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· Women in Technology: The Glowing Determination of Faith
Opiyo



Ploera Community Team Member

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Women in Technology: The Glowing Determination of Faith Opiyo

Read the newest feature from our Women in Technology series, *The Glowing Determination of Faith Opiyo*, a Sr. Technical Support Engineer at Palo Alto Networks. Celebrating the International day of Women in Science and Technology, Live Community introduces a few of our talented women engineers at PAN.

"I consider each small life milestone that has got me this far an achievement in itself. I would not have thought in 1,000 years that I would be out of Kenya working in a big organization." -Faith Opiyo

Before earning certificates in networking and cybersecurity or becoming a Sr. Technical Support Engineer and Threat Specialist at Palo Alto Networks, Faith Opiyo had an extraordinary journey through life, education and work experiences that shaped her to be the inspirational woman of today.

Born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya, Africa, Faith grew up with two prestigious career paths to choose from: doctor or engineer. Luckily for us, she chose the career with far less plasma. "I cannot stomach blood so I couldn't see myself as a doctor. The only reasonable option for me was to be an engineer," Faith said.



Faith Opiyo standing amongst the trees.

Many engineers in the same field as Faith have grown up enthralled with the idea of coding and engineering through gaming or by having access to computers. However, that wasn't the case for Faith. She was orphaned at a young age and raised by her aunt and uncle in Nairobi with little

exposure to computers. Nonetheless, that didn't stop her from harnessing the power of adversity and using it as motivation rather than letting it fester into discouragement.

"The opportunities were not vast for me. The first computer I had was when I was 19 years old when my uncle gave me his old computer to go to university in Russia," Faith explained.

Following high school, Faith received a scholarship by the Russian Government to attend Moscow Technical University of Communications and Informatics in Moscow, Russia. "I qualified to join the university back in Kenya as a computer scientist but decided to study out. I opted for telecommunication engineering but didn't even know what it entailed," Faith said.

Yes, that means she had to learn how to speak, read, and write in Russian before the university courses began.

"I studied the language for eight months, I believe. And after that, I was infused into a Russian school that was 100 percent Russian. It was really difficult," Faith recalled. "The good thing is that I was doing engineering. So the terminology is basically going to be Latin, right? Mathematics is mathematics everywhere—in Spanish, Japanese, everywhere. At least with the vocabulary there, it wasn't so intense, but still it was a challenge."

With a firm grip on the language, she dove into her education, and Faith soon gathered that she would have to choose a career path. Like most students, she explained, uncertainty had come over her, and she questioned her ultimate goal.

"In the last years of my bachelor's, maybe in the third year, I realized that I didn't really know what was going to become of me," Faith unveiled. "I didn't see myself climbing poles to fix the cables back home, so I thought 'okay? What can I do?'"

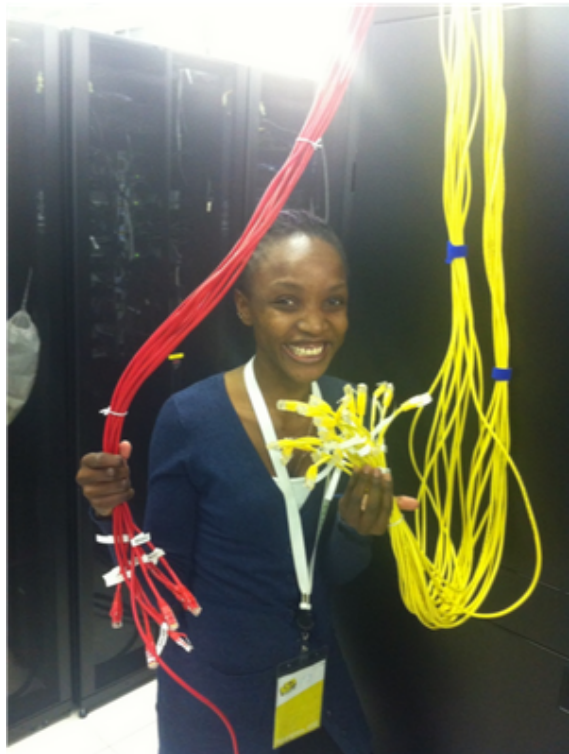
This was the moment Faith took her fate into her own hands. She explored opportunities and discovered a networking academy offered at her school. She immediately went down to the program, knocked on the director's door, and asked to speak with him about registering.

Now, just imagine the shock on the Russian secretary's face when this young Kenyan girl was standing at their door, boldly requesting a meeting with the director.

"I think at first the lady was a bit shocked because this is in Russia, right? And I'm unique," Faith said laughingly as she remembered the moment. "I went ahead and spoke with the director, who is the kindest person I've ever met."

After a conversation about her qualifications and background, the director accepted her situation and granted her free admittance to the academy, which began the following week. Even though Faith knew little about networking and had no idea what a CCNA was or how she would pay for the new courses, her determination helped to create a path that wasn't there before.

“If doors don’t open for you, just knock. Sometimes, you just need to knock. That’s basically how I got my foot into networking,” Faith said.



Faith Opiyo in a server room holding ethernet cables.

Faith completed her CCNA course and was offered an internship at Cisco while she studied for her Bachelors and Masters degrees. After graduating, her career in networking was off and running. She had begun to follow in the footsteps of inspirational women who paved the path for her.

As an engineer, Faith is no stranger to the challenges involved in her field. However, as a woman in a male-dominated field, she described the types of challenges she faced early in her career.

“After some time, I actually realized that it’s not that easy sometimes. Sometimes, I got the feeling that I had to try a little bit harder. I

don’t just get it on a silver platter,” Faith said. She continued, “At least in my case, people were not really open to me being there or something. But when I started showing that I was capable and when I started delivering, they knew I was a person they needed to go to. That’s how it was for me. I did have to break the ice. And once I broke the ice, it got easier.”

Faith learned how to endure challenges and how to be strong and confident in work from the encouraging women that have surrounded her throughout her career. Even today, after three years at Palo Alto Networks, Faith continues to absorb positivity from the inspiration around her. She has become successful by remaining humble and optimistic, and remembering the rewards of the journey are in the small milestones.


“All the small milestones of getting out of Kenya, joining a university in a completely different language, being able to complete my education in Russian with first-class honors, being able to join my previous company, Cisco, May Kay, this company; I think it’s all those small milestones, they’re not very big, but for me they are accomplishments in their own way” Faith explains.

Faith has good advice for young women who are pursuing a career in engineering.

“If doors don’t open for you, just knock. If you really, really want it, you really have to work for it,” Faith revealed. “All the resources are there online. We have free educational portals and different types of online training that cost barely anything, so if you really want to join the field right now,

there are so many resources that are available to you that, at the particular time, I didn't have."

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