

Women's Month story - "I love when you count me out"

By Serah Phiri, issued by Regent Business School

22 Aug 2022

We all may have at some time or the other found ourselves in a position where we were left out of something. The other kids may not have wanted to include you in a game; the cool kids did not invite you to the party, you were not from the right background or simply because you were different in some way. I felt I was counted out many times.

My upbringing was not an easy one. I was born into an abusive household. My mother left my father when I was very young, and I was raised by her. I was told he did not believe I would make it and that my mother would not manage to raise me, and I would die.

Well didn't that give us motivation to prove him wrong. My mom struggled and of course life was hard, but we lived. I learnt a lot of life lessons which have equipped me for what was to come later.

At the age of 15, I sadly lost my mother. It was a hard time. People thought I wouldn't make it; But that just motivated me to prove them wrong.

I then found myself heading a household and having to balance going to school and working part-time to provide.

I was always an A student and did well in school. Being good at school did not necessarily make people like you. I matriculated with good marks and sadly, I had to turn down a scholarship, bursary and an internship. I wanted to study further just like everyone else around me and feel like a college or university student, but I could not afford it as the offers to study further did not cover all my expenses. My circumstances didn't allow for that. I remember crawling into my closet and crying bitterly, thinking to myself if I was being counted out again. Will I have the same opportunities as others to do something with my life I wondered. At the time I didn't have the answers, but I was determined to be happy. That motivated me.

One day I had a light bulb moment...

So, when I started working full time after I matriculated, that's what I did - I learnt. And through my eagerness to learn, I grew in my working environment. I had the opportunity to study further and complete short courses in financial management and public relations. I am currently completing a qualification in disaster and safety management. At the age of 24 I found myself in a management position as a quality assurance manager at Regent business School.

Over the years that followed, came many challenges. Being a young African female with limited experience in the field and having my height against me, being short, gaining the respect of my colleagues was hard. I found myself in yet another position where I was being counted out. Many times, I cried, wanting to quit but my boss wouldn't let me. How grateful I was that I persevered because eventually things changed, and my colleagues counted me as someone worthy.

You may feel left out, left behind, uneducated, marginalised, discriminated, you name it! but that doesn't limit what you can achieve in life. Take every opportunity to learn, because nothing stops you from learning. That's why it's called lifelong learning. You have the power to influence and impact others, so teach others- mentor people especially those that may not have all the same opportunities as you. And it's alright to be different.

I was determined to prove everyone that counted me out, that I would not only live, but I could also be happy and



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successful.

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Serah Phiri is a quality assurance manager at Regent Business School.

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