

Cashier climbs the ranks to Divisional People Partner at SA's largest private sector employer

Humble beginnings didn't hold her back and this Women's Month, we celebrate just how far she's come. At the age of 22 Cathrine Sibambo joined the Shoprite Group as a cashier. Now, at 37, she's shaping careers and leading teams as a Divisional People Partner.

She started at the bottom. Down to earth, determined, and eager to build a better future. Before she knew it, Cathrine Sibambo was stepping into a senior leadership role at South Africa's largest private sector employer.

When she joined the Shoprite Group as a cashier in 2010, she couldn't have predicted the journey that lay ahead. But through hard work, perseverance, and the support of a company that recognised her potential, Cathrine rose through the ranks to become the Divisional People Partner for Shoprite Gauteng East.

Born and raised in Metz Ga-Sekororo, a village nestled in Limpopo, Cathrine (37) dreamed of becoming a social worker. "I always wanted to help people," she says. "That's been at the heart of everything I do."

After matriculating from Nareng High School, financial constraints forced her to take a gap year. But in 2007, she enrolled at Tshwane University of Technology, where she discovered a passion for Human Resource Management. "HR aligned with my values and my love for people. I knew I had found my purpose."

Cathrine's first job as a cashier at a Usave branch in Pretoria was supposed to be a temporary solution, until a pivotal moment changed everything. In early 2011, she was on the verge of resigning to pursue a government learnership when she crossed paths with a Regional People Partner. "He asked me to hold off, tested me for a Trainee Manager position, and believed in my potential," she recalls. "That moment changed the course of my life."

From there, her journey took off: Trainee Manager, Assistant Manager, Store Manager, and then into the people space where she had always longed to work. Her career in HR flourished. In 2017 she became Regional People Partner for Shoprite, and in 2024 she was promoted to Divisional People Partner. First for Usave, and then, in July 2025, for Shoprite Gauteng East.

"My job is about people. From hiring and development to simply being there when someone is struggling. I carry people's stories and do my best to uplift them," she says about her role as a leader. One such moment came when a store manager confided in her about personal difficulties. "I listened, really listened, and referred her to counselling. A month later, she thanked me. That reminded me: our work isn't just about targets, it's about people's lives."

Cathrine's journey is deeply rooted in the values of resilience, humility, and faith. "Prayer grounds me," she shares. "On tough days, it helps me find peace and purpose."

Her success hasn't come without challenges, especially the emotional weight HR professionals often carry. "People bring us their most personal pain, and we need to hold that with compassion."

She credits the Shoprite Group not just for providing a job, but for transforming her life. "The Group has given me financial independence, stability, and the ability to support my family," she says. Married with three children, Cathrine balances career and family through intentional planning, support, and clear boundaries. "It's not about perfection, it's about presence."

What sets her apart is her desire to pay it forward. "I want to mentor the next generation of leaders, especially women. I want young women to see that it doesn't matter where you start. What matters is that you keep moving forward, one step at a time."

Cathrine is proud to be part of an organisation that actively develops women leaders. "With more than 101 000 female employees, the Shoprite Group has created space for women to thrive. Our voices are heard. Our growth is a priority. That's what makes it a place where careers can truly flourish."

And her message to other women?

"You are powerful beyond measure. You build homes, communities, and legacies. Your voice matters. Your dreams matter. Never forget that," she says.

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