

Career Spotlight

BY ACTUA

TATENDAISHE JAKAZA



Tatendaishe Jakaza, Project Leader

I work as a project leader at a health authority specializing in capital projects. In my position, I'm involved in the planning and implementation of large-scale renovation projects at a hospital. These upgrades improve the hospital's facilities and services, contributing to improved patient care and operational efficiency. So, overall, my work integrates healthcare, engineering and construction. My role involves project planning, management, communication and contract management. I am able to manage changing priorities and I need to have strong communication skills when working with various professionals from engineers and trades to clinicians. I'm continuously using my problem-solving and decision-making skills developed through my engineering background.

DIVERSITY
IN STEM

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What challenges have you faced and overcome in your career?

I've had to overcome some mental and physical health challenges. During my engineering studies, there was a period when I struggled immensely with burnout, anxiety and depression. At that time I had not built healthy systems to manage stress and did not know how to draw from my support system. Balancing pressures at school and for my engineering demands, while navigating student life as an immigrant took a toll on my well-being. As an underrepresented individual in STEM, I've often found myself in environments where my experiences and current circumstances differ from those of my peers. It's important to build resilience and cultivate a strong support network to navigate obstacles and be a Black pioneer in STEM.

What advice would you give to youth?

My advice to youth is to invest time in yourself – learn who you are, what you like and what life you want to live. Get to know yourself and invest in the community! There's an African proverb: if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together. There is so much value in learning from others. Invest in getting to know yourself and developing your skills and character so you can navigate anything that comes your way. Your character will determine how you handle success and setbacks and how you treat those around you. I also encourage youth to try new things, network and remain adaptable. It's okay if you decide to pivot careers, but make sure you are continuously building yourself towards something that will benefit your long-term goals.

Why does diversity and representation matter in your field?

It's been shown in different studies how organizations benefit from having diverse employees. Diversity leads to innovation because when you have people who come from different backgrounds, you foster an environment that promotes new ways of thinking and problem-solving. Ideas are birthed from stepping out of the silo and engaging curiosity. We should celebrate the strides we've made but we still have a long way to go. I've seen more underrepresented people venture into STEM fields because of several programs and pathways to support equity-deserving groups interested in STEM. However, retention is a significant issue that really needs to be addressed. We need better ways of supporting individuals through STEM. This can range from helping students to enter the STEM workforce, and once in the industry, we need mentors and allies who will champion underrepresented individuals to ensure they are included and can have an equal chance of thriving.