

The woman behind the mentor

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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In a world where most people are just looking to get ahead, there are the few who find purpose in helping others get there. Protea Hotels' training manager, Nancy Gaylard is one of those who have a passion for mentoring and helping others become the best they can be. Having recently been named 'Man of the Match' in the 2016 Cape Legends Interhotel Awards, we interviewed Gaylard to find out why she loves her job and what it's like to be 'the [wo]man'.



'Man of the Match' Nancy Gaylard at the 2016 Cape Legends Interhotel Awards.

■ Tell us a bit about who you are and your role at the Protea Hotel by Marriott Johannesburg Balalaika Sandton?

I am the training manager at the Protea Hotel Balalaika; I deal with skills development of people, as well as the occasional HR-related issue from time to time. I try assisting people into understanding their job roles better and hopefully to do their jobs better. I try and help people develop their full potential through training and development.

■ What inspired you on your career path?

I started off as a trainee with Protea Hotels in 1997 and worked my way through all departments within the hotel. Having been transferred to various hotels and being put in at the deep end and learning the ropes, growing from within the company, I learnt that my strength was helping staff understand their job roles - and talking for a living! I asked to be developed in skills development and training... I fell in love and found what I was good at - mentoring and guiding people. Over the years I have learnt that in training, we learn something new every day. So when you have a bad experience, there is always something another person learns from this.

Something that I do enjoy explaining to staff is 'to remember that we are the customer too'; that when we leave the workplace we are now the customer – so would you be happy with the service you just gave a guest? If the answer is no, then why did you give that service? 'Treat people the way you want to be treated' is how we should address each customer service challenge.

■ You were recently named 'Man of the Match' at the 2016 Cape Legends Interhotel Awards. What does it mean to you and to the industry as a whole that you, as a woman, have won this award?

It was nice knowing that I won this award because *“Nancy pushed the boundaries and raised the bar, and that she was an exceptional mentor and a source of inspiration to all her peers.”* That was the comment from ShowCook’s managing editor, Chania Morritt-Smith.

I wouldn’t have thought that of myself and, hearing it, it sounds surreal. I didn’t do anything that I don’t do when at work. It is nice to be appreciated and I am really humbled that this is how I was perceived during the competition. It validates that this programme is on the right track.

Achieving ‘Man of the Match’, being a woman, is quite awesome!

■ ***Now, you have a particular dedication to helping empower deaf staff members. Why is that, and tell us about your initiatives to provide work opportunities for them?***

The unemployment rate for the deaf community is so high and it shouldn’t be. A person who cannot hear can do everything we can (sometimes better as they are more focused and not distracted) - the only difference is they cannot hear!

The hotel currently has 50 staff members that have been trained to sign basic SASL (South African sign language). By doing this we are hoping that when a deaf learner is on the property they feel supported and know they are free to communicate to all, helping them feel part of the team.

As for the staff who are interested in going into cooking, we send them for cookery lessons at HTA School of Culinary Art and for those who want to pursue a career in management we send them to the University of Johannesburg to study hospitality management. These programmes vary between one and three years. They are also joined by interpreters and a data capturer.

I am hoping that in the future we are able to get more hotels on board so they do the same thing we are doing.

■ ***As a mentor to so many others, who do you look to as your mentor?***

I have so many!

Family is very important to me. My parents for raising me, my sister for putting up with me.

I like to think that my husband and son are my biggest fans.

My son has made me a better trainer and person. He is almost four and he is learning this world from scratch and how he looks at it with innocent eyes... We all should look at the world the way a child does and from his perspective – we *are* the wrong in the world and at the same time we are in control of making it right!

■ ***What is your message this Women’s Month?***

Be the colleague who motivated you.
Be the vision you saw at the start of your career.
Be the mom you love.
Be the person you would follow!

I think that being a man or woman doesn't make much difference in this industry, it is the skill, dedication and work ethic that one brings to the table that makes all the difference.

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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