ONE INTERNSHIP AFTER ANOTHER, BUT BEATRICE RAMALOKO WOULDN'T CHANGE A THING

After completing the ASISA Academy Independent Financial Advisor (IFA) Internship in 2018, Beatrice Ramaloko was offered a place on a graduate programme at Ninety One (then Investec Asset Management). For a minute she thought "Oh no, not another programme, when am I going to get a real job?", but now the data operations analyst at Ninety One says she wouldn't change a thing.

Raised in Mokopane, a small town in Limpopo, Ramaloko was sent to boarding school at Prestige College, an independent school in Hammanskraal, near Pretoria, for high school. At the time, her father said he wanted her to get exposure beyond their small town; he didn't want her to get "locked up there".

She says back then she thought getting away from her parents sounded like fun. Like many a teenager would, Ramaloko pictured a life of freedom. "Little did I know," she says, it was your typical boarding school." In place of the imagined freedom, Ramaloko got her first dose of exposure to life outside a small circle. It gave her a new perspective and a curiosity for learning and being exposed to new things that has served her well in a long journey of learning after school.

"My dad has this belief that you are as great as your exposure. He said, 'Go see the world; if it doesn't work out, you can always come back'."

After matriculating in 2013, she registered for a BCom Finance at the University of Johannesburg. After completing that, she did her Honours in Financial Planning, also at UJ, in 2017. It was during her Honours that Ramaloko was invited to apply for the ASISA Academy's IFA Internship.

After applying too late for her first choice of degree (Accounting), she had opted for choice number 2 (Financial Planning), fortunate happenstance, she realises today. Then, later, she was all set on being a Financial Planner but, again, life had other plans and that, too, worked in her favour. Ramaloko finds her work as a data operations analyst at Ninety One interesting and challenging and 100% the right place at this stage of her career, where she is building knowledge and confidence.

Her growth in both areas is obvious to those around her, too. Her manager, Carol Holtzhausen, Head of Portfolio Services, said: "Beatrice has shown consistent and impressive growth since joining the team. She has not only expanded her knowledge base but also demonstrated increased confidence in applying it to her work."

Looking back, Ramaloko has positive memories of the process of interviewing for a host company during the IFA Internship. "It was so interesting," she says. "The interviews we did were almost like speed dating with potential hosts. You had two minutes to put your best foot forward and you had to do it eight times [with different potential hosts].

She got four callbacks and, after a series of interviews, accepted a position with Ascent Wealth Management for a year's internship. It was a small firm and there weren't a lot of opportunities for client time but, Ramaloko says, that year taught her "so much about putting yourself out there and doing the best you can with what you have".

"Even if you don't have all the necessary tools you need to be able to say, 'I don't know the answer to this question. Let me ask someone. If that person doesn't know, they will probably know who to ask.

"It taught me the importance of relationships with not only the people you work with but within the overall organization. That was a very important tool for me when I got into a bigger company."

The IFA Internship had effectively been a steppingstone into the Ninety One Graduate Programme. There was a moment, she says, when she thought, "I'm moving from an internship to another graduate programme. When am I going to get a real position?" Her frustration didn't last long, however, and she loved that time of "learning and being a sponge, absorbing as much as you possibly can". Ramaloko liked the idea that "there are no stupid questions when you are learning". Being an intern, she says, gives you the confidence to say, 'I don't know anything. I'm here to learn as much as I can'."

Beatrice Ramaloko, a Data Operations Analyst at Ninety One.

The two internships were very different. At Ninety One she had the chance to spend time with telephonic and walk-in clients, as well as the experience being "very admin intense". She is very glad to have been through two intense internships before becoming a fully-fledged employee.

"I wouldn't change it, even if I could. It gave me the opportunity to move around and to understand different parts of the business. It gave me the ability to draw myself a bigger picture of what the company is striving towards. I don't think I would have been able to do that if I had immediately gone into a permanent position."

Just as her graduate programme with Ninety One was about to end Ramaloko got a call from HR, and they said, "Hey, how do you feel about moving to Cape Town?" She spoke to her Dad and he said: "You have nothing to lose. It's exposure, right? If it fails, you can always come back. And even then, you would have learned something, you would have brought back something with you."

Her current role as a data operations analyst is building her confidence further since she has had to become accustomed to speaking to "big players in the company". Ramaloko says, "I can pick up the phone and call a trader, or a peer, or an analyst. It has given me that confidence in the same way that the internships gave me the confidence to ask questions. When I speak to people in the company, I grab knowledge from this role and that role and combine it together. Colleagues at Ninety One are always so willing to share their knowledge."

It is clearly a case of willing teacher, willing student. Ramaloko's manager, Holtzhausen, adds: "Beatrice's proactive approach to learning and her eagerness to take on new challenges have quickly made her a valuable member of the team. Beyond task execution, she has contributed meaningfully to team discussions and collaboration, strengthening overall outcomes. Her progress reflects both her commitment and potential and it is clear that she will continue to make strong contributions as she develops further in her career."

Ultimately, Ramaloko sees herself ending up in a sales role where she will be on the other side of the table with the IFAs, almost full circle to her first internship.