

'If we support each other, we can change the world' - AECOM's Kim Anne Timm

By  Sindy Peters

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Currently responsible for the technical performance and deliverables quality of the AECOM Centurion Structures team, Kim Anne Timm has been working on a wide range of projects since graduating in engineering 17 years ago. She enjoys mentoring new graduates and young engineers and discussing interesting technical challenges.



Kim Anne Timm, executive - Structures, Buildings and Places, AECOM

Some of Timm's recent achievements include winning the SAPSA Award for Woman Professional of the Year and the CESA Mentor of the Year in 2019. She shares with Bizcommunity a bit about her beginnings in engineering, challenges she's faced in the workplace, her thoughts on how we can drive greater gender parity in STEM-based industries, and some advice for women pursuing a career in STEM today.

📌 *Tell us a bit about yourself - your background?*

Kim Anne Timm: I grew up in Durban, the daughter of two teachers. I was lucky to win a bursary to study engineering at UCT and later my Masters at Stellenbosch and thereafter went to work for BKS (later bought by AECOM). I have worked all over South Africa and still love travelling and exploring the country further.

📌 *Describe your role at AECOM - what does a typical work day look like for you?*

Timm: I look after the technical quality of the Centurion Structures department for AECOM. I spend a fair portion of my day conducting design reviews and mentoring and guiding the younger engineers.



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📌 *As a woman, have there been any significant challenges in the workplace that stand out for you?*

Timm: Initially, when I started work, there were very few women engineers. As such, the contractors would very seldom take my instructions seriously and would typically repeat questions to the male engineers to confirm that my responses were correct. The industry has evolved over the past 20 years but it can still be a challenge to be taken seriously as a woman in engineering.

🔴 ***To what do you attribute the low percentage of women in STEM-related sectors?***

Timm: It is too late to tell girls in Grade 12 that they can do any career they choose. If we force our young girls to play with dolls and our young boys to play with bricks and ridicule them when they choose to play with the other, it is much harder to open their minds at a later stage. It is important for girls and boys to have access to learning through a wide range of play, even at very early stages.



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🔴 ***How can we drive greater gender parity in STEM-based industries?***

Timm: We need to encourage an environment in which men and women are free to choose to follow the careers that appeal to them without fear of bias or judgement from friends, families or colleagues. This starts from an early age in the way with which we interact with our and other children.

🔴 ***Where, to you, does the value lie in a diverse, inclusive work environment, particularly in terms of female representation?***

Timm: All people bring different assets and approaches to their work. Often, when you consider something from only one perspective, the decisions you are reaching are biased and one-sided despite all efforts to the contrary. With contrasting viewpoints, you can ensure that the decisions you ultimately make are more comprehensive.



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🔴 ***Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in STEM today?***

Timm: This is an amazing industry with a lot to offer. It's not the easiest industry for women to start in but once you are there, it is immensely rewarding and one where you can be part of the change you want to see.

🔴 ***How is AECOM supporting and empowering women in STEM/business in general?***

Timm: AECOM is very supportive of women in STEM. Women's achievements are celebrated and actively encouraged across AECOM worldwide. There are mentoring environments in place for women to be able to contact and talk to other women in similar situations and obtain advice. It's a very inclusive place to work.

🔴 ***Do you have any pearls of wisdom to share this Women's Month or words of encouragement?***

Timm: If we support and encourage each other, we can change the world.

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