

WHEN DETERMINATION MEETS OPPORTUNITY

Dimakatso Mlambo's story is one of resilience, grit and the transformative power of opportunity. A key milestone in her journey from scholarship-funded accounting student facing numerous obstacles to a Client Investment Analyst at Alexforbes was her participation in the [ASISA Academy Independent Financial Advisor \(IFA\) internship](#).

After completing her undergraduate degree in Accounting at Midrand Graduate Institute (now Eduvos), Mlambo found herself at a crossroads. Her bursary from Tomorrow Trust had ended, and with her mother, a single parent, being unemployed, she faced significant financial uncertainty. Fortunately, Electronic Toll Collection (ETC,) her donor through Tomorrow Trust, stepped in to fund her Honours studies.

Her initial goal was to become a Chartered Accountant, but her undergrad degree being from a private institution limited her access to traditional accounting Honours pathways. So, she chose to do a bridging year in Finance and Investments – a decision that would ultimately help her redefine her aspirations.

"I was used to accounting, tax and auditing," she recalls. "Now I had to learn about the world of investment – completely new territory. But I told myself, I've been given an opportunity. If I don't take it, it might never come again."

Mlambo decided to "do with what I had at the time ... I thought, let me just finish this course, find a job and I'll go back to school to do accounting if I still want to".

That bridging year ended up sparking a new passion, prompting Mlambo to enrol in a B Com Honours in Financial Planning at the University of Johannesburg. When the opportunity to join the ASISA Academy IFA Internship came in 2017, she didn't hesitate.



She remembers the interview process being "like speed dating with potential host companies ... you got to meet a whole lot of people, a whole lot of managers. LinkedIn wasn't a thing then so the opportunity to network was novel and very engaging".

She was placed with Exponential Financial Options, a small Independent financial advisory firm in Centurion, Pretoria. There, Mlambo received a comprehensive introduction to the financial planning industry and the powerful impact that leaders who are committed to transformation and empowerment can have.

In a team of just five, including the director, she quickly found her footing. In addition to helping her "understand how financial planning works in the real world," she gained valuable skills in administration, compliance, client service, and record-keeping, skills that continue to serve her well today.

Dimakatso Mlambo was doing the best with 'what she had at the time', which ended up igniting a new passion.

She says she also really appreciated the focus her manager at Exponential Financial Options put on improving Black representation in the industry.

"We still have a long way to go," she says. "I think the IFA Internship is helping to bridge that gap. If you look at all the interns from five or six years ago, many are working to change the status quo, that's what we are doing."

Following her internship, she was invited to stay on for another year. During her two years at Exponential Financial Options, another intern joined the practice, and Mlambo was included in the interview and selection process. "That was incredibly empowering," she says.

In early 2019, she moved to Legacy Wealth, where she worked as a Paraplanner and Office Administrator for a few months. After several years commuting between Pretoria and her home in Alexandra, Johannesburg, she jumped at the opportunity to work closer to home when an opportunity came up at Alpha Wealth in Bryanston.

That was just two weeks before the Covid lockdown. Although it was initially challenging adapting to a new role during the pandemic, Alpha Wealth would prove to be a turning point. Not only was the location right, Mlambo says, Alpha Wealth really shaped the trajectory of her career. In her time there, she says, "things really started to make sense".

"The environment, the people, I felt encouraged and motivated to push myself forward," she says, adding that it was during her time there that she enrolled to pursue her Certified Financial Planner (CFP) designation.

After two and a half years at Alpha Wealth, Mlambo was ready for something new. "You just get to a point where you think, what's out there? How can I challenge myself further," she says. It was at this stage that she joined Alexforbes as a Client Investment Analyst, a role that has truly shaped her career, she says. Serving institutional clients and being a custodian of retirement funds has been a rich learning experience and a humbling one, she says.

Nawaal Aboobaker, Principal Investment Consultant at Alexforbes, to whom Mlambo reports, says: "Since joining our team nearly three years ago, Dima has shown remarkable growth, quickly becoming a key contributor to the team. Her dedication, analytical acumen and collaborative spirit have made her an invaluable asset to our organisation. We are confident that she will continue to thrive and take on greater leadership roles within the team."

Mlambo's personal life has developed in parallel with her working life. She has started a family and, in 2024, completed the UN Global Compact Programme, a sustainability programme that encourages businesses to address the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Balancing this with her job and new motherhood was daunting, but completing it proved to be a powerful affirmation.

She has also taken the opportunity to give back. Through the Sizanani Mentorship Programme Mlambo has helped high school students from Alexandra access higher education.

Today, her focus is firmly on creating positive change: "Whether it is as a financial planner or investment consultant, I want to be part of the process that drives change and impacts people's lives meaningfully."