



## Mamokete Lijane

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

A I started my career in 2001 as a graduate at a small but influential stockbroker called Barnard Jacobs Mellet Securities. The company CEO Paul Barnard asked me whether I wanted to work in equities or fixed income, and was surprised when I said fixed income. At the time, the equity business was seen as much more exciting. However, my actuarial education had built an enduring fascination with all things interest rates.

I worked as an analyst in fixed income and economics for much of my career. I was assistant to the economist, credit analyst, and fixed income analyst on the sell side for the first 15 years, and multi-asset strategist at a buy-side firm for another three years. Consequently, there is little in the non-equity research space that I haven't done.

On completion of my MBA, I decided to spread my wings beyond research and joined the institutional sales desk at Absa. I still do research, but am now focused on making sure that the firm uses the knowledge generated optimally for clients. My job is about connecting the dots and closing the loop between what Absa can and does do, and what clients need from a knowledge and product perspective.

### 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 was fortunate to have mentors pretty much from the start. My first mentor, Leon Krynow, was also my first manager and remains a key guide and anchor member of Team Mamokete.

I also worked as an assistant to top-rated economist Bruce Donald early in my career, and he remains a friend and a sounding board. Those two men were instrumental in the formation of my career. They guided me tirelessly, shared insights, opened doors, and fought many battles on my behalf in my early career. They taught me to work hard, prioritise clients, and innovate continuously. They also showed me that success and kindness are not mutually exclusive. Leon especially modelled authenticity and love in a work setting. That's something I try to embody every day.

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

A I really struggled to adjust to working during the lockdown. I get energised by human interaction, and working on a trading floor provides ample amounts of stimulation. Working at home alone was extremely disorienting for me, especially in the early days before MS Teams and Zoom were well established as forms of communication. That eased a bit as I started talking to people on Teams, but I was one of the first people to go back to the office when we moved to Level 4. I have not really worked remotely since.

That said, working on Teams expanded our reach and transformed our ability to work. I share and explore ideas with clients and colleagues for a living, so working with webinars and Teams has made it much easier and cheaper to communicate than what we were able to achieve with physical engagements. It's been a game-changer in how I do my job.

The economic turmoil of the COVID crisis and the volatility of financial markets in the period saw increased demand for insights from people outside

the industry. I was increasingly called on to share insights on forums outside my normal area of operation. I leaned into this, and it has been a game changer in the expansion of my profile, which has also helped my career.

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

A Finance is a fascinating world. No two days are ever the same, and there is continuous learning. The people are intelligent, and both the work and the people stretch you continuously. I have no regrets about my career decision. I cannot imagine doing anything else. You are rewarded for the work you put in and have a lot of fun doing it. I would highly recommend this field as a career to anyone, male or female.

That said, because of the cutthroat nature of some of the roles, people can be aggressive. It can be emotionally taxing, too. There are strong personalities everywhere. I have found that being true to yourself helps keep you centred. You should deliver on the work, but you do not have to be a clone. Moreover, authenticity is important for networking, and that is the key contributor to success in finance.

I would urge young women to fight hard for themselves, with themselves. In this business, you must show up strong. In the early years, that means working as hard as you can and being excellent. Study. Read. Take on projects. Put in the extra effort while you have the energy. That early investment is an invaluable foundation for the rest of your career. But don't forget to play. It is easy to lose yourself at work when work never runs out. And in finance, work truly never runs out. 