

From tower crane operator to safety officer with Grace

By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Neither intimidated by heights nor working in a male-dominated sector, Grace Yoliswa Nyilika is an inspiration for all women keen on taking on the construction industry as a career path. Journeying from the Eastern Cape to Joburg, Nyilika joined Enza Construction as a tower crane operator, but soon after took a keen interest in safety on site. With support from the company through her studies, Nyilika is now assisting as a safety officer on one of Enza's sites and is also in the process of obtaining her professional registration in construction health and safety with the South African Council for Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP).



Grace Yoliswa Nyilika, safety officer, Enza Construction

Celebrating [Women's Month on Biz](#), we caught up with Nyilika to find out more about her experience in the construction industry, what a typical day on the job entails, how she's tackled some of the challenges she's faced, and who inspires her.

❏ **Could you tell us more about yourself - how did you get started in construction?**

When I left the Eastern Cape to look for a job in Johannesburg, I was not industry specific. I gravitated towards crane operation simply because I find heights very fascinating. Fortunately enough, I was exposed to various sites and that's when my interest in safety on site began. I approached the Enza HR team about my passion, and they were open to helping me grow. Back then, I only had standard nine (grade 11), so the company assisted me in gaining admission at a safety institution based on my work experience. In 2017 I successfully completed my SAMTREC qualification at NOSA. In order to ensure that I acquired experience as a safety officer, Enza allocated me a mentor and exposed me to various sites.

❏ **Describe for us a typical day in your job?**

My day starts with tool box talks - we discuss various factors that may compromise workers' safety on site and, once done, how we can better address them. I then move to the site walk down where I inspect various areas to ensure that the environment is safe for people to work. If there is an issue that needs to be addressed, I do so immediately with my team with the help of the area supervisors. Currently, I spend most of my day inducting people on site. We welcome many guests on a daily basis, which is why I ensure that people are well inducted and know what is required of them, be it on-site or off-site. Prior to leaving work, I do a site inspection; this is normally to ensure that all identified issues are addressed, as well as to see if the site is still safe.

❏ **Is working in construction a passion for you?**

Yes, it is. I do not see myself anywhere else other than a construction site. You get the most fulfilling feeling ever when you complete a project, and there are no injuries, long-term injuries or fatalities, and you know that you were part of that. When you pass a place, you are even able to tell your children, "I did that."

■ ***As a woman in a male-dominated field, what have been some of the challenges you've faced, and how have you overcome them?***

Not being taken seriously by my male counterparts was probably the biggest challenge I faced in the beginning, but I did not let it discourage me. It pushed me to work hard to prove that I am not just a female, but deserved a seat at the table. I have made use of the toolbox talks to address this and gain the trust of my male colleagues. We now work well together to a point that they come to me for advice and recommendation.



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■ ***What advice would you give to other women looking to pursue a career in construction?***

We are more than capable. We grew up being told things women can and cannot do in terms of work or a career. However, due to different work roles, I have learned that we are equals not just in strength, but in capability as well. Reach for your dreams, the only limitation you have is yourself.

■ ***Is there a female figure that has had a positive influence on your life?***

My older sister - she encouraged me to come to Joburg. Had I not taken the leap I would not be where I am today. Professionally, it has to be the HR executive at Enza Ms Navisha Mitoo - she gave me an opportunity. She was also accessible and helpful throughout the journey.

■ ***What is your message for Women's Month?***

Dream, and don't just stop at dreaming, follow those dreams.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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