

Develop yourself, develop others

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Gretchen Arangies knows about human resources. After completing her MBA at the USB her career took off in an exciting new direction. She talks about her achievements, passions and pastimes.

Her passion is people and the development of people to reach their full potential. And Gretchen Arangies, director: human resources at Stellenbosch University (SU), strives to do that on a daily basis through listening, evaluating, facilitating, inspiring and leading.

We talk in her office at the USB campus in Bellville where Gretchen has been seconded to adjust job structures and the financial model of the campus since July 2012.

“I enjoy this immensely. The big choice in my life has always been between finance and people. Numbers are sometimes easier because they make sense and they are logical. People can sometimes be complex to manage. It’s as simple as that,” she says, laughing.

“It’s a new challenge, but my MBA has helped me tremendously.”

AMBA’s Global Ambassador

Her MBA, which she obtained in 2008, recently also opened new doors for her. At the beginning of 2012, Gretchen was appointed as one of the 20 Global Ambassadors of the Association of MBAs (AMBA) to, among other things, create a worldwide MBA network. (The USB is an AMBA-accredited business school.)

But she is not just a Global Ambassador; she is the Global Ambassador for 2012. This after she beat all the other ambassadors worldwide with a winning article on sustainable leadership. As part of the prize Gretchen represented AMBA and the MBA community at the UN Global Compact Sustainability Forum in Rio de Janeiro in June this year.

“It was a total surprise and unique opportunity. Sustainable leadership lies close to my heart and perhaps that is why I could immerse myself in writing the article.”

Valuable experience in human resources

This farm child from Cradock in the Eastern Cape has been working at SU in the human resources division since 1989. This is where she established her career and she was mentored by former chief director of human resources, Prof Kobus van Wyk.

“I’ve learnt so much from him. He taught me the value of inviting people to come to me with not only their problems, but also with their solutions. Today I manage in the same way because this is how you allow people to think and grow.”

Why does she still work at SU after all these years?

“The university gives you the opportunity to develop. I also have a passion to learn. I like to acquire knowledge and

the university creates that space for me – not just to study, but to develop.”

And it’s with this same passion that she completed her MBA.

“An MBA expands your knowledge and skills. It definitely changed the way I manage and interact with people. It taught me to understand and handle people better.”

Woman in a work environment dominated by men

Gretchen can stand her ground and she does not let a male-dominated work environment get to her.

“The higher education sector in South Africa is largely still an environment dominated by men, especially at senior level. It’s a pity because diversity stimulates creative thinking. I get along in a male environment simply by being myself and focusing on what’s being discussed. My advice to women is: Be yourself and believe in yourself because you can do it. Don’t give up your femininity by trying to act like a man.”

She has high energy levels and constantly drives herself.

“I set goals and I apply project management to my own life. I achieve my goals because I focus on the ultimate goal – at work and in my personal life.”

As a mother of two sons and her husband’s two daughters, her biggest challenge is to find the right balance between her work and personal life.

“At times it’s very difficult – even organised chaos – but I maintain my sanity by exercising and driving out with Henk (my husband) on our Harley-Davidson. I am also addicted to reading and crazy about athletics. To watch athletics at an Olympic Games is still on my bucket list.”

She still has big plans for the future.

“I would like to do a PhD on how to manage different generations in one work environment, and on what skills managers need today to do this. I also want to make a real difference in people’s lives, not just by giving them something like money, but by developing them and investing time in them. Teach people to catch a fish rather than give them a fish. That’s my philosophy.”

Quick questions

- **What leadership qualities are important to you?**

A good leader has vision and integrity, is courageous, inspiring and credible, and can communicate well.

- **Who inspires you?**

Anyone who rises above his circumstances and makes a difference.

- **What is your best advice to others?**

Don’t give up on what you believe in.

- **What iPad apps do you use regularly?**

Dropbox: To store documents and to easily access it again, like in meetings. Also to share documents with staff.

Adobe Reader: To live “greener” by working on PDF documents and making notes on them instead of printing the information.

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