



LULU MAKAPELA (34)

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Besides achieving her current rank, Makapela was honoured as one of six space professionals worldwide to receive the International Astronautical Federation's Young Space Leaders Award. "I never dreamed that could happen," she says. "Being acclaimed as someone who's contributed to science is really rewarding, especially since my background is a legal one."

She holds a Master's degree in business law from the University of Pretoria and started her career at the Pretoria Magistrate's Courts.

While she admits there are challenges for women in this male-dominated industry, she stresses the importance of asking for help and developing solid relationships with colleagues. "You have to be able to work with people and have interpersonal skills," she says. "There's something to learn every day. Allowing myself to depend on others makes those people feel valued and closer to me in terms of sharing knowledge and skills."

She believes that one should continually strive for self-improvement, adding: "The one thing I know is that I don't know enough."

Makapela's completed space law courses with the International Space University in France and has begun studying towards a PhD. "You must always stay on top of your game," she says. "Because of my background, it's important for me to understand the legalities of technical issues. Investing time in doing so has motivated me to get where I am today." – EY