

# Q&A

## Tshimbiluni Ntuli

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**Q Where did your corporate finance journey begin, and how did you end up where you are today?**

**A** My journey began when I joined Absa's Graduate Programme as a graduate trainee in Public Sector Banking, focusing on sector analysis and providing solutions to the South African government – particularly local and provincial government. A year later I was given the opportunity to lead the local government on-balance sheet funding book. That experience provided me with the opportunity, at a very early stage of my career, to learn and understand banking, and to develop the confidence needed to succeed in a male-dominated and extremely competitive environment.

A few years later I found that I had reached the ceiling in terms of my learning, so I started to ask myself: What's next? I found what interested me within the bank, navigated my way into Structured Trade and Commodity Finance (STCF), and haven't looked back. I spent two years on secondment across Barclays Offices in Canary Wharf, New York, and the National Bank of Commerce in Tanzania. Those secondments afforded me the opportunity to harness my technical and leadership skills, which have added to my current role as the Head of the STCF Absa Regional Operations desk.

**Q Did you have a mentor at any point in your career? If so, who were they and what did you learn from them?**

**A** I have been fortunate to have several phenomenal mentors at various phases of my career, who provided me with meaningful relationships and selfless insights. They imparted their knowledge and held me accountable when I withered. They helped shape my career and left me with lifelong lessons, which I pay forward.

**Q What are some of the most memorable deals you have worked on?**

**A** The most complex deal that comes to mind was a USD25 million multijurisdictional inventory finance transaction, which comprised funding various commodities in multiple jurisdictions – including Absa non-presence countries and countries where Absa had never financed commodities before. This required an understanding of the commodities and markets we were going into, and engaging legal counsels in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Singapore, Tanzania and UAE simultaneously to ensure that the bank was covered and that the client's structured working capital requirements were solutioned for accordingly. The transaction was Absa STCF's debut into Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, and it provided

a gateway to do more transactions in those markets and other non-presence markets.

**Q How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your work or career?**

**A** I became a first-time mother during the first outbreak of COVID-19. My world changed when my daughter was born. Previously I would plan around my career, and as a result, I'd planned how I would transition back to work and business travels... only to change gears when we went into hard lockdown as I was due to return to work! I quickly had to adjust to going back to "work" and separating being a mom from being a professional in the same space.

**Q What advice would you give to young women who are looking to enter the corporate finance market?**

**A** Don't be afraid to make mistakes early in your career. This may be your only opportunity to make mistakes without being judged, as colleagues appreciate that you are learning. Once the experience has been gained, things change, and unfortunately, it becomes harder to make mistakes with minimal judgement. Also, own up to your mistakes. This builds respect and trust. 📌