



Angela Dick has a mission in life: to improve the quality of life for as many South Africans as possible. Since 1983, she and her growing team at Transman have been responsible for recruiting and finding employment for millions of temporary and contract staff. What started out as a small business at the height of apartheid has grown into the largest privately owned temporary employment service in South Africa. Transman's budget has grown apace, from R85 000 in 1983 to R600-million in 2011, and today it finds employment for 9 500 to 10 000 staff daily, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

# Changing the Future, One Job Seeker at a Time


By Laura Franz-Kamissoko

**A**ngela started her working life as a teacher and was soon promoted to the position of lecturer at the Teachers' Training College Edgewood. When she moved from Durban to Johannesburg for better work prospects, she opted for the challenge of a sales position with 3M instead of remaining in the lecture room. "Despite some thorough training, I was absolutely terrified of the phone at first, but I gave myself a good talking to and after about a week I eventually got on with the job," she recalls.

This job would prove life-changing for her, and for many others, in another respect. She recalls that every

morning she had to walk through a throng of job seekers – mainly unskilled, poor, black men who would gather at the company's gates in search of work, no matter how temporary – to get to her clients. "What struck me to the heart was the hopelessness and desperation in their eyes. They wanted the same things you and I do: food on the table, education for their children and a roof over their heads. Yet, because of their lack of education and skills, they had little hope of meeting any of these needs as they were unlikely to secure a good job.

"With time, I realised that the current state of affairs in the job market, particularly in the industrial sector, was not benefiting anyone – neither employers



nor job seekers – and yet there was no resolution in sight,” Angela explains. Among employers, there was a desperate need for skilled workers, but companies were not inclined to invest in unskilled people, especially temporary workers. Given the lack of legal and regulatory worker protection at the time, companies were also not compelled to provide any benefits or protection for temporary workers. “Temporary workers were simply not in a position to negotiate more favourable employment terms with companies. All I could see was this terrible cycle of poverty and misery continuing, and I decided to find a solution.

“With a newborn baby in tow, my former partner and I established Transman and set about recruiting and screening candidates for employment in the industrial sector, initially focusing on the transport industry – and hence the company name. I took responsibility for our candidates from day one, providing them with the training opportunities and protection that a permanent position would have afforded them,” she explains.

“I must be honest. Our temporary staffing solution was unheard of at the time, especially for workers in the industrial sector. It was a good five-year struggle to convince the industry of the benefits of our service, but through sheer determination and persistence we won over several significant clients.” Today, Transman has an operational complement of about 260 permanent and 150 contract staff, and just under 10 000 placed staff who are screened and trained for a host of general jobs in the industrial sector, including as packers, drivers, cleaners, artisans and builders. “My commitment to everyone who walks through my door is that we will help find them a job. Even if they have a limited education and no work experience, we will do our best to find them a suitable position and help them get experience and advance their skills,” says Angela.

Since its inception in 1983, Transman has placed more than a million temporary staff, many of whom have gone on to become permanent employees. The company even places staff as far afield as the rest of Africa and the Middle East. “Admittedly, given the nature of the industrial sector, most of our job candidates are men, but there are niche markets where women dominate. Within our own organisation, I believe that women are more responsible and conscientious, and show more empathy in our line of business than men – which is why well over 51% of our staff are women,” she remarks.

Over the years, Transman has had to compete with new entrants to the market, but Angela is of the opinion that her company has retained its uniqueness as a result of its solid reputation, ethics and credibility. “We are the pioneers in our field. For example, we were the first to provide a genuine provident fund designed specifically

with the requirements for our temporary staff in 1989. Our strength is our ethical reputation; this industry is open to a lot of abuse – consciously and unconsciously – on both sides of the fence, especially when it comes to smaller operators. The recession has affected our industry, as it has most others, and our clients are demanding a lot more for a lot less. While we have to make a profit, it is critical that we comply with legislation above all else. So, sometimes we have to walk away from potential business if we can’t reach a compromise with a client,” she notes.

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As for the current turmoil in the temporary employment sector, with government threatening to ban labour brokers, Angela takes a pragmatic approach. “I believe that it is the trade unions that want to ban labour brokers, but they lack a thorough understanding of the essential role we play in finding employment for millions of people in this country. I think that the battle hinges on their perceived loss of power, and thereby membership and revenue, and I’m hopeful that, based on the negotiations at NEDLAC between organised labour, business and government, they are getting a view of the bigger picture. I don’t believe we will be banned, but there will be even tighter and better regulation. We do need a regulating body, preferably one from the industry and with teeth, to police the less ethical elements in this industry, as is the case with any other industry,” elaborates Angela.

“We live in a very beautiful country in a period of transition. The future of South Africa depends on every individual making a contribution to the wellbeing and betterment of our people, even if it’s in a small way. I know that every decision I make affects thousands of lives, and should I make the wrong decision I could cause untold damage to the lives of these individuals and their families. I am cogniscent of my responsibilities every day, but I’d like to think that I’m secure enough about my decisions to eschew such unimportant things as power and status, and to focus on the bigger picture and do my bit hopefully to keep taking this country in the right direction,” Angela explains. □

## Tomorrow's Leaders at Transman

Angela's passion for developing people has been turned into reality in her own company. She highlights two individuals in particular as prime examples of the growth that is possible at Transman.



Karabo Mohsoane, Business Development Officer, Transman

Karabo Mohsoane has been with the company for nearly five years now. She met Angela when she was selected to attend one of her lectures as part of the Businesswomen of Tomorrow programme of the Businesswomen's Association of South Africa. "Angela gave us this really inspirational talk and invited us to call her if we ever needed anything. I made sure I got her business card, and during the December holidays after writing matric I called her up and asked her if I could work for her.

"I remember telling her I would do anything, even carry her briefcase. We met at 2 p.m. that afternoon, and I've worked for her ever since. I started out as an assistant to her assistant. Three months later I became a trainee sales executive, and I'm proud to say that I finished the 18-month sales programme in only eight months. I was sales executive for just over a year, and then I was promoted to Business Development Officer, a position I still hold, where I am responsible for about 40 clients across all industrial sectors," relates Karabo.

She maintains that she owes all her personal and professional development to Angela. "I love my job, I love working here, and I owe my confidence and success today to Angela – I call her my other mother, and with good reason," says Karabo with a grin.

Rebecca Dick is another of Angela's successful protégés – the fact that she's her daughter notwithstanding. Like Karabo, she worked her way up from being the assistant to Angela's assistant. During her studies at Varsity College she had to acquire practical experience in order to qualify for her National Diploma. Eventually she settled in the position of Public Relations (PR) and Marketing Assistant.

"I had no expectations when I joined Transman. My mother made it clear that I would have to earn my stripes, so I set about learning the basics of the business and then decided to study PR." After completing the theory and practical for her diploma, she returned to Transman in 2009 after her graduation, and was promoted to PR and Marketing Officer for the company.

"I choose to stay at Transman, not because it's a comfort zone, but because I have a real passion for this company and what it stands for. Not only have I developed business acumen, but I have also found my passion in the charity work we do. We are committed to several corporate social investment initiatives, and I love working with the charities and the children we assist. I have the greatest respect for what my mother has achieved with Transman, and I understand why she made sacrifices through the years. It's pretty cool having a mom who's an entrepreneur. She proves that women can achieve great things!" says Rebecca with evident pride.



Rebecca Dick, Public Relations and Marketing Officer, Transman