I DIDN'T WANT TO JUST SETTLE WHEREVER I LANDED

Mamatholo Mkwanazi, a client regulatory reporting analyst at Ninety One Investment Managers, is accustomed to putting herself out of her comfort zone. Leaving Cape Town after completing her undergrad degree to do her Honours in Pretoria and pivoting from Economics to join the ASISA Academy's Fezeka Graduate Programme are examples of the approach she continues to apply today, "to not just settle wherever I land, but to find a place that aligns with my aspirations".

Originally from the Free State, Mkwanazi moved to Cape Town when she was in high school after the death of her parents. After completing her matric at Bloubergrant High School in 2017, she completed a Bachelor of Commerce (Economics and Investments) at the University of the Western Cape in 2021. Then she decided to stretch herself by applying at a university far from home and completed her Honours in Economics at the University of Pretoria.

It was a good choice, she says, "I learned a lot". It was also the context in which she was introduced to the Fezeka Graduate Programme, a structured development programme run by the ASISA Academy and Joint Prosperity that is expanding the talent pool of women in asset management.

As she was nearing the end of Honours in 2022, when she still had her heart set on becoming an economist, she came across an advertisement for Fezeka, and was intrigued by the sound of the programme that provides high potential, black South African female graduates with a route into asset management.

Mamatholo Mkwanazi, a client regulatory reporting analyst at Ninety One Investment Managers

Having recently attended a cocktail event at Allan Gray that was designed to introduce graduates to the industry, Mkwanazi says she thought, "Why not?"

That turned out to be another excellent choice. "The Fezeka Programme was without a doubt the best programme I have ever been part of," she says. "It is a good programme because of the all-round exposure one gets to the industry, on top of the mentorship and the sisterhood among and across cohorts."

Mkwanazi noted the support and mentorship as particular benefits. "One of the things I appreciated most about the Fezeka Graduate Programme was the inclusion of softer skills. For example, they did psychometric testing to discover our different personalities so that they could place us in companies that would allow us to come out of our shells."

In addition to the theoretical knowledge and professional development, the Fezeka Graduate Programme gives graduates practical work experience within established top performing investment management businesses. Mkwanazi's work rotations were with PPS Investments, Perpetua Investment Managers, and Merchant West Investments.

"I think they did an amazing job with the allocations for each graduate and the different companies. I got a taste of experiencing different-sized businesses and also seeing different departments within a bigger organisation. Ninety One was not one of her rotations but at the end of the programme the graduates were invited to interviews by the companies that had not hosted them, and Ninety One offered her a position in mid-2024. The position was different from her current role as a client regulatory reporting analyst, which she started in May this year, "a very exciting role and a big transition from my previous role as an operations analyst".

She loves the new role, she says "because I get to engage with a lot of teams". "I told my mentor, Jenny Albrecht, that the space I would ideally like to be in is product development."

She knows that achieving this dream will require a whole lot of experience and enhancing her studies. "People in product development tend to have studied actuarial science or have an MBA. However, I see my current role as a great platform for growth. It's giving me invaluable exposure to different parts of the business, and it's helping me build the skills and insights that will support my future career aspirations" she says.

Mkwanazi adds that her path to this role was not direct. She was interviewing for a different role when her ultimate goal became obvious to her interviewers, who helped her to change course.

"The two amazing ladies who interviewed me figured out where I wanted to be. Based on what I said and my previous experience, they provided feedback to the recruitment team on the role they thought I would be suitable for," she says. "That's how I then ended up in this role."

And a very suitable role it is. As her manager, Yandisa Gcwabe, Client Reporting Team Leader, puts it: "Mamatholo is exceptionally driven and demonstrates a remarkable willingness to take ownership. In Client Operations, two of the qualities we value most are ownership and accountability – and she embodies both, along with many more strengths that make her stand out."

Mkwanazi is very intentional – strategic even, you might say – but she also clearly puts her hand up and asks for what she needs to progress. "I think Fezeka played a huge role in me being like this. We were challenged a lot to not just sit in our corners. We were told that it is very important to engage. That gave me the courage to set up those meetings and ask questions and be very clear about where I wanted to be.

"When I started at Ninety One I told my mentor that I didn't just want to settle wherever I landed, that I wanted to go into a space that would align with my aspirations. I am an introvert, but Fezeka did a very good job of boosting my confidence levels. When I think of myself from when I started the programme to now there has been a huge shift."

"More than anything, I'm grateful for the support from the ASISA Academy and from Joint Prosperity, and having Patience Motlana as a life coach – she played a huge role in my journey through Fezeka. I still reach out to her today and give her feedback on where I am in my life. I think the role that a mentor plays in one's career, especially when you're starting out, is crucial. I'm grateful that I was given one, that she was carefully matched to me."