

# Be unapologetically female - representation really does matter

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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In celebration of Women's Month, we speak to Bowman's partner and head of their employment and benefits practice, Lusanda Raphulu about being a woman in law.



Lusanda Raphulu

■ ***Tell us a little bit about yourself and what steered your career path...***

**Lusanda Raphulu:** I'm Bowmans homegrown, having started my articles here in 2004. I progressed through the ranks, and was made partner in 2012. I was appointed as the head of the employment and benefits practice in 2019.

■ ***What are the challenges facing women in the legal industry today?***

**Raphulu:** There are many more women entering the legal industry, but I think the challenges remain in keeping women in the industry. One of the challenges is the lack of female role models; it's important to see successful people who look like you and sound like you to help make you believe that it's possible for you. Representation really does matter, and with time this is improving.

A second challenge is sponsorship, having senior and influential people who back you and say good things about you to other senior and influential people, having your name spoken of positively in important and persuasive spaces.

The third challenge is motherhood, taking maternity leave, and having that impact on your career without it meaning the death of your career or a longer than necessary slowdown in it - taking four months off should not mean becoming two years behind your male contemporaries.

■ ***What do you believe women bring to the industry that you feel men don't?***

**Raphulu:** The industry needs diversity of perspective and experience. There are things that a woman can see and appreciate that a man won't, and visa versa. It's in the best interests of clients, employees and law making that the industry benefits from both men and women, from a real representation of the society we live in.

■ ***What do you think is the most important piece of legislation affecting women that has been passed – either locally or internationally - within the last 20 years?***

**Raphulu:** In my view, in South Africa, the Employment Equity Act. As much as we would like diversity and inclusion to improve organically in all workplaces, realistically, without legislation, change would be happening slower than it is currently happening.

▣ ***Over the course of your career, what are some of the differences you've experienced as a woman in your field?***

**Raphulu:** Without a doubt, taking maternity leave, twice. That's a very real career interruption that men don't experience. It's not something to be taken lightly. Being a professional success requires time, learning, and experience, and taking months out of one's career has a real impact. The introduction of parental leave in January 2020, although it is 10 days, will help in balancing the time off taken between mothers and fathers, and the consequential career impact. It's a step in the right direction. I hope I live to see a South Africa where mothers and fathers take equal time off for parenting.

▣ ***Who do you consider your biggest female role model and why?***

**Raphulu:** Michelle Obama. She is unapologetically female, confident and comfortable in the space she occupies. She has courageously and authentically navigated being female in a male-dominated world. And of course, she's an attorney.

▣ ***What is your message to young women looking to start a career in law?***

**Raphulu:** Bring your full self into it; don't look to become a clone of the men. Bring your female influence, it is needed.

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Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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