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HAZEL LATEGAN PROVES IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE IT ALL AS SHE TAKES BUSINESS AND FAMILY TO NEW HEIGHTS

Hazel Lategan (39), Financial Director of project construction management company Integrated Solutions, is not only qualified as a quantity surveyor over and above her current position, but she is also an entrepreneur, co-owner of Integrated Solutions, devoted wife to husband Evert (MD of Integrated Solutions) and mother of four boys. Despite a schedule that starts daily at 5am and continues until late at night, Lategan also managed to find the time to launch an interior design division as part of Integrated Solutions' variety of services.

So how does she do it all? "It's not always easy, but I've always been of the opinion that the more you've got to do, the more actually gets done. I'm a perfectionist, so I prefer things done in a certain way and my children are therefore well disciplined – they thrive on routine. As a large family, we like each other's company and we have loads of fun – even if we're stuck in the car together.

"At work, Evert and I have very clear areas of responsibility so we work well together as a team and cover for each other when one is travelling. It's also great to be able to discuss what happened during the day with each other at home and to know that the other one understands and gets it. I know he loves me just the way I am and he knows that I support him on any decision he makes," she says.

Born in Knysna, raised in Plettenberg Bay and matriculating from the Outeniqua High School in George, Lategan studied towards her B.Tech Quantity Surveying qualification at the (then) Cape Technikon. "From a very young age I was always fascinated about how things are put together and the mechanics behind buildings. My father had a construction company when I was young and I distinctly remember my fascination watching workers put together a beautiful house from sand, stone, bricks and cement," she explains.

It was when she was a first year that Lategan met her husband, Evert, who was a final year in the B.Tech Construction Management course at the time. "He was one of the tutors so I knew him from class. One day as I was sitting outside waiting for friends he walked past, turned around and asked me out for a beer. The rest is now, as they say, history and we've been married for 17 years. Our four boys are aged from six to thirteen," she says.

After completing her tertiary studies, a career as a quantity surveyor and lecturer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology followed. Lategan recalls following a career in a predominantly known male environment. "When I studied this was definitely the case. We were about five girls in a class of sixty and we had to work hard to shake the 'girls are not practically minded' stigma. I do believe we worked hard to prove ourselves, so when I ended top of the class, there were a lot of guys asking me for help. That felt great! Once I started working as a quantity surveyor I was also often mistaken for a secretary. Today there are a lot more female quantity surveyors and we've proven ourselves to be very good at our jobs – the playing fields have been leveled."

It was during the time that Lategan took some time off to be at home with their first son that the couple decided to take the brave step towards starting their own business, Integrated Solutions. "Evert was quite frustrated with his working environment due to some leadership changes and we've been discussing going on our own for a while. We felt that we were called to do greater things, which was confirmed to us through our strong faith in God. It was of course scary to leave a steady income, but I knew we could make a success of it if Evert and I were committed," she recalls.

The biggest challenge the couple faced was informing everyone that they were establishing Integrated Solutions and they were offering a unique value engineering service, which was not available in the country at the time. "Being new is an obstacle by itself as everyone knows what skill sets you have, but no one wants to entrust you with the project being a new company. Fortunately we were soon contracted for the Pezula Project in Knysna after an introduction by a quantity surveyor we knew personally."

It is due to the integrity of Integrated Solutions that Lategan believes the company is growing from strength to strength after eleven years of success. "I believe we deliver a service that is transparent and value driven. We always go above and beyond our scope of work to deliver a project that we're proud to be associated with. We consistently meet our target, which is quality, on time, within budget, and we treat the contractors and consultants that we work with, with respect and dignity."

Lategan believes that what goes around comes around, as she explains: "The wheel might turn slowly, but it does. Treat everyone that you meet with respect and dignity, and many others will bestow you the courtesy. If you can help, who don't you?" She describes herself as positive, energetic and driven, as well as "someone who believes that everything's possible if you put your mind to it and go the extra mile".

As a wife and mother over and above being a successful businesswoman, Lategan does not get as much free time as she wishes. "I love spending time with my family so most of the time we're doing something together. I'm passionate about cooking so when I do I'm sort of treating myself while taking care of the family. I do have spa dates with myself once a month and also love cycling. I do the Argus every year and to date I've successfully completed seven. I also enjoy going to the gym for spinning classes, and love travelling, which my job often requires."

In conclusion, Lategan says: "I would like to see Integrated Solutions grow steadily as it has, to encompass even more trades and to become a go-to company for clients who want to have a seamless experience when it comes to renovations and builds of retail, hospitality and commercial spaces. I would also like to see our interior design division grow and establish itself as an interior design group on par with other leading interior design practices."