

Legal tech CEO shares 10 leadership tips for women

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Women in Tech (WIT) Conversations is an all-women virtual forum launched recently to spark interaction and impart professional insights for the advancement of women in the South African tech space.

A collaboration between legal technology firm, LexisNexis South Africa, and information technology vendor, Dell Technologies, the sessions see some of South Africa's foremost women in technology sharing their professional experiences.

Those interested in attending the next WIT Conversations event on Monday, 8 March 2021 at 2pm, commemorating International Women's Day, can [register here](#).

During the first event in the series, held on 18 February, LexisNexis CEO and chairperson of the board, Videsha Proothveerajh, shared insights under the theme, **Love Lessons in Leadership**.

"If you lead from the heart, you can never go wrong," she said, as she outlined several nuggets of advice for those working their way up in careers at the frontiers of the new economy.

Proothveerajh has 20+ years' experience working in high profile ICT companies such as EDS, Microsoft and Intel and running her own business focusing on business strategy and value creation. Her accolades include being recognised as: the most influential Woman in Business and Government for ICT in Africa; a *Forbes* changemaker in Africa; one of the 50 most inspiring women in South Africa as part of the global Inspiring Fifty initiative and among the 'Africa 50' of Leaders in Data Centres and Cloud, driving change in Africa.

Her advice to attendees was:

1. Know your strengths

"The technology industry is synonymous with disruption. Add to that the social divisions and cultural divides of our time and we have an environment that is not always amiable to both genders. In an environment like this we, as women, can be recognised for what we bring to the party – things like compassion, humility, human connection and empathy at all levels. These are as important – if not more important than – the traditional corporate jargon around deal-making, process efficiencies, innovation and being cutting edge. We need to start bringing our strengths to the table as women," she said.

2. Say yes to change

Being changeable is a new skill set that is necessary for success going forward. "Decades ago, we spoke about IQ as the most important thing," said Proothveerajh. "In the last few years, the focus shifted to EQ and now we talk about AQ, the adaptability quotient. Going forward both EQ and AQ will be the hallmarks of great leaders," she said.



Videsha Proothveerajh

“Even as companies, we must change in order to move forward. But if we want to live in a world where both genders are equally respected and valued, we must start looking at how we accelerate this journey of change. Change is necessary for growth, but how we promote and execute on that change is also very important,” she shared.

She said a winning formula is to drive change that is expansive and that is motivated through transformation. “When you give a reason for change to your teams, you must be able to put on the table a narrative that reflects what is in it for that person, team, department, or company, and the benefit behind the change. Transformation is about aligning people to meaning and purpose rather than offering a bland carrot and stick method.”

3. Be fearless

Proothveerajh urged attendees to be bold, gutsy and a force to be reckoned with.

“Intention is very important and it’s necessary to go after goals that might have once been considered big, hairy and audacious. Even when silence seems safer, you have to learn to speak up, speak your truth and use your voice for those who have no voice. Being extraordinary means being willing to take risks and to use the platforms we have in order to effect change, not just in our companies, but in our communities, societies, our country and the world,” she said.

4. Know your why and know yourself

Proothveerajh said it is critical to solicit regular feedback for oneself during the professional journey and to receive it in a manner that makes people comfortable to give ongoing feedback.

“When you understand your why, you can understand your purpose and what brings you joy and meaning. If you’re able to link it to what you do on a daily basis, then the cliché holds true – you will never work a day in your life,” she said.

5. Love yourself first

“Being authentic means loving yourself first, sometimes being selfish, being kind and nurturing to yourself even when you have let yourself down. Know who you are, understand your gaps and be willing to work on them,” she advised.

“Ignore the inner dialogue and the imposter syndrome. Practice being kind to yourself. Take care of your mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing because you cannot pour from a cup that is empty,” she added.

6. Play your trump card

Proothveerajh said that “playing the gender card” does not need to be perceived as negative. “As women, our gender can be an opportunity rather than a threat. This isn’t about playing the victim. We should look at what we uniquely bring to the table. We are great at many things, because we are empathetic, collaborative, strategic in our nature rather than transactional, comfortable with ambiguity, curious and keen to find solutions,” she said.

7. Build alliances

Proothveerajh stressed the importance of working together and being willing to celebrate the next woman’s success. “We must strive to strengthen others and hold space for them. Together, we are so much more powerful but also more impactful,” she said.

8. Take small steps daily for big change

While each woman’s journey is different, small steps can be taken daily to make an impact on your career.

“My personal perspective is to start every day with a grateful heart and to be thankful for the amazing opportunities before me. When I lead with a grateful heart, I always attract more positivity into my life,” she said.

9. Be your own fan club

Proothveerajh said it isn't always necessary or helpful to look for accolades and praise outside of yourself. "I am my own fan club. It's also important to have a strong circle of people around you who care enough about you to call you out when necessary," she said.

"Making an impact in your organisation must be measurable. Identify your individual and unique value, understand your worth and communicate it regularly. Play to your strengths instead of focusing on your weaknesses," she added.

10. Know your personal non-negotiables

"There is no one size fits all when it comes to juggling family responsibilities with executive commitments. Be very honest with your kids, your family and your support system. Also, know the non-negotiables you're not prepared to waive, based on what is important to you and your family, so for example, one of mine is never missing my kids' birthdays," she said.

The WIT Conversations come at a time that women continue to be under-represented among workers with disruptive technical skills, with the [World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2020](#) showing they represent only 14% of professionals in cloud computing and engineering, 28% in data and AI, and 36% in product development.

Regional sales director of Dell Technologies, Sabine Dederich, outlined Dell's moonshot goals for 2030. "By that time, we want to have women representing 50% of our workforce and 40% of our leadership team. Our workforce in each country should also represent the demographics of the countries we operate in. Empowerment of women and girls – especially women of colour – to join the IT sector and to study STEM subjects is very important to Dell Technologies."

Proothveerajh said LexisNexis had likewise managed to change the face of the company over the last year. "Three out of five of our senior leaders are women, whereas previously we had just one. Six out of 10 of our board members are also women," she said.

The importance of embedding gender parity into the future of technology has only heightened with the rapid labour market changes and digital acceleration of Covid-19. This presents a renewed opportunity to balance efforts between the demand side of growing jobs and the supply side of future-ready skills.

"Women must raise their hands and be counted," concluded Proothveerajh.

Future sessions of WIT Conversations will interrogate topics including: Importance of Self Love; Recruitment of Women in Tech; University Mentorship; Creating your own Board; and Reintegrating Women into the Workplace.

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