personnel. She isn't hesitant to ask those around her, "What's hindering you? Can I connect you with someone who can help, enabling your upward trajectory?"

Believing that women wield a critical role as positive role models in every life they touch, Kahumuza asserts, "As a mother, I play a pivotal role in the physical, emotional, spiritual and financial aspects of my family (partner and children). At NEXT176 we've forged an environment where personal and professional spheres harmoniously intersect. We're on a journey to transform our communities, offering economic empowerment, financial liberation and newfound freedom – all initiated from scratch with the launch of this subsidiary".

Kahumuza identifies her partnership with female entrepreneurs in the startup sector as her most exhilarating and impactful endeavor to date.

Yet, traditional challenges tied to transformation persist within the financial services industry, Kahumuza laments. This compels her to drive a change in the narrative, to exert influence and disrupt the hierarchy that often relegates African women to the bottom.

"For female empowerment, NEXT176 has the potential to incubate new ventures led by female entrepreneurs. The question remains: How do we identify, empower and onboard more female entrepreneurs? This is a topic I consistently challenge my Managing Director on".

Kahumuza underscores the necessity of creating diverse representation in investment committees and decision-making bodies to touch a billion lives – starting with women.

Female entrepreneurs grapple with numerous challenges. "Not all women have the same level of support as I do. Many lack the necessary structures, both at work and home. We juggle myriad roles – consider what I accomplish as a mother of six! Nevertheless, I think I am one of the lucky ones because of the support of my partner," Kahamuza adds.

She acknowledges that even a single mother of one, balancing childcare and running a business is immensely demanding. "At NEXT176, we offer an intermediate value proposition: women with entrepreneurial aspirations receive a salary and the chance to enhance their skills. It's a gem for women – providing security while nurturing business growth".

The leadership team at NEXT176 has embraced the challenge of increasing female and women of colour hires. "Our paradigm, hiring those who resemble us in appearance, behavior and speech, is familiar and safe. We've upended this at NEXT176. In August alone, we welcomed eight women, diverse in ethnicity, to key roles".

This is merely the first step – bringing these women in and affording them opportunities. The second step involves creating an environment, a business model ecosystem, where they can flourish and contribute their best selves.

Kahumuza calls for a paradigm shift in redefining job roles. "A job doesn't have to be a rigid 8-to-5, flexible arrangements and shared skills across different organisations are viable options".

Kahumuza stresses that a change in employment paradigms is essential. "It doesn't have to be restricted to South Africa, geographical boundaries can blur. Remote work, even from a coffee shop abroad, is conceivable".

She highlights the importance of challenging policies, recruitment norms, and the current agenda if it doesn't align with NEXT176's goals – particularly in the context of sub-Saharan Africa having the highest percentage of single mother breadwinners globally.

"I have to play a crucial role of advocating for others. I've been entrusted to support my colleagues and potential hires due to their diverse experiences and knowledge. This underscores the significance of advocacy. As my mentors told me, speak up even if your voice trembles".

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