

Issue 004

# WHEN SPARKS SPEAK

DEC 2025



**WHEN  
SPARKS  
SPEAK**



— • Zanel Viljoen • —

Zanel Viljoen  
Co-Founder | Inov8HER



When I discovered Inov8HER through Zanel's post on Women In Tech, the project immediately resonated with our beliefs at When Sparks Speak: we shared the same vision through different formats. It became clear we wanted to shed light on that initiative and meet the people behind it

The first thing I noticed about Zanel was her vibrant energy, and I believe her dynamism shines through in this article. She brought such enthusiasm and drive to each conversation, I couldn't leave without a smile. I hope, dear reader, that you will feel just the same and close this article with a renewed spark.

Then came the admiration and the respect for Zanel's drive and boldness. May that be on a hike or on Tech ground, her adventurousness has led her to reach new highs. Her testimony proves that curiosity combined with hard work allows for intricate connections across topics to find innovative solutions. Yet, she leads her decisions with understanding and compassion.

As someone who has been advocating for women to reach for their dreams, Zanel's voice is a reminder to be fearless, persevering, and fierce without sacrificing our empathy. In a few words, Zanel is a lioness.

Every issue of When Sparks Speak begins as a conversation – usually one sparked by curiosity, admiration, or the simple sense that someone's story needs to be seen. This issue, featuring Zanel Viljoen, is exactly that kind of story.

What struck me most in working through Zanel's interview was her duality: the analytical precision of an IT recruitment leader paired with the deep human insight of someone trained to understand people far beyond their résumés. She moves through the tech world with a rare blend of discipline, resilience, and heart. You can feel it across the pages – whether she's talking about the psychology behind hiring, the grit required to climb mountains, or the courage to co-found a platform for women who too often feel unseen.

Her words echo the deeper purpose of this magazine. When Sparks Speak has always been about visibility, amplification, and the stories that don't get told loudly enough. Women are reshaping technology every day, and our goal is to continue building a space where those perspectives are centred, celebrated, and shared.

To everyone reading, thank you for joining us as we continue to grow this platform. Elise and I are building this project issue by issue, conversation by conversation – and it's your energy, support, and excitement that keep it moving forward.



**Elise**



**Michael**



## INTRODUCTION

I'm Zanel Viljoen, Head of IT Recruitment at Bluegrass Digital and Co-founder of Inov8HER, a platform dedicated to empowering women in technology. I lead with a balance of analytical precision and human insight, drawing on a background in Psychology that allows me to truly understand what drives people—not just what qualifies them.

***“Adaptability and ownership are everything in the modern tech landscape.”***

My career has been built on connecting exceptional talent to transformative opportunities across the globe, from scaling startups to building enterprise-level digital teams. Outside the boardroom, I'm powered by discipline and endurance through hiking and MMA, which mirror how I lead: with resilience, focus, and strategic patience.



**Q: What does your role as Head of IT Recruitment entail?**

A: It's equal parts leadership, strategy, and execution. I lead a global recruitment function that delivers elite software talent to clients in multiple markets, build teams, create hiring strategies, maintain long-term relationships, and act as a business partner advising clients on scalability and future-proofing their workforce.

**Q: What led you to this role and the tech field?**

A: I've always been fascinated by people—how they think, grow, and adapt. Pair that with my obsession for innovation, and tech became a natural fit. I wanted to be where ideas disrupt industries and where change happens first.



***“AI isn’t replacing developers — it’s raising the bar.”***

**Q: How much have you dabbled in tech?**

A: A lot more than people expect. I made an early decision to understand the technology I was hiring for—beyond buzzwords. I've completed courses in cloud computing, data analytics, AI fundamentals, and frameworks like React, Node.js, and Python.

**Q: Did you have a mentor at the time? What other resources did you rely on?**

A: Not at first. My mentors were curiosity and consistency. Later, I built a network of forward-thinking professionals and invested in continuous learning through courses and thought-leadership communities.



**Q: What skills are most relevant in the current market for engineers and employees?**

**A:** Adaptability and ownership. The market moves fast—those who can pivot thrive. AI literacy, cloud, data fluency, and full-stack development are in demand, but communication and accountability separate the great from the good.

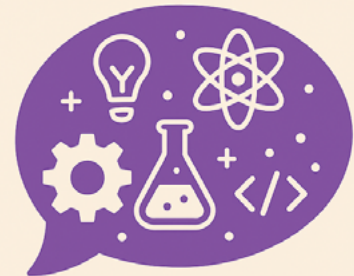
***“Psychology taught me that every hiring decision is really a human decision.”***





**Q: What have your studies in Psychology brought to your work?**

**A: Everything. Psychology taught me to see beyond surface behavior—motivation, resilience, stress responses. It helps me read teams, support candidates, and prevent burnout. At its core, hiring is a human decision.**



**WHEN  
SPARKS  
SPEAK**

# WOMEN IN TECH

**Q: You won the Africa's Woman's Leader distinction in 2020. What was it for?**

**A:** I was recognized as one of the top female leaders on the African continent. It pushed me to double down on creating spaces where women can thrive and showed me the power of visibility.

**Q: You co-founded Inov8HER—could you present this project?**

**A:** Inov8HER was born from conversations with women who felt unseen in the tech industry. It's a platform that connects, mentors, and empowers women through real stories and community.

***“Discipline is remembering what you want.”***



**Q: How can someone submit their story?**

A: They can reach out directly to us or through our Wonder Women Wednesday feature.

**Q: What advice would you give to girls and women reading this article?**

A: Own your space. Don't play small. Build skills, learn the language of the industry, and back yourself—even when it feels uncomfortable.





## **SPORTS & LEADERSHIP**

**Q: What non-technical hobbies helped you in your career?**

A: Hiking has been mental conditioning. Every climb demands focus, patience, and endurance—skills that translate directly into leadership.

**Q: What about MMA? What did you learn from it?**

A: MMA taught me to control chaos—strategy, timing, and emotional regulation under pressure. It mirrors leadership in many ways.

***“MMA  
taught  
me  
to  
control  
chaos.”***



## **A FEW LAST WORDS**

**Q: What book, movie, or podcast would you recommend?**

A: Book: *Becoming Bulletproof* by Evy Poumpouras. Podcast: *Contrarian Thinking* by Codie Sanchez.

**Q: What is a quote that resonated with you recently?**

A: "Discipline is remembering what you want." A reminder that consistency beats talent every time.

# A Note to Our Readers

Thank you for being part of another issue of When Sparks Speak. Every edition is shaped by the remarkable women who trust us with their stories, and Issue 004 is no exception.

In this issue, we explore themes of resilience, leadership, and empowerment through the voice of Zanel Viljoen – a woman who exemplifies what it means to lead with intention, adapt with confidence, and uplift others along the way. Her journey reminds us that the tech world is not just built on skills and innovation, but on people, community, and the courage to elevate one another.

We hope this issue inspires you to keep pushing forward, to keep learning, and to keep taking up the space that belongs to you.

Thank you for reading, sharing, and supporting this project as it continues to evolve.

– The When Sparks Speak Team



# Contact Us

---

email

[whensparkspeak@proton.me](mailto:whensparkspeak@proton.me)

WHEN SPARKS SPEAK