

From shelf packer to data scientist

Jongikhaya (Khaya) Ngodwane did not think he would join Shoprite's Data Science Academy when he found work as a shelf packer in 2018.

Ngodwane graduated with a B.Sc Honours degree in Statistics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2009. After university he returned to the Eastern Cape to support his mother financially and began teaching high school mathematics and science.

"Despite seven years of experience I did not have a teaching qualification and eventually resigned because my salary could not support my family," explains Ngondwane. He left his home town of Tsomo near Queenstown to come to Cape Town where he found employment as a shelf packer at Checkers Protea Heights in Brackenfell.

One day while restocking shelves in the store, he met Zonke Vika, a trainee store replenisher from the nearby Shoprite distribution centre. He asked her whether she could ensure his CV reached the right people at the Group's home office, as he harboured dreams of becoming a data analyst.

His CV landed on the desk of Chris Steyn, Head of Data Analytics, who invited him for an interview the very next day. "Khaya's passion for his subject was evident from our very first meeting. We felt compelled to provide him with an opportunity for self-fulfillment after he had set aside his own ambitions for so long to care for his family," says Steyn.

Ngondwane started with the Group as a Trainee Data Analyst on 1 September 2019 and in February 2020 he joined the group of graduates enrolled for the year-long apprenticeship at the Data Science Academy.

Data science is a multidisciplinary field that combines mathematics, statistics and computer science to automatically extract knowledge and insights from large amounts of data for the purposes of improved decision making. At the Shoprite Group data sets involve sales, inventory, consumer spending and much more.

"Being trained as a data scientist is beyond anything I could ever have imagined. My dream was to be a data analyst because I love to work with numbers. Words fail to express my gratitude to Shoprite for this wonderful opportunity," says Ngodwane, who supports his child (Lindo) and mother in the Eastern Cape.

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