

Making Inroads

SA's unsatisfactory public transport system is quickly being overtaken by private taxi companies working hard to provide safe, reliable alternatives – like Basadi Letsema



Sharon Tshabalala

The unreliability of Gauteng's public transport aggravated Sharon Tshabalala to such an extent that she was inspired to form her own company: Basadi Letsema, a Setswana phrase meaning "women hard at work".

Having identified logistics and transport as the first sector to pursue, the company launched its taxi business, Dikunyo My Cabz, which offers point-to-point service around Gauteng and primarily targets corporate clients.

Entering a traditionally male-dominated sphere hasn't fazed Tshabalala, who says the company's seven fleet vehicles have been

well received in the market. "Hardly a year [since our inception], we're already in talks about partnering one of the large players in the industry. This could gain us access to the international market – something that would otherwise take years to achieve," she says. She adds: "This has been confirmation to us that there are many opportunities waiting to be taken advantage of and my partners and I will do everything humanly possible to position our company well to access them."

Tshabalala's the only executive member of My Cabz, but has four other women

business partners. "We meet at least once a month, but talk almost daily to review our progress and address challenges. I always ask for assistance when it comes to areas of which I have limited knowledge, like human resources and labour issues." She admits that the transport and logistics sector is still a male-dominated industry, from employees to managers and owners. However, she chose to view this stumbling block as a challenge, rather than a barrier to entry.

"We decided to challenge the *status quo* before making any criticisms and pointing fingers. We identified the opportunities, focused on them and left remaining issues to be tackled as they arose.

"Much as we anticipated being sidelined and bullied around by male service providers, that hasn't been the case at all. We've been well received and supported by our clients and embraced by necessary bodies like the Operating Licence Board and Gauteng Tourism. Within a period of six months after starting, we'd signed up corporate clients of good standing. Most of our clients to date are multinationals," she says.

Like any other start-up, raising capital has been Basadi Letsema's biggest obstacle, and the women were forced to dip into their own savings. Eventually, however, the company received financial support from an empowered logistics organisation to obtain and maintain its vehicles. "When potential funders failed to see the reason for financing us, that created an element of self-doubt. We questioned whether we truly had it in us to take on such an opportunity and its challenges. But we had to overcome that and focus on the unique quality service we were planning to offer the market," says Tshabalala. **D**

TSHABALALA'S FIVE SUCCESS SECRETS

- Prayer helped my business work out.
- Perseverance meant I didn't give up on my dream.
- Focus grew the business.
- Being a team player was intrinsic to our success.
- Hard work continues to help us excel.