



South African Payroll Association

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Gender shift evident in payroll

Despite the prevalent gender bias in the South African payroll industry towards women, change is under way says Val Forrest, Executive Director and Administrator of the South African Payroll Association (SAPA).

“Payroll has a high level of discipline and routine and women handle routine well, others just fall into the job because they are good at figures and can build good relationships,” Forrest adds.

The gender imbalance is also evident in SAPA’s membership, which is currently sitting at 50% female that are white and Indian, with the remainder being divided between black women and men.

“However, it is enormously exciting to see the number of men that are coming into payroll and they have a definite layer of sophistication to them,” Forrest says. “In this profession, if you are good, no business wants to lose you and those who come into the profession today are well aware of this.”

She further notes that she would like to see change around equal pay for equal work and more recognition as to the important role the payroll professional plays in the success of any business.

Evolution of payroll

Focusing on other changing trends in payroll, Forrest mentions that in the 60’s, the payroll practitioner inhabited an entirely different world to the one in which they currently practice. It was, to be precise, a hard slog.

“Sometimes I wonder how we managed back then,” says Forrest, who has been in the payroll industry for the past 50 years. “We did the calculations for payroll in an enormous ledger that was so big, I had to stand up to complete the top lines when I started a new page.”

Wages and salaries were manually calculated and checked by the accountant, before being drawn in cash from the bank. The pay envelopes were painstakingly handwritten, carefully filled and recipients signed for their money in a ledger.

Then came the Kalamazoo payroll systems, which automated some of the manual processes. With our current technology available, things are changing ever faster.

Transformative technology

The advent of the personal computer brought Turbo Cash accounting software, which allowed records to be pulled up in seconds rather than laborious physical hunting for files. Payroll was transformed.

“However, payroll became more complex, vast volumes of legislation were passed and we became project managers, counsellors, guardians of information, diplomats and accountants,” says Forrest. “Now the payroll practitioner is a true professional who knows how important the role is.”

“I have been at SAPA for 14 years and watched the association grow,” adds Forrest. “We have SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) recognised qualifications, have become a professional body in South Africa and added inordinate value to the payroll profession. But there are still some inequalities that need to be addressed, changes which need to be made.”

“Organisations need to give as much attention to the development and training of professional payroll personnel as they do to the rest of the people they employ,” says Forrest. “And they need to introduce the concept of payroll as an attractive choice for young people to build a career.”

Forrest will be concluding her successful payroll career and involvement with SAPA at the association’s conference in September this year. For more information, visit <http://www.sapayroll.co.za/Events/Conference.aspx>.

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