



# A PASSION FOR PEOPLE

*Ethel Nyembe – Head: Card and Payments South Africa*

**Signature** recently had the exclusive opportunity to discuss various aspects of Ethel Nyembe’s career, her vision for the future, and the role of women in the banking sector.

It is a crisp late-winter morning when Ethel Nyembe invites us into her home near the Diners Club head office. What began as an opportunity to discuss various matters related to her new role as Head of Card and Payments in South Africa, soon turned into a morning of whimsy and insight, as we get down to business with the illustrious banker.

Ethel’s varied career has seen her ascend the corporate ladder in the media and public relations spheres.

Over the better part of 16 years – the last decade of which, in various roles in the Standard Bank Group – Ethel has applied her skills as an astute executive and expert communicator in the banking sector, where her passion for innovation, entrepreneurship, and ethical business has earned her accolades far beyond the boardroom, and she shares her insights with us.

***What drives your passion for the banking industry?***

“My passion for the financial services industry is based on the fact that we are front and centre, and integral to the society that we serve. We exist because businesses exist, and we exist because consumers exist. We are always looking for ways to be more inclusive and innovative, in ensuring that we are relevant to the needs of our customers. For me,

it comes down to what difference we can make as an industry.”

***Considering where consumers may find themselves at this point, what can the financial services sector do to support customers during this time.***

“Standard Bank has played a leading role in ensuring that our customers had access to payment holiday options as COVID-19 set in. Also through innovation with the SnapScan app, we gave our customers the ability to pay their favourite restaurants upfront, to ensure that they could keep operating. Also, our customers’ safety is a massive concern for us, and with our contactless payment technology, we make it possible to avoid contact between persons and their cards or devices. The survival of the financial services industry depends on businesses surviving and on people being employed. By assisting our customers in this way, we also ensure our own prosperity. We do this in the spirit of Ubuntu.”

***South Africa is facing a challenging decade ahead, would you say that technology plays a leading role for Standard Bank in shaping the future of the industry?***

“For me it is not just about technology, but the recognition that the bank does not exist in a vacuum. It exists together with businesses, together with

the people that it serves, and together with the communities that are supported by the bank. The work that we were able to do with the Solidarity Fund, shows how the bank has supported, and continues to support, its customers. For me, technology is an enabler that allows Standard Bank to, not only be at the forefront of innovation, but also to remain an integral part of the communities that we serve.”

***Were there any individual mentors who have shaped your experience of the industry, and in what way?***

“There are a number of individuals who made it possible for me to thrive in the industry. Either by their encouragement, through their teaching, or simply by listening, they have allowed me to bring the authentic ‘me’ to work, so that we could collectively thrive.”

***What have been the most challenging aspects of carving a successful career in the industry?***

“I believe that I am still on my journey to creating a successful career, and while all career paths have their challenges, the portfolios that I have been exposed to have given me great joy, and the people that I have worked with have taught me a lot. For me, collaboration leads to great success and it challenges us to find far reaching solutions to the challenges that we face.”

***Women have an increasingly important role to play in all industries. Where would you say are the greatest opportunities for women to make a difference in the financial services sector?***

“As a bank, we are always very conscientious in making sure that women have equal opportunity, yet at the same time pay attention to the advancement of women. I believe that South Africa is quite progressive in celebrating our women, yet women need to continue to occupy more



prominent roles across society to ensure that the female agenda is addressed. Having said that, women cannot advance this agenda alone, and that is why Standard Bank has joined forces with the UN campaign - #HeForShe - to collectively address women’s issues in the country. When you give a woman a loan or help her to start a new business, how many more mouths can you feed? Or when you educate a girl, how much more of a change can you make? This agenda takes centre stage in how we shape our society.”

***What general advice do you have for young women who are seeking a future in the finance industry?***

“Always keep an open mind and be willing to learn, because the space is forever pivoting and changing. Be excited about everything that you do,

because that way you can make the difference that needs to be made, and, most importantly, you can enjoy the work that you do.”

***What is your vision for the Diners Club brand?***

“Diners Club has always been a leader in inspiring its members to travel and explore more, and during the time of COVID-19, I have seen the management pivot more to listen to its members. As we couldn’t travel at the time, the brand began to encourage its members to use their Diners Club card more for everyday payment solutions. It is important for our members to get the most out of their cards, and it is our responsibility to ensure that we continue to provide our customers with the tools to do this.”