



ROCKWOOD



Leslie van Niekerk

Deal Executive

Q&A

Q What led you to pursue a career in Private Equity?

A My interest in mergers and acquisitions first peaked during a university class where students were broken up into small groups and assigned a company, with the objective of completing a transaction with another group by the end of the semester. I thoroughly enjoyed the excitement of strategising and negotiating with my peers. Given this interest, I was excited to start my career in PwC's mergers and acquisitions team. I was afforded the opportunity to work on multiple transactions, local and cross-border, in multiple industries, which was a great learning experience for the rest of my career. After completing my MBA, I decided that I no longer wanted to be involved just in the acquisition or sale of a business, but to be involved post-acquisition. This ultimately led me to the decision to pursue a career in private equity. This move has not only provided me with the opportunity to still be involved in transaction processes, but also to expand my expertise as a portfolio manager, where I am involved in all business aspects of the portfolio company, and get to work with business leaders with a wealth of knowledge.

Q What is your favourite sector to do a deal in and why?

A Manufacturing – As a child, I remember going to a steel mill with my Dad, where my sister and I were given hard hats to wear and shown around the plant. I found the manufacturing process fascinating, and I still do. I am always excited to learn how things are made, and take every opportunity I can to walk around our factories. Manufacturing is such a broad industry, where cutting-edge technology is key, and it attracts people from all walks of life. The variety and adaptability of this industry are what make it my favourite sector to do a deal in.

Q What piece of advice would you give a female entrepreneur looking for funding?

A In terms of equity funding, start thinking about your ideal equity partner, your company's growth potential, and your exit options long before making the final decision to go to market. Finding the right partner for your business is one of the most important decisions that you will make in your journey as a business owner, which is why it is important to have a clear understanding of the attributes that you would want in a long-term partner, as well as the exact assistance that you would want from that partner – whether it be assistance with increasing market share or a partner that is well connected in the financial world, that can assist with bank relationships and funding. Knowing your exit options is also important before looking for a partner, as it is not unusual for transaction agreements to address matters such as tag-along and/or come-along rights. This brings up the question of whether you would want to exit when the equity partner's investment horizon has come to an end, or whether you would want the option of first right of refusal to acquire their shares. Knowing the answer to these questions will ensure that you don't waste your time with the wrong equity partner, and that you have options should you wish to exit. Finally, surround yourself with good advisors who can assist you with finding the right partner and concluding the best possible transaction for you and your business.

Q What, in your opinion, is the hardest part of a PE deal?

A The first 100 days after closing the transaction. Change is tough at the best of times, let alone when there is a change in ownership of a company. Gaining the trust of employees takes time and there is often

resistance to changes such as implementing new governance structures. When Rockwood acquires a company, we create a 100-day plan that assists with managing expectations and helps to create some structure and reassurance, which is a strategy that has proven to be a success.

Q What was the toughest deal you ever worked on and why?

A The toughest deal I was involved in was the sale of an agricultural commodity company that was in financial trouble and on the verge of being liquidated. This situation was made more difficult by the passing of one of the shareholders before the transaction process started. It was tough to manage the emotions of all parties involved, while also trying to drive the deal forward. This deal taught me a lot about dealing with different personalities in a stressful environment.

Q What do you do to unwind and get away from the stress of work?

A I play horse polo. Not only is it a great stress reliever, but an incredible community to be part of, where I have met amazing people and made lifelong friends.

FUN FACTS

My favourite Colour: Blue.

Dog or cat person: A dog person.

Unusual hobbies: Horse polo. I find it to be unique in the way that, during a game, I can't think of anything else other than what is happening at that exact moment.

Item ticked off your bucket list: Live in New York.

Item not yet completed on your bucket list: See the Northern Lights. 📍