

Shilpa Mehta of EO talks Covid-19, women entrepreneurship and GBV



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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"Women shouldn't shy away from leadership, especially during tough economic times such as these," says Shilpa Mehta, the newly elected first female president of The Entrepreneurs' Organisation Durban Chapter (EO).



Shilpa Mehta, the newly elected first female president of The Entrepreneurs' Organisation Durban Chapter (EO).

A CA by training and entrepreneur in her own right who is quite at home working in a male-dominated industry, Mehta takes over from property guru and Remax franchise owner, Grant Gavin.

She takes the reins at a time when businesses in South Africa are struggling to cope with losses incurred during the Covid-19 lockdown and delays in the gradual re-opening of the ailing South African economy.

The post-Covid-economy is looking to be one where we are extremely focused on rebuilding, growth as well as collaboration. Embracing diversity is a priority and businesses will shift to proactively embrace this.

“The challenges of a Covid recovery and embracing diversity are tough challenges for everyone. Whilst I am a woman, I have had the same challenges as other business owners. Entrepreneurs are carrying the load to ensure their businesses, staff and family are all safe and learn to respect diversity whilst at the same time ensuring you have a business that adapts in the current crisis. Although we will be the ones to make a difference, this places a huge weight on an employer’s shoulders.

What has helped is my EO network and forum and together we have navigated this crisis as best possible, knowing our decision making sound and rational rather than emotional and based on sound business principles rather than fear. We have leaned into the network to share the numerous challenges and also many opportunities which have certainly helped,” says Mehta.

Shilpa Mehta, who is also the owner of electronic manufacturing service provider, Production Logix, chats with us about female entrepreneurs, Covid-19 and gender-based violence in South Africa.

■ *How is EO empowering women entrepreneurs in building large and successful businesses?*

Being surrounded by successful business owners in EO allow women the platform to shine and understand their unlimited potential that their business can grow to, EO removes the gender barrier and forces you to focus on growth and key importance. There are also mentorship programs and the forum experience where you have your own personal ‘board of directors’ who challenge you out of your comfort zone.

In addition to this, we have a group called MyEO women who connect from all over the world once a month on a call and share their experiences, highs and lows with other women. Almost all our women members are part of the MyEO women network and the women really leverage this network and help each other succeed.

■ *Does EO have any accelerator programmes that empower women?*

EO has recently launched an accelerator program which is a two-year course based on the principle of scaling up your business. It’s a brilliant course and allows you to 10x your business. we launched this last year and was fully subscribed and mostly by women.

■ *What can governments do to help drive women entrepreneurs in SA?*

The government has created a great platform in BBBEE codes for women to start as entrepreneurs and on the back of this there are various grant and funding opportunities for women. Government can definitely ease the bureaucracy around this. I am already seeing a number of young women walking through trade shows looking for opportunities and it’s exciting to see.

■ *How do you think EO and other big companies can help in the fight against GBV?*

There is so much that we can do!

- Big corporates can create CSR programs around this. Anyone involved in the manufacturing, sale and distribution of alcohol can educate men on the importance of protecting and respecting women.
- A lot of GBV is deep rooted in cultural beliefs and EO has reached out to tribes of women in Africa have helped fund education programs for women to go to school. Through education women can be independent and self-sufficient and earn an income.
- Corporates and entrepreneurs need to create safe platforms for women to speak out and heal against gender-based violence.

■ *Could you share any future plans of EO?*

We have a really exciting year planned ahead and we have outlaid all of this in our strategic plan which focuses on two

main themes. Namely keeping our core engaged and leaning into the EO community for bolder and authentic member connections.

There are many action points but some of them are:

- Creating a learning calendar made up of highly influential speakers
- Forming strategic alliance partnerships with specific organizations which will assist our member and the EO Durban Chapter
- Creating a key executive forum for our members 2lc's who also need to be lifted and we are particularly excited about launching this.
- Creating a pitch platform for our members to present new business ideas and concepts in a safe environment without solicitation. Based on the current economic climate, this will be hugely beneficial to the member
- Create industry-specific forums where members can discuss business within specific industries that they are in such as property, franchises, IT and manufacturing
- Creating more spousal engagement. Often the entrepreneur grows personally and professionally by being a member and encourage the spouses to grow as well.

■ You've recently been appointed as president of the Durban Chapter of the EO. What are your plans and goals?

My goal is to have EO Durban as the go to organisation for every entrepreneur and cement it as the leading organisation for entrepreneurs to learn and grow personally and business and create a safe environment for entrepreneurs to share their highs and lows.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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