

# Ubuntu must shine in the crisis of Covid-19

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Trudie Matthyssen is a financial controller at Sandton Sun, a Tsogo Sun flagship property, and a diamond member of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants' (SAICA's) Accounting Technicians South Africa designation or AT(SA). Her career has not only been one of self-growth but also of giving back. Here, she talks us through her journey to reaching AT(SA) diamond membership and the importance of working towards sustained, inclusive economic growth and decent work for all, especially in these unprecedented times...



Trudie Matthyssen

SAICA has been part of Trudie's career highlights package at every step of the way. She remembers receiving her initial AT(SA) membership 21 years ago and celebrated her diamond level membership status at the AT(SA) graduation ceremony last year. A privilege previously only awarded to chartered accountants, Trudie is one of the first AT(SA) members to achieve this status. Of the experience, she says AT(SA) diamond status is a significant achievement and defining milestone that serves as reward for her 33 years' dedication, commitment and contribution to the field of corporate finance so far.

Trudie began her career at Holiday Inn Jan Smuts, now Southern Sun OR Tambo, in a junior role in 1991, with her eagerness to develop seeing her promoted to Financial Controller in 1996. This was her stepping stone to wanting to help others: "My passion ignited when I was able to develop my own team, unlocking their potential, instilling pride into their work and making them see their valuable contribution."

## Self-development measured by developing others

Yet it was only in 1999 that Trudie's journey started after a Southern Sun financial manager introduced the finance office to SAICA. Trudie says her AT(SA) membership and SAICA recognition significantly contributed to her personal and professional growth over the years. She achieved Platinum status in 2009 under the international professional body, the Association of Accounting Technicians, a joint venture between SAICA and the UK's AAT(SA). The joint venture came to an end in 2017, which saw the accounting technician membership designation become fully incorporated into SAICA.

Trudie currently holds the designation of MAT(SA), and registered Chapters Consulting and Coaching in June 2019. She's about to complete her international coaching certification and is looking forward to the next leg of her career, which will see her living her dream of helping others. Trudie says, "I believe that my time in corporate, my journey with SAICA and my purpose will allow me to make a significant impact on many lives in the years to come."

This passion for giving back has driven Trudie throughout her career, and is proving especially necessary in current conditions, where a fifth of young people are currently not in education, employment and training, while the global Covid-19 pandemic wreaks havoc on the global economy. The time is, therefore, ripe to reach out where we can and redefine the way we view success.

## Time to redefine success and open the door to alternatives

While success is usually measured in rand and cents, profit margins and economic growth, Trudie has personally experienced the challenges of entrepreneurship and the thin line between success and failure. This has taught her that: "Success is in fact measured by the difference you make, the hope you bring to people, the door of opportunity you open and the candle you light for someone's possibilities, opportunities and future."

AT(SA) does this by offering an alternative to the ultimate CA(SA) career dream, which is sadly out of reach for many. Trudie says youngsters aim to go to university and wear that CA(SA) graduation gown and cap as creditors, debtors and cashbook clerks were viewed as mediocre roles for decades.

Luckily, this view has changed significantly over the last few years, with SAICA's AT(SA) designation offering entry-level accountancy qualifications and professional membership to individuals across the finance office chain. This empowers them with accounting, finance and business skills, allowing ordinary people to build a sustainable career, with a firm foundation in the finance field through quality, practical competence-based education. Each completed AT(SA) level of learning is celebrated with the same respect and dignity given to graduating CAs(SA), which opens the door for personal growth, in uplifting of individuals and communities and contributing to sustainable economic growth in the long run.

After all, Trudie says the future lies in the hands of young entrepreneurs who will be able to contribute directly to the South African economy by being instrumental in job creation, innovation, creating sustainable cities and communities and overall wellbeing.

### **Working together for a brighter future**

Trudie's own passion extends to the idea of good health and complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, which she sees as a dynamic process of change and growth, as the walls of business, society and individuals build on the foundation. Because unfortunately, there's misalignment between what most institutions of higher learning teach and the actual practical skills required by the market. Trudie comments: "The gap between theory and practice is a reality at all levels of business, irrespective of the industry." That's where AT(SA) comes in.

"As CAs(SA) are prepared for their future positions in key leadership roles through internships, so the accounting technician is provided with accounting theory combined with real-world practical experience, enabling them to apply their professional skills in the workplace. They are groomed to enter the workplace as competent, confident and empowered employees, ready to make informed decision and meaningful contributions to improve organisational productivity and efficiency at a foundational level."

But at the end of the day, opportunity and motivation lies within yourself. It's a personal journey of intention, self-discovery, inner strength, personal growth and connection with your Higher Power and purpose. That's why it's so important to empower the upcoming generation beyond the basics as they formally qualify and enter the workplace.

As a head of her department, Trudie's approach to on-the-job training and mentorship includes exposing individuals to the big picture. She wants them to understand the significance of their role and contribution to the organisation's overall results through practical exposure to the different departments and by getting them to buy into the overall mission, vision and values of the organisation. "Exposing the upcoming generation to this information empowers them to enter the workplace ready to contribute, with a positive attitude."

### **It's time for us all to do our part**

As the effects of Covid-19 become more apparent, Trudie feels that every South African can contribute to meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, on both a personal and professional level. As individuals, we choose how and where we channel our personal efforts, while organisations direct their contributions through their corporate social investment programmes. The AT(SA) profession has an exceptionally strong understanding and commitment to upholding the highest professional standards and ethics, an attribute Trudie feels is the key that will unlock a positive future.

She believes that in these unprecedented times of lockdown and global uncertainty, we have the opportunity to reflect. Nothing will be the same after Covid-19, and while the last few weeks of lock down have brought great suffering, they've also highlighted what a powerful, resilient nation we are.

Trudie concludes: "People have opened their hearts and hands, and the true spirit of Ubuntu is our hope for the future. The

creativity of individuals and society holds great promise as we're prompted to close the last chapter and write a new one. We get to see this as both a journey and a choice."

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