

PHILLIPINE MTIKITIKI, 46

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A driving force behind the empowerment of women across Africa – both within the multinational she spearheads and in communities across the continent.

As the first black South African woman to head up Coca-Cola in South Africa, Phillipine Mtikitiki has always been passionate about mentoring young people and empowering women.



“Early on in life I had a sense that I was going to do something meaningful with my life,” says Mtikitiki. “It’s such a privilege to have been appointed into this executive position, stewarding a brand and system that makes a difference in the lives of women across Africa.”

Excited by the South Africa systems drive for innovation, consumer-focused brands, strong customer base and robust growth opportunities, Mtikitiki advocates for the African girl-child at the grassroots level and is a champion for the development of African talent and acceleration of growth opportunities for women and youth.

From humble beginnings in Mpumalanga, she gives much credit for her later success to the supportive adults in her immediate and extended family in her early years.

“My home environment was very loving and supportive, not only in terms of promoting a cognitive space where reading, writing and maths was encouraged, but also to develop the social skills that set me up for success,” says Phillipine. “Our young people need these skills if they are to succeed today.”

After graduating from the University of KwaZulu-Natal with an honours in economics in 1998, one of her lecturers told her about a graduate programme at Coca-Cola. Mtikitiki went for the interview and has been with the Coca-Cola System for 23 years.

During this time she worked across business units and bottling entities in South Africa, across various functions and roles of increasing responsibility. She honed her skills in Operations, Marketing, Planning and Commercial Strategy before being appointed the Vice President and General Manager for the east and central Africa regions.

In this role, she was responsible for leading the development and execution of the business strategy across 12 countries, while working with Coca-Cola’s bottling partners to focus on the company’s growth agenda.

“In east Africa, I worked closely with the Coca-Cola Company’s 5by20 programme, which set out to help women entrepreneurs overcome social and economic barriers to business success—while creating thriving, sustainable communities,” explains Mtikitiki. “The vision is rooted in the belief that investing in women, who are pillars of their communities, creates a ripple effect of economic growth and sustainable change.”

Hearing women’s stories about how they managed to increase their income, support their families and make a bigger impact in their communities made Mtikitiki even more passionate about giving women the tools to gain confidence to set up and run their businesses. She is also a member of the Global Women’s Leadership Council focused on advancing career opportunities for women at Coca-Cola.

“Whether you’re a black woman like myself or somebody else, you’re going to face the headwinds of stereotypes,” says Phillipine. “What you have to do is own your story, know where you stand and what your purpose is, and focus on that. You cannot change other people, you can only change yourself.”

She believes mentorship and sponsorship programmes are critical to developing a pipeline of female talent. The company’s Women’s Lead Inspire Connect (Women’s LINC) initiative is a broader network of women across the company with a focus on the development of women.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without the mentorship, sponsorship and coaching I received along the way,” says Mtikitiki. “For leaders today, reverse mentorship is also very powerful. This is where you take junior associates and ask them to mentor you. That way you continue to learn as a leader too.”

“It’s about doing what you believe is right. If I could say something to my younger self, it would be ‘don’t worry you’ve got this covered’.”

The Coca-Cola Company’s aspiration is to be 50% led by women by 2030 and continue to make progress advancing female talent. Of the 122 senior leaders that comprise the Africa Operating Unit extended leadership team, 67 (55%) are women.

But she says being a role model should be more of an organic process, rather than something that one sets out to do.

“It’s about doing what you believe is right,” she adds. “If I could say something to my younger self, it would be ‘don’t worry you’ve got this covered’, focus on building your mind-set, your heartset and your soulset. This combination will help you to be a strong female leader as you move forward.”