

How can men support women in the workplace?

By [Yuneal Padayachy](#)

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"We rise by lifting others" - a quote by Robert G. Ingersoll which really stuck with me the first time I heard it. I believe in order to grow as individuals, collective of individuals or a country, we need to support each other in every way possible.



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In recent years, South Africa has set out to improve gender equality and women's empowerment in various spheres, including the workplace. However, achieving true gender parity requires the active involvement of all members of society, including us men.

I believe that we have a crucial role to play in supporting women's advancement and dismantling barriers that hinder their progress in the workplace. By fostering a supportive environment, advocating for equal opportunities, and challenging gender stereotypes, we can contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable workplace for all with the specific focus on Black women.

One of the fundamental ways we can support women in the workplace is by promoting gender sensitivity and practicing inclusive leadership. This involves recognising and challenging biases and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality.

A few key strategies to consider as follows:

- **Education and awareness:** We can actively educate ourselves about the challenges faced by women in the workplace, including gender-based discrimination, unequal pay, and limited career opportunities. By understanding these issues, we can better support our female colleagues effectively.

- **Addressing unconscious bias:** Unconscious biases can influence decision-making processes leading to unequal treatment. We can work towards identifying and mitigating our own biases by participating in bias awareness workshops and training programmes. This step fosters a fair and inclusive work environment.
- **Mentorship and sponsorship:** Us men can play a pivotal role in mentoring and sponsoring women within our organisations. By actively supporting and advocating for talented women, we can help create a pipeline of female leaders and increase their visibility in the workplace.



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We can actively contribute to creating equal opportunities for women by challenging discriminatory practices and advocating for policies that support gender equality. Here are a few key actions we can take:

- **Pay equity:** We can advocate for pay equity within our organisations by the team conducting remuneration audits to identify and address any gender-based pay disparities.
- **Flexible work policies:** We can champion flexible work policies, including remote work options, flexible hours, and parental leave as this will support the work-life balance of both men and women. By advocating for these policies, we will contribute to reducing the burden of caregiving responsibilities disproportionately shouldered by women.
- **Representation:** We must actively support the representation of women in leadership positions and decision-making roles. This can be achieved by encouraging women to apply for promotions and providing them with opportunities to highlight their skills and talents.
- **Recruiting and hiring practices:** We need to challenge gender biases in recruitment and hiring processes by advocating for diverse candidate pools, reviewing job descriptions for gender-neutral language, and ensuring a fair evaluation criteria.



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We can also contribute to fostering an inclusive and safe workplace culture that encourages gender equality. Here are some strategies:

- **Active bystander intervention:** We must intervene when witnessing instances of harassment, discrimination, or bias in the workplace. By speaking up and supporting victims, we will be helping to create a culture of respect and accountability.

- **Engage in dialogue:** It is essential that we actively engage in open and honest conversations about gender equality. This involves challenging sexist jokes or remarks, promoting inclusive language, and encouraging respectful dialogue among colleagues.
- **Work-life balance:** We can prioritise work-life balance and share caregiving responsibilities at home. By modelling this behaviour, we are challenging traditional gender roles and promoting a more equitable division of labour, encouraging our female counterparts to participate fully in their professional lives.

Creating a workplace environment that is conducive to the success and advancement of women requires the active engagement of men as allies and advocates. By promoting gender sensitivity, advocating for equal opportunities, and fostering an inclusive workplace culture, we can contribute to breaking down the barriers that hinder women's progress in South Africa's workforce.

It is essential to recognise that supporting women benefits organisations and the country by harnessing the diverse talents and perspectives of all employees. By working together, men and women can drive positive change, fostering an equitable and inclusive South African workplace for future generations.

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