



IN CONVERSATION WITH SECTOR LEADERSHIP



Kasthuri Soni

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Kasthuri is the Chief Executive Officer of Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator. Kasthuri is a chartered accountant and the previous Group Finance Director who spent 10 years at Deloitte in various leadership positions. She brings prior experience as Chief Executive Officer of Soul City and is widely regarded as a seasoned executive. As a member of the team that incubated the organisation at its founding in 2011 she has deep institutional knowledge of Harambee.

Q: WHAT ENERGISES YOU ABOUT YOUR WORK?

Let me start by sharing that I am deeply grateful to be in the privileged and humbling position of being able to do work that feeds my soul at Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator. What energises me is the people – from three perspectives. Firstly, I draw inspiration from the young people that we serve – they are tenacious, determined and have a strong desire to be productively engaged in the economy. It is synchronicity that I write this article in June, an important month in South Africa that shines a spotlight on the young people who are at the centre of what we do at Harambee. I am more motivated than ever by our unique opportunity to be a catalyst for significant and enduring positive change in tackling youth unemployment. **As a change leader, I am driven by the transformative and outsized impact that our work can have on the lives of young people, women and broader society.**

Secondly, I absolutely love the amazing people in the Harambee village who bring their heads, hands and hearts to their work every day. I am truly honoured and excited to partner with a highly talented and fabulous leadership team to shepherd Harambee through its next phase. It is a gift to get to do this purpose-driven work in a values-driven culture with leaders who are very smart, committed, humble and caring.

Thirdly, I am super-excited by our coalition of ecosystem partners (which includes Digital Council Africa) who are working together to pathway young people into earning and learning opportunities through the sayouth.mobi platform. **These phenomenal people are essentially building a movement for youth economic inclusion. Our collaboration efforts will maximise opportunities for young people and be a game changer for the youth of South Africa. It is so awesome to be on this journey with this inspirational and powerful collective.**

"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

Q: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHERS?

Believe in yourself alongside striving to always do your best and be your best.

This will require you to back yourself with exceptional work ethic. Be driven to autograph your work with excellence. Having a growth mindset and making a commitment to lifelong learning will be fundamental to your success. Make an investment in your personal development and self-mastery. Being your best is also about how you show up for others. Remember to be kind to yourself, have fun and practice mindfulness rituals to keep the balance!



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I show up as a servant leader who is committed to helping others shine and unlock their potential. Growing talent is something that energises me and I am always ready to share knowledge. My objective is to help my team be the best that they can be, so I am intentional about creating opportunities for learning, development and elevation outside their comfort zones.

I make my expectations clear, equip my team, provide guidance and then hold them accountable to a high standard of performance. My approach is to typically work alongside my team, as I believe that the most effective learning happens through collective thinking and engagement in the work environment.

Q: HOW DO YOU EMPOWER OTHERS?

I pride myself in leading by example and am happy roll up my sleeves and jump in to support, where necessary.

For me, it is always a priority to pause and appreciate the efforts, as well as, affirm the successes of team members. I am also prepared to lead through the discomfort of having courageous conversations, as I ascribe to the notion that “feedback is the breakfast of champions”. With that mindset, I provide concise, honest and timeous feedback with specific data points to help them learn from the experience. Tone matters as much as the message, so I am very thoughtful in how I provide the feedback. My motive is not to criticise or blame, but rather to focus on the lessons learnt to do it better next time. In order to create an enabling environment for growth, it remains important to build a learning culture and foster a psychologically safe environment to “fail forward”.

In empowering others, I aspire to Sheryl Sandberg’s principle that “Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence”.

Q: IF YOU COULD HAVE ONE SUPERPOWER, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE IT TO BE?

I would love to have the superpower of sprinkling abundance like pixie dust across the globe. How amazing would it be for everyone to have an abundance of love, joy, kindness, success, learning, impact, wellness and memorable moments! It would surely make the world a better place for all.

Q: IF YOU COULD GIVE JUST ONE LEADERSHIP LESSON THAT YOU’VE LEARNT OVER THE YEARS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Lead with authenticity, humility and humanity.

Afterall -

“Leadership is not about being in charge but about taking care of those in your charge – Simon Sinek”