

## **From humble beginnings to retail success: One woman's relentless pursuit of affordability**

Tasneem Thavar is one of the rising stars in the over 160 000 people working for South Africa's largest private employer. In less than ten years, Tasneem's dedication and passion for retail saw her moving rapidly through the ranks at the Shoprite Group into the position of Head Buyer for the Usave supermarket brand, that has over 484 stores across all nine provinces.

"I will never forget accepting my first corporate job offer after university from the Shoprite Group on the eve of my wedding, which is one of the many reasons why the business is very close to my heart."

Her retail career began long before that, though, during a shopping trip in Durban's CBD, where she proactively knocked on shop doors seeking job opportunities, securing a position as a permanent casual at a jewellery store just a day after completing her final matric chemistry exam.

Coming from humble beginnings, Tasneem was the first in her immediate family to attend university, thanks to her mother's job at the University of KwaZulu Natal, which allowed her to study for free. She held down two part-time jobs to support herself financially while completing her BCom degree in Supply Chain Management and Marketing, followed by an honours degree in Supply Chain Management.

"I am very driven, and I don't give up," she says.

In 2014, she sent her CV to the Group and was appointed as an Imports Replenisher, and within six months promoted to Senior Stock Replenisher, at the retailer's Canelands Distribution Centre in KwaZulu-Natal.

Under the mentorship of Deena Pillay, Replenishment Manager, Tasneem says she improved her communication skills and learned to resolve issues more effectively. "Deena was instrumental in my development. He pushed me out of my comfort zone and made sure I was proactive in making those important calls," she recalls.

Tasneem transitioned to the buying team as a Trainee Buyer at the KwaZulu-Natal divisional office, before being promoted first to Buyer, then Senior Buyer, and then Head Buyer for Usave at the Group's Home Office in Cape Town, all in less than 7 years.

Usave is a no-frills retail destination that creates over 6 200 jobs and aims to provide access to everyday essentials at unrivalled value for money, especially in areas with limited economic opportunities and high unemployment

"There's always more to do at Usave," says Tasneem, whose role involves improving processes and understanding customer needs. "We continue to innovate and adapt to help our customers stretch their money and get more value."

During the high inflation period in early 2022, when maize, rice, oil and wheat prices soared, Tasneem and her team approached suppliers to find products they could sell for less than R10 or even R5, also sourcing items like Usave's very popular R1 packet of biscuits.

She also implemented the centralised buying structure, leading to better bulk purchasing discounts, improved supplier relationships, and overall cost savings, while growing her team from a single assistant to a group of nine people.

“I’m always working on improving our processes and the way we operate to enhance our efficiency. It’s important to understand our customers – to live in their shoes, so to speak. We’re constantly finding products that fit our customers’ budgets,” she enthuses.

Driven by her upbringing in a single-parent household, Tasneem says she likes to set goals and works hard to achieve them. “My upbringing taught me the value of hard work and perseverance,” she reflects.

Tasneem is consistent and plans ahead, “It’s all about making a positive impact and seeing the tangible results of our hard work,” she concludes.

END