

a creative mindset

by Cheryl van der Merwe

Charlene Lewison is Marketing and Sales Director of Birdi Golf Apparel, and is the mastermind behind the fashionable items that Birdi continues to impress golfing communities with, for both men and women.

“When Lewison, Birdi CEO, and I am proud to say my father, has been my greatest influence from a leadership perspective,” says Lewison. He is a man of total integrity and honour, with no ego and a humble outlook. He is a man who is concerned for others. His experience and knowledge has been my greatest driving force – he is my mentor.

“I also respect global leaders such as Deepak Chopra, who is the greatest consciousness soul in leadership; a visionary working through intuition. Scott Bedbury is another leader I look up to. His marketing genius engineered the phenomenal growth of Starbucks and Nike, leading them to where they are today. A great leader takes risks. I take risks; I see myself as a protector, a nurturer, an innovator, having vision and working with synchronicity and intuition.”

Being a woman in the initially predominately male industry of golf apparel and equipment was a challenge for Lewison. “Also, I entered the manufacturing and distribution environment with a totally different perspective having come from a background of female retail outlets,” she explains.

“The marketing and design of predominately men’s apparel was also a challenge, as was managing from a staff perspective, where men dominate the workplace. Another important challenge has been dealing with the negative mindsets of staff, whom I guide, teach, and motivate – especially with regard to their health and wellbeing.”

Leadership milestones are many for Lewison. “One of the main highlights was taking a new, virtually unknown South African brand, competing with established and well-known international brands and succeeding in the challenge by becoming the leading South African golf clothing brand for both men and women,” she says.

“Other milestones would include achieving accolades for my company, such as Birdi being endorsed by the Professional Golfers Association of South Africa and the Cotton Board of South Africa. Birdi is also the official clothing supplier of the Women’s World Cup of Golf. A new highlight is the franchise agreement of the Birdi brand on non-apparel golf-related products with a



Charlene Lewison, Marketing and Sales Director

leading listed South African Company, which has recently been concluded, as well as having a leading clothing chain introducing the Birdi brand into their stores.”

Lewison’s position in the industry has offered her unique opportunities to influence it in a positive way. “Birdi has influenced the growth of interest and participation of women in golf with its involvement as clothing sponsor of the Women’s World Cup of Golf, a prestigious international women’s golf tournament that was initiated in South Africa,” she says.

“Being holistic in my approach, and coming from a textile background, I design and create fashionable merchandise, while respecting the rules and regulations of golfing attire. The end result is a wonderful collection of clothing that leads the golf industry. The power to drive and dictate trends in golf comes through hands-on working with the market, and knowing and understanding that market.”

Dealing with young entrepreneurs and executives from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, who have entered into commerce and industry and have a burning passion and ambition to succeed, is Lewison’s greatest inspiration.

“Technology today assists global communication and global trends, bringing South Africa closer to truly being part of the global village,” Lewison concludes. “Being a part of building the economy of South Africa never ceases to inspire me.”

