



## Esti Stransky

Director: FSG  
Absa Corporate and Investment Banking.



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

**A** I knew I wanted to be a banker when I was in high school. I used to watch a Canadian television show called “Traders”, about an investment banking firm in Toronto and I remember thinking “that looks like fun, I want to negotiate large corporate deals one day”. I, therefore, concentrated my studies on attaining the skills needed to reach my goals and received my CFA, law and accounting degrees. I spent four years doing risk consulting and working in credit within the investment bank before finally moving into a transactor role nearly 9 years ago.

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

**A** I have had a mentor in my career as a transactor. Sam Erwin was the previous head of Global Finance at the bank, and I think the most important lesson I learnt from him is to be prepared and to pay attention to details. If you want to sell a transaction to your colleagues or credit, you need to make sure you clearly understand the intricacies regarding the client and the transaction better than the person

you are trying to persuade. You need to create confidence in yourself and the deal.

**Q** *What is the biggest / most complex transaction you have worked on so far in your career?*

**A** There are different aspects of different deals that have been complex. With some transactions, the complex element is the structuring, while with others it is the credit process, origination or legal/client negotiations. Sometimes it is merely having the determination or stubbornness to persevere when deal fatigue sets in. I also often find that it is the smaller deals that bring more complexities rather than the big deals as there are far fewer eyes on the deal, so as a transactor you really delve into the details and often need to problem solve different aspects of the transaction lifecycle yourself. However if I need to choose one deal, I would probably say it was a small preference share transaction where we funded into a fintech company. We needed to upskill ourselves on the subject matter, perform due diligence and then needed to convince a sceptical credit to extend funding into a new sector on difficult terms. But through the process, we as a deal team came to understand the client and business very well and I was confident in the growth story

we were backing. A few years later I couldn't help but smile when the credit sanctioner on the deal phoned me up and told me that he had to admit that I was right and he was wrong on this deal.

**Q** *Did the COVID-19 pandemic with the various lockdowns, changes in working habits etc. bring about any major changes for you from a work/career perspective?*

**A** I believe it encouraged a healthier work-life balance and I now find the time to once again exercise, something I had not been able to fit into my daily schedule since I became a mother. Forced lockdowns have proved the concept that as an investment banker you are capable of competently working from home. I believe it has increased my productivity in all areas of my life. As the mother of two small boys, life is very busy, so finding ways of being more efficient remains a priority.

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

**A** Learn early on in your career to negotiate and stand up for yourself, don't expect or wait for anybody else to fight your battles on your behalf. 