

MOVING UP

At the age of 34, Franco Feris reached his dream of becoming a CEO when he took up the position of chief executive officer of Santam Namibia Limited in Windhoek. He tells **Cherice Smith** about his new position and how he ensures career growth.

You are the youngest CEO of Santam Namibia to date after your appointment at the beginning of 2012. How do you feel about this achievement?

This appointment is surely a dream come true. I am excited to lead Santam Namibia, the top short-term insurance company in Namibia. This achievement confirms that hard work and dedication reap rewards. I must admit, I view it as a great challenge. Each day is a learning experience.

What would you consider your biggest challenge?

To lead with impact. I believe the rise and fall of a business begins with leadership. My challenge is to empower, promote skills development, focus on effective team operations and develop succession plans.

What would you like to achieve as CEO?

My vision is to grow the market share for the company as well as the human resource capacity in terms of skills levels and succession. I'd also like to work collectively with the various regulatory bodies on compliance.

Was your career dream always to become a CEO?

During my younger years I wanted to become an accountant or pastor. At university my vision was to join a corporate entity as a financial manager and by the age of 40 be a CEO. My career started in 2005 as financial manager of Santam Namibia Limited, and I became chief operations officer in 2007. This learning experience prepared me for the CEO position. During this process of career development I learnt that success is a continuous journey.

Why did you do the Senior Management Development Programme at USB-ED?

I did the programme in 2008 because I clearly had shortcomings in terms of leadership and strategic thinking. In addition, time constraints prohibited me from doing an MBA. I enrolled for the Senior Management Development Programme (SMDP) to eliminate the gaps identified. This empowered me to achieve my dream.

Was it challenging to work full-time and study?

Yes, it was. Luckily my manager was a great motivator and it became part of my development plan at Santam - which was an advantage. I had specific time slots in my diary for learning and I was monitored accordingly. Discipline is of utmost importance. You must develop a study timetable and adhere to it.

What was the biggest take-out from the SMDP?

The importance of strategy. Knowing where you are going and implementing it. And most importantly, taking human resources along. Without people, results won't be achieved.



FRANCO'S FAVOURITES:

BOOKS: *The Maxwell Leadership Bible* by John Maxwell, and *Fire and Water: The Power of Passion, The Force of Flow* by Mike Lipkin, Reg Lascaris.

MUSIC: Gospel music – Hillsong worship songs.

FOOD: Braai vleis. I'm a farmer and meat is my preference! I enjoy the social aspect of sitting around the fire.

PASTIMES: Reading and travelling. To meet new people and see new places.

TRAVEL DESTINATION: I would like to travel to Israel.

FRANCO ON MANAGEMENT TRAINING

- For those thinking of doing the Senior Management Development Programme: Go for it. It broadens your understanding of management and empowers you to be a leader with impact. It changed me for the better because it changed my thoughts.
- For those already on the journey: Be disciplined, interact with your group and be proactive with the group assignment.

How do you ensure your own career growth?

I achieve career growth by:

- Interacting with various stakeholders, internally and externally
- Being an active participant in various forums. This allows for knowledge-sharing and creates empowerment opportunities
- Being actively involved in community activities which gives me the opportunity to learn about clients' needs directly from these clients
- Reading. I do continuous reviews of reports and newspapers
- Training. It is important to challenge yourself and enrol for short courses. I do this at least twice a year
- Receiving coaching. I've had a life coach

for the past 12 months that added great value in terms of guidance

How do you relax?

I love farming. To spend a weekend on my dad's farm outside Rehoboth, surrounded by my Bonsmara cattle, is most joyful.

Finally, what would you still like to achieve?

My aim is to complete my MBA at the USB and to be a member of the board of directors at corporate companies. My vision is to leave a legacy that promotes the importance of leadership. I also want to focus on continuous skills development and character building because I believe knowledge and the right attitude is a winning recipe. ^a