Q&A

Nyameka Nkasana

Associate

Baker McKenzie

How have you built resilience in a high-pressure, male-dominated environment?

The most important lesson I've learnt is to develop resilience and a mindset of perseverance. I continually work to sharpen my technical skills, knowledge and expertise. This ensures that in every transaction, I contribute meaningfully to client needs and provide excellent client service. Lastly, I surround myself with a community of women who thrive in male-dominated environments, providing a safe space to affirm, motivate, and help each other work through the imposter syndrome that we often experience as women in these spaces.

The most important lesson I've learnt is to develop resilience and a mindset of perseverance. I continually work to sharpen my technical skills, knowledge and expertise.

What does self-care look like for you, and how do you prevent burnout?

The most important act of self-care for me has been creating and setting healthy and realistic boundaries. This involves showing up as my best self at work, and setting aside time to step away from work to do things that I love. It can be as simple as setting time aside every evening to read a chapter from a book on my current reading list, or spending time with loved ones.

Have your views on work-life balance changed over time?

Yes, definitely. When I started my career, I thought work-life balance meant leaving work at 5 pm every day and having the rest of the evening to do whatever I wanted – and never working on weekends. I quickly learnt that there are occasions that demand working far beyond those hours, and even into some weekends. However, it's important to take time away at the end of a long and strenuous transaction to have some downtime and rest.

Did you have any mentors or role models? How did they influence your journey?

My biggest mentor and role model is my cousin, who is a qualified Chartered Accountant. At a young age, she has managed to build a successful career in the financial services industry, focusing on insurance and asset management, with experience in top local and international audit firms. She has shaped my journey by showing me what can be achieved through hard work, resilience and integrity.

What barriers for women still need to be broken down in the banking & finance industry?

Many transactions are still largely run and negotiated by men, both from the perspective of the transactors on the deals and the lawyers advising on these transactions. To a large degree, women remain in supporting roles to their male seniors and/or male counterparts.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

I constantly remind myself of how far I've come, and the possibilities that come from how far I still have to go and what I'm still capable of achieving. I believe this is only the beginning of what promises to be a long, fruitful and successful career ahead. The tough days build resilience, and everything will work out in my best interests.

Nyameka Nkasana is an associate in Baker McKenzie's Banking & Finance Practice Group in Johannesburg. She has been involved in various transactions, including leveraged finance, debt restructurings, acquisition finance and syndicated lending for major financial institutions and borrowers. Nyameka has advised on significant deals, such as providing senior and mezzanine loan facilities to Enyuka Prop Holdings, and assisting Absa Bank with a substantial lending facility for Fonzosys Proprietary Limited. Her expertise spans both local and international finance transactions, making her a valuable asset to her clients.