

Cell C CEO's sexist remarks cause a stir

By [Thabiso Mochiko](#)

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José Dos Santos, the CEO of Cell C, could have burnished his image when he said during a radio interview on leadership that he wanted a woman to succeed him. After all, South African male CEOs seldom strike a blow for gender equality.



Image via How South Africa

But Dos Santos' comments on online radio station CliffCentral rapidly degenerated when he explained that women managed differently because they had a "bitch switch".

He said that Cell C had "good-looking women, clever women and smart women" in senior positions - presumably he could choose from among them for his successor.

And in his experience from working on the rest of the continent, African women had a higher tolerance level than men. Women had a "different way of managing, they have a different way of engaging in meetings it creates a different dynamic".

Predictably, the comments caused a storm on social media.

Dos Santos said that while his comments were taken out of context, he regretted the choice of words.

"As a CEO with a strong track record in the empowerment of female employees in SA and in many other African countries that I have worked in, I am saddened that my stance has been taken out of context," he said. "I regret my choice of words which I realise were offensive."

In the interview, Dos Santos said 60% of Cell C staff were women. That was up from 42% when he joined the company in 2012. Dos Santos said: "I have seen instances where women do not support each other to get to the top."

This was his observation, "and perhaps one of several reasons why women are underrepresented in leadership positions. This is not an environment that was created by women, but one that has been entrenched in the general workplace."

Though Dos Santos was widely panned for being sexist, marketing analyst Chris Moerdyk did not agree, blaming the outrage on political correctness.

"I find it incredibly sad that today so many critics are so quick to play the sexist card," Moerdyk said.

"I truly believe José Dos Santos was genuinely being complimentary of the obviously high level of management skills of the modern businesswomen."

Cell C sponsors the Miss SA pageant and the Take a Girl Child to Work day.

Source: Business Day

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