

ALWAYS KEEPING HER EYE ON THE PRIZE

Keeping her eye on the prize of higher education helped Masanele Bam steer her way through seasonal work (and a fulltime job offer from a major retailer) and a learnership with the Department of Transport and Public Works to the ASISA Academy's IMACS@TSIBA programme and her current role as a Client Service Administrator at Taquanta Asset Managers.

Bam's journey stands out not only for her determination, but also for how she turned an unconventional academic path – via marketing and tax – into a fulfilling career in financial services.

After finishing school, in George in the Western Cape, in 2013 Bam had a clear goal: to study further. "I had applied to various universities because I wanted to study, but finances said otherwise," she says. She refused to let go of that dream.

In 2014, what she calls her "gap year", she was anything but on a break. After writing her matric exams she took a seasonal job at a leading South African retailer, where she quickly earned the offer of a full-time position. But she turned it down. "I just kept thinking, 'No! I'm going back to school'," she says.

When she got the opportunity to join The First Work Experience PAY Programme, a learnership run by the Western Cape Office of the Premier that places matriculants in government departments Bam seized it. She was assigned to the Department of Transport and Public Works, where she handled administrative tasks and accompanied inspectors on site visits.

"It was something very different from what I knew," she says. "I had done commerce and maths at school, so being exposed to public works was new and interesting."

Yet, even as she enjoyed the experience, she knew she wanted more, so, when an opportunity arose to enrol for a Higher Certificate in Business Administration (HCBA) at TSIBA Education, she jumped at the chance to pursue her dreams.

"I just felt that I had to go back to school," she says.

Bam went on to do her Bachelor of Business Administration at TSIBA from 2016 to 2018. Although she had once dreamed of becoming an accountant, she joined the marketing stream at TSIBA. Then, a conversation with a high school friend who was also at TSIBA, changed everything. "She told me about the Asisa Academy's IMACS@TSIBA programme and said, 'You need to do this!'"

Even though the programme, developed by the ASISA Academy in partnership with TSIBA, is normally offered to finance-stream students, Bam applied and was accepted. "For some reason, I got in," she says, laughing.

The programme's mix of academic learning and workplace readiness resonated deeply with her. "It really opened a lot for me," she says. "If it wasn't for that programme, I think I'd be in marketing now."

Her IMACS@TSIBA cohort became a vital support system, especially when she found some of the finance modules challenging. "When it was difficult to connect the dots, my classmates helped me through. That's how I survived, and I really did enjoy it."

She fondly remembers the community spirit. "TSIBA is a home. I knew I was safe there. My classmates had my back all the time. I wasn't scared to try things because I had that strong support."

When it came time for the IMACS@TSIBA students to be placed with sponsor companies for the practical component, Bam went through several interviews – more than five, she recalls, with Taquanta Asset Managers being the final interview.

Taquanta offered her a sponsorship and turned out to be the perfect fit for her. Her placement coincided with a difficult time personally – her grandfather had just passed away – and receiving her placement email from Taquanta while still at home in mourning with her family was a bittersweet moment and a big relief.



Masanele Bam, a client service administrator at Taquanta

"I really liked the environment from the start," she says. "Even though it's a business, they really take care of their people."

The feeling has been mutual from the start. Siphosethu Futwa, Senior Client Service Administrator at Taquanta, describes "the privilege of witnessing Masanele's career growth since she joined Taquanta in 2017" and says she is "a wonderful colleague, an excellent team player and her positive attitude brings great energy to the team".

Futwa, to whom Bam reports, said that while she had "faced early challenges" in her role at Taquanta, "her eagerness to learn and openness to feedback were instrumental in turning her performance around", adding that "her growth has been remarkable, consistently demonstrating outstanding performance and a strong work ethic."

Now seven years into her career at Taquanta, Bam is still motivated by learning and growth. Based in Cape Town, married and a mother of one, she enthuses about the way client service presents something different every day and "combines technical knowledge and people skills".