

The business OF FAMILY

BY LYNSEY CHUTEL

A Tuesday night in early October marked yet another victory for African women with the launch of this publication in Johannesburg, South Africa. The bold monochrome cover and red lettering of the inaugural issue sent the message that African women were seated at the boardroom table and ready to make their voices heard.

But even in the atmosphere of affirmation and optimism, the keynote speaker, businesswoman Cheryl Carolus, pointed out that women still face many challenges, from the kitchen to the office.

“Even Superman had a mother,” said the Gold Fields chairperson, reminding the room full of powerful women that their ancestors had played a key role in men’s success for centuries.

What then about Wonder Woman? The iconic comic book character is a demigoddess who battles otherworldly villains with little more than a lasso of truth and a tiara of telepathy. Today, Wonder Woman would be wearing a business suit, multitasking her way through the corporate world with a personal digital assistant. But even she would probably buckle under the pressure.

In her book, *Wonder Women: Sex, Power, and the Quest for Perfection*, former Harvard Business School professor Debora L. Spar explores the demands on women.

She notes that women may have broken through the glass ceiling, but they still face a plethora of obstacles in the corporate environment, which have not adapted to the professional and domestic demands of working women.

Referring to the impossibly high standards that women in the American workplace hold themselves to, Spar says the woman in the perfume advertisement has become the icon of the working girl: “It conveyed this image of this sort of effortless combination of work and motherhood and sexuality and professionalism and ease.”

As an increasing number of African women become a formidable force in business, a reinterpretation of traditional family values seems to be necessary to ease some of the pressures on working women.

“If someone were to ask me what makes successful women, it’s about the infrastructure. But it’s also about love and the giving spirit,” says Batsana Kumalo. The beauty queen-turned-media maven attributes much of her success to Agnes Mofokeng, the woman who has lived with her since she was 10 days old.

“She’s an extension of my mother. For me, she epitomizes grace, kindness. A good soul, who, in all my years, has been with me. She has always just been the rock for my family. My husband and I often ask each other what we would do without her.”

Shared child care is a common fixture in African homes, but not for Kumalo. “I don’t see her as an employee. It’s never been about that. We have a mutually respectful relationship and it’s about family. They say it takes a village to raise a child and she’s part of my village.

“It goes beyond employee-employer. It’s about being in a village and having an elderly person in my village helping me raise young men who will hopefully be trailblazers, world shakers and history makers,” says Kumalo.

Mofokeng agrees: “This doesn’t feel like work to me... sometimes I have to remind myself that she’s my boss. But often I feel like she’s my daughter – having watched her grow and go through the different phases of her life.”

However, Mofokeng emphasizes the importance of trust in such a close domestic setting. “If you’re in my line of work, you need to respect your job, take it seriously and be professional. You must know why you’re working and throw yourself in.”



Former Miss SA Batsana Kumalo

PHOTO: Gallo Images / SundayTimes /
Katherine Muick-Mere

As an increasing number of African women become a formidable force in business, a reinterpretation of traditional family values seems to be necessary to ease some of the pressures on working women.

Meanwhile, performer and businesswoman Unathi Msengana describes her decade-long relationship with her project manager, Colene Arendse, as one that relies on this trust.

"I think, because there's a lot of trust, and I know her intrinsically as a person and she knows me as a person and we know each other's value systems and how we want to do business with dignity... It's a huge trust that she has in me because her company is a corporate commodity," says Msengana.

Currently Arendse is working toward launching the first music and business conference in South Africa next year. And Msengana is acutely aware that her professional behavior directly impacts on Arendse's business. "It just takes one bad spell to tarnish her company."

The usually shy Arendse, who prefers to work behind the scenes, jumps in: "It's her brand, it's my company. I take my hat off to her. She's in music, on radio, on TV and not everyone will like you. The only place she's not criticized is at home."

As business partners, they are aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses. Where Msengana excels at sales, Arendse closes the deal with a watertight proposal and streamlined logistics management. It's also a business model built on family values. "You identify a strength in someone because you know that person and you use that professionally because trust is intrinsic in the relationship," Msengana explains.

"Professionally, you know they have the capability. But personally,

there's that trust and if you betray it, it would not only destroy the professional relationship, but it would destroy families. We know there's a lot at stake if we disappoint each other."

The pair is also planning a series of wine and music festivals across the continent, modeled on the Soweto Wine Festival. The event aims to introduce South African blends to new audiences, while simultaneously promoting South African musicians. Msengana is not only a business partner but will also perform at the events.

When Kumalo began building her career, she knew she wanted Mofokeng to be a part of her life. After she won the Miss South Africa beauty pageant in 1994, Kumalo moved from her family home in Soweto to an apartment in northern Johannesburg. At the age of 20 and alone in the city, Kumalo asked Mofokeng to live with her and help manage her life in the public gaze, with the demands of being a beauty queen.

A year later, that beauty queen relaunched her career as a businesswoman, becoming an equal partner in Tswelopele Productions. The company would later merge with Union Alliance Media and was listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

Kumalo's latest venture is the acquisition and redevelopment of abandoned buildings to create new urban spaces. But when she was building a family, Kumalo again turned to the woman who had helped to raise her and her siblings.

Kumalo and her husband, Vodacom CEO Romeo Kumalo, insist that their two sons speak Sesotho at home.



Performer Unathi Msengana

And, with Mofokeng's help, the children are taught to respect traditional values.

"When I look around, this family hasn't changed much from the atmosphere in the Makgalemele home. These families have the same values," says Mofokeng, comparing Kumalo's home to that of her parents.

"If she comes home late and leaves very early in the morning she will call and say: 'would you please sort out this and that in the house?' She'll ask: 'how are things going?' and so on. I also give her feedback when she's not around... There's constant communication between us," explains Mofokeng.

Kumalo values these regular updates: "There is an amount of guilt, when you feel: 'I wasn't there for this and that milestone in my child's life'. I think guilt will always be there. As mothers we're nurturers, we want to be there, we want to raise our children, but times have changed..."

"People may say I'm a workaholic but it's who I am, as well as a mother, and it makes me a happy mother." Msengana believes her close relationship with her project manager has enabled her to be a better mother.

"I remember, in the first couple of meetings, Colene said: 'You need to let go, you need to let go'. Because I used to micromanage. It's allowed me to be more present as a mom." **FW**