

Women in the motoring industry

 By [Liz Segal](#)

2 Feb 2018

Have you ever been thoroughly annoyed by a driver cutting across your lane, or turning at a traffic light without using their indicators? It's a simple gesture and an even simpler flick of a switch, but when someone forgets to do it, it can make your blood boil. Ever wondered who invented indicators?



Liz Segal

Florence Lawrence, a Canadian actress and car enthusiast born in 1886, was the first person to develop indicators, using flags on either side of the car that she lifted remotely to signal which direction she was turning in. She also developed the earliest version of a brake light of sorts, which was a stop sign that would pop up at the back of her car when the brakes were applied to indicate that she was about to stop.

The broader public might not know about them, but those of us in the motoring industry is familiar with women such as Lawrence, who started paving the way for women in motoring a long time ago.

Developing a competitive advantage

According to research conducted by Deloitte and The Automotive News Group over a ten-year period in Europe and North America into the recruitment, retention and advancement of women in manufacturing industries, the path forward entails:

- Starting at the top
- Addressing gender bias head-on
- Fostering growth programmes and sponsorship
- Creating a flexible work environment
- Developing the automotive workforce early
- Promoting personal development
- Creating a legacy

This path was suggested on the back of statistics such as 75% of women in North America who feel women are underrepresented in the automotive industry. The following were cited as factors that contributed to the underrepresentation: 76% said there was an industry bias toward men for leadership positions; 53% pointed towards organisational cultural norms; and 46% said the underrepresentation was due to a lack of mentorship.

Manufacturers across the world are embarking on radical transformation in all areas of their business, and automotive companies looking to develop a competitive advantage would do well to embrace diversity, taking advantage of the opportunity to foster disruption and innovation through the incorporation of new perspectives, and skills. This movement is much bigger than gender parity.

Diversity matters

According to the *2017 Women In Business Report* compiled by international audit firm Grant Thornton, only 28% of senior management roles in South Africa are held by women. 13 years ago, when the firm first started compiling this report, the figure was 26%. A 2% increase since 2004 isn't good enough.

Worryingly, 31% of South African companies have no women in senior management positions. Lee-Anne Bac, Grant Thornton advisory services director, said: "Companies should constantly be working to improve gender diversity in the workplace. We have too few women in management positions and until we tilt that balance, it will remain difficult for women to influence change. Women are fighting from a position of lack of power."

Gender diversity seems to take a backseat

In South Africa, gender diversity seems to take a backseat as companies focus on addressing other imbalances. Businesses are currently prioritising broad-based black economic empowerment targets, which are legislated, as opposed to gender diversity targets, which are not.

South African companies should take note of a published McKinsey report titled *Why diversity matters*, which states that gender-diverse companies are 15% more likely to outperform other companies. The report states that companies in the top quartile for gender or racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians.

McKinsey has been researching diversity in the workplace for many years and these findings are the result of data collected from 366 public companies across industries in North America, Latin America and the United Kingdom (UK).

The research also found that in the United States, there is a linear relationship between racial and ethnic diversity, and better financial performance. In the UK, greater gender diversity on the senior executive team corresponded to the highest performance uplift in the data: for every 10% increase in gender diversity, earnings before interest and tax rose by 3.5%.

Leadership lessons

As successful female executives, there is a responsibility to empower other women, to mentor them, encourage them and engage with them to share what we have learnt over the years.

Like many industries, the motoring sector is a male-dominated one and there are gender-related challenges. However, in

my opinion, it's prudent to adopt a take-charge attitude and to work hard regardless of the negativity you might encounter because this is the only way to succeed in any organisation.

Several industries have gender-related roadblocks. You can either choose to get stuck, or you can find a way around or even over these obstacles. I believe in the saying "where there's a will, there's a way", and I have always found a way to progress in this industry.

At Nissan South Africa, we're working towards gender equality in our workforce, particularly at our manufacturing plant in Rosslyn, where we have achieved a 50/50 gender split with the engineering trainees who participate in our skills development programme.

I've had 12 challenging, yet enjoyable years in motoring and I have learnt that being driven, professional, willing-to-learn and versatile are key attributes for success. I would advise young women to be more expressive about their passions, learn to become hard negotiators capable of getting their hands dirty, whilst also being able to exercise strategic thinking to ensure they're always ahead of the curve.

ABOUT LIZ SEGAL

With almost ten years in the automotive industry, Liz Segal began her career at sub-Saharan Africa Jaguar as national sales manager, whereafter she moved on to become Toyota South Africa's product marketing manager in the passenger vehicle line. Currently, she is Nissan's general sales manager spearheading markets in Nigeria, Angola and Ghana.

» Women in the motoring industry - 2 Feb 2018

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>