

DealMakers[®]

WOMEN 2025



Women of SA's M&A and Financial Markets Industry



Marylou Greig
Editor

Each year on Women's Day, we pause to honour the courage, strength and resilience of women, both past and present, who have broken barriers and paved the way for future generations. In South Africa, this day holds deep historical significance, rooted in the 1956 march of 20,000 women to the Union Buildings in protest against unjust laws. It serves as both a tribute and a call to action; a reminder of how far we've come, and how much further we must go.

Within the South African M&A and financial markets industry, women continue to make strides, often quietly, often against the odds. This sector, long dominated by men, is slowly but surely beginning to recognise the immense value women bring to the table: not only through skill and insight, but through leadership, empathy, resilience and collaboration.

This collection of profiles and personal reflections is a celebration of those women. Each voice is unique, and each journey distinct, but common threads emerge; work hard, believe in yourself, and embrace the guidance and support of others. These stories are rich with lessons: from overcoming doubt to navigating complex deals, from building credibility to mentoring others in the quest to advance the visibility and influence of women in this industry.

It is our hope that these pages serve as more than just a showcase; that they be a source

of inspiration to young women considering careers in finance, law or dealmaking. We hope that they offer encouragement to those who are navigating their own path, and serve as a reminder that they are not alone. Others have walked this road and thrived.

Let this be both a recognition of remarkable women and a beacon for the next generation.

This fifth edition of the feature will be released at the third DealMakers Women's Day networking event, which builds on the previous two years' success and will once again include a panel discussion. This year's panel members are Jo Mitchell-Marias, a Partner in Restructuring, Turnaround & Performance Improvement at Deloitte Africa; Amalia Lui, a Partner at Clyde & Co Tanzania; Shireen Motara, Founder and CEO of The Next Chapter Studio; Soria Hay, Founder and Head of Corporate Finance at Bravura; and Titi Sekhukhune, co-Founder and Partner at Infinite Partners.

My grateful thanks go to this dynamic industry for the continued support and participation in this feature and the networking event. And to my own team, who themselves are women juggling many roles, for their dedication and excellence in compiling this discourse – a collaboration and testament to the talented and resilient women in this space. 🙌

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FOREWORD

DealMakers WOMEN 2025

Women of SA's M&A and Financial Markets Industry

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PROFILE

Monica Shupikai Simmons

Head of Private Capital
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WHAT I HAVE LEARNT

There is nothing quite like a milestone birthday approaching on the horizon to force one to reflect on life's journey. When it comes to my career, I marvel at how far I've come. I've achieved more than a young Monica could ever have dreamed of. More importantly, I consider myself to be one of the lucky ones who loves their job. This is what I was born to do. Yet even so, the road has not been without its challenges, and I have learnt some important lessons along the way.

I am excited about what lies ahead in my career. Global private capital markets have grown exponentially in the past decade, and this is expected to continue ('Global Private Market Report: 2025' (McKinsey)). It's a great opportunity for our team; however, the famous Winston Churchill quote that "those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it" reminds me to really think about the lessons learnt, so that I never repeat my old mistakes.

Relationships are critical

One of the biggest lessons of my career has been the importance of relationships. Building a relationship network is critical to business success. And without trust, there is no relationship. This is true for all relationships, including in business. With our clients, we all understand that buying or investing in a business requires the founder, the management team, and the business itself to be subjected to rigorous due diligence. This forms the basis of trust. So too with our colleagues, clients, fellow advisors, the investor community, potential acquirers and other stakeholders. Their trust is not automatic. We need to earn the trust to build the relationship.

Throughout my career, I have had to prove that I am trustworthy and have integrity. I have had to prove my worth by demonstrating my expertise, time and time again. Things like being on time, being professional, being diligent, following through on commitments made, and delivering high quality work product, etc. These are all proof points. As a black woman in finance, I've faced my share of prejudice. Yes, it's unfair and it can be exhausting to continually have to push back against some preconceived notion of who you are. However, over the years, I've learnt to *accept that some relationships just take a little longer than others to build*. That simple. So, I focus on nurturing the relationships in my network, one conference / email / video call / coffee / lunch / dinner at a time. I make it a priority.

All feedback matters

Looking back on my career, a particularly interesting observation has been how well structured, constructive feedback has been just as much a catalyst for change as that rude and obnoxious colleague's flippant remark that I pondered for hours afterwards! Both made me focus on development areas that needed improvement. That's because I have learnt that *ALL feedback can lead to positive change*. This knowledge has made me more open to hearing uncomfortable truths, and less likely to respond reflexively to blame the messenger. I try to objectively see where they are coming from, and try to see where I can improve. I wish I had known this when I started my career, back when I had thinner skin and took negative feedback personally.

When in doubt, pause

As women, one of the most damaging labels we can get is the dreaded e-word... 'emotional'. When I was at university, a game changer for me was reading the book 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' by Stephen Covey. First published in 1989, this book has sold over 40 million copies in 40 languages, making it one of the most successful business books. The very first habit is learning to master how to respond, not react, to a given situation. And the difference between a response and a reaction lies in the time between stimulus and response. The longer that time, the better the quality of your response. I have a personal rule to never respond to an upsetting email / message within 24 hours. If I do, I am highly likely to escalate the situation. I apply this rule in my personal and professional life with great success. I've learnt that this is how *I enable the clearest, calmest version of myself to lead in challenging situations*. Try it!

Work-life balance

I'm a single mum of two pre-teens, working in a high pressure, male dominated environment. You can safely assume that work-life balance is a goal that I strive for on a daily basis. "It takes a village" is a favourite mantra in our home, and I'm the queen of lists and multi-tasking. Yet even with all these tools in use and my mother living around the corner, it would be impossible to achieve the level of work-life balance that I have without the support of leadership at RMB. Yes, the women in leadership (thank you, ladies), but notably, it's the men in our leadership team who are a key part of my 'village'. Throughout my career, my male colleagues have understood the challenges that I am facing and empowered me to *still* deliver for our clients with excellence in a way that has allowed me to sleep well at night, knowing that I had spent that precious quality time with my kids when it counted. Whether it's flexibility to work from home or trusting that I'll get the deliverable done even when a personal situation arises, *I have learnt that you can't do it all on your own; it takes a village*.

I wish young Monica had known these four lessons when she started working as a trainee accountant at PwC London:

Relationships are critical, so go ahead and join the others at the pub, even though you don't drink alcohol. Because it's not about the drink, it's about the relationships.

ALL feedback matters, so ignore the delivery or tone, and focus on shifting that misconception. Don't take it personally.

When in doubt, pause. So, go ahead, vent in an email, but save it in Drafts and see how your calmer self views that same email in 24 hours, before you click send. It will teach you to be more measured.

Work-life balance does not mean burning out from trying to do it all (team lead, mother, daughter, self). It means doing the best you can by prioritising what matters most that day, while leveraging the 'village' for support.

These four lessons learnt are a constant as I navigate my career. They empower me to pursue my career goals with confidence. If I can do it, then so you can you. Godspeed! 🙌





Q&A

Cara Pardini

Transactor

Rand Merchant Bank

What initially drew you to a career in M&A or corporate finance?

During my articles, I found myself naturally drawn to understanding what “dealmaking” really meant. I remember reading about transactions and feeling genuinely excited at the thought of being part of a deal team.

I wanted a career that would challenge me, stretch my thinking, and accelerate my growth. Corporate finance offered all of that and more. This is a field that pushes you to constantly be on your game – technically, strategically and interpersonally.

The exposure you get early on is exceptional – you’re working on high-profile transactions, engaging directly with senior executives, and gaining insights into the inner workings of companies across different sectors. You’re required to think critically, creatively, and under pressure – and that’s where I thrive. I also knew the skill set I’d develop would be invaluable.

But beyond the technical side, it was the people that sealed it for me. The idea of learning from and working alongside some of the brightest minds in the industry was, and still is, incredibly motivating.

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

Resilience, for me, has come from knowing my value and learning not to be afraid to speak up. In environments where confidence is often equated with being the loudest voice in the room, it can be easy to feel like you’re being overlooked, especially as a woman. I’ve learnt to empower myself to push past that, to share my views, put my hand up for opportunities, and ask for what I want. Things won’t always go your way, but there’s strength in being bold enough to ask.

I’ve also found that staying calm, being honest, and developing strong self-awareness are key to maintaining resilience. It’s about not letting bad days define you, and knowing when to seek support if you need it.

Above all, I’ve learnt that you don’t have to lose your personal touch to succeed. Everyone brings something unique to the table, and real resilience lies in balancing self-advocacy with collaboration and empathy.

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

I’ve been fortunate to have a handful of mentors and role models who’ve played a meaningful role in my journey so far, and who have helped shape my mindset and approach.

They’ve helped me understand what really matters, what to focus on, what to let go of, and how to take a broader view. One piece of advice that’s stuck with me is that you have to take the long-term

view in this career. If you measure progress over just a year or two, it can feel uneven or frustrating. But if you zoom out to five to ten years, you’ll likely get all the exposure you hoped for, and even some you didn’t know you needed.

That advice helped reframe my perspective. It reminded me that growth in this industry is rarely linear, but if you stay committed and open, the right opportunities will come – often in ways you don’t expect.

What advice would you give to your younger self starting out in this field?

Be open to new experiences and say yes to as many opportunities as you can, especially early on. Learn about yourself, your working style, your limits. Don’t be afraid to ask for help, and be honest about your capacity. Patience is key. Give yourself grace, keep persevering, and remember, growth doesn’t always look like success.

One of the most valuable things you can do is talk to people. Network with peers, seek out mentors, and share your experiences. You’ll find others have gone through similar challenges, and that support is powerful. Just as important, be that support for someone else. Help those who are just starting out. A little guidance or reassurance can make a big difference.


And finally, don’t measure success only by closed deals or immediate wins. So much in this field is outside your control. Instead, measure your progress by how much you’re learning and how you’re developing professionally. The wins will come in time.

What would you say is a critical trait to have in this career?

It’s hard to choose just one, but for me, it’s a tie between resilience and patience.

Patience is essential – with transactions, with timelines, with people, and most importantly, with yourself. Deals stall, timelines shift, and outcomes can be uncertain despite months of work. Learning to remain calm, composed and committed, even when things don’t unfold as expected, is a key part of the job.

At the same time, resilience is what gets you through the tougher days. There are daily challenges – some weeks are rougher than others, some deals fall apart after months of effort, and sometimes you’re navigating difficult personalities or situations beyond your control. The ability to recover quickly, to bounce back and show up the next day, ready to tackle the next challenge, is a must.

Having these qualities not only helps you grow, it also allows you to stay motivated and remain excited. You begin to appreciate the process, the lessons, the small wins, and even the tough moments, because each one shapes you into a stronger, more capable professional. 





Q&A

Daniela Perros

Transactor

Rand Merchant Bank

What initially drew you to a career in M&A or corporate finance?

I didn't grow up with a clear path to investment banking and corporate finance, but as I studied finance and gained exposure to corporate transactions, I became increasingly interested in M&A. The fast pace, complexity and intensity of dealmaking were compelling. What stood out most was the unique perspective it offers — you gain an insider's view of how businesses grow, change ownership, or reposition themselves during pivotal moments.

Working in the financial sponsor advisory space has deepened this interest by exposing me to a wide range of companies across sectors such as logistics, energy, consumer, healthcare, hospitality, services and more. Many of these companies play an important role in the South African economy, often operating behind the scenes but contributing significantly to growth and job creation. Being involved in their evolution through capital raises, exits or strategic acquisitions is both commercially engaging and economically important.

I was also attracted by the blend of analytical rigour and commercial judgment that the role requires. Being involved in high-stakes transactions with tangible real-world impact is challenging and rewarding, which continues to motivate me.

Have you faced any gender-based challenges or biases in your career? If so, how did you navigate them?

There has been progress for women in corporate finance, with increased awareness, representation, and more open conversations compared to when I started. However, challenges remain, often in subtle forms like being talked over in meetings, assumptions about my role on deals, or being held to different standards.

One of the biggest challenges has been internal, i.e. struggling with imposter syndrome and sometimes doubting my own contributions despite knowing their value. This kind of self-doubt is difficult to overcome, especially in an industry still dominated by men at senior levels.

While I'm still working through this, I've improved at identifying when my doubts stem from fear rather than reality. I've learnt to speak up, even when it feels uncomfortable, and to trust my judgment more with each experience. I also try to be open about these struggles with other women in the field, so they understand that they're not alone and can feel more confident in their own abilities.

How have you balanced your personal life with the demands of a career in finance?

Some might say a "personal life" and "corporate finance" rarely co-exist easily, and there have certainly been intense periods where that feels true. Over time, I've learnt that if I don't actively create space for life outside work, the demands of the job can consume all my time.

Exercise has become essential to maintaining balance. Morning runs with friends provide a valuable chance to clear my mind, stay physically active, and connect with people outside of work before the day begins.

I also try to be deliberate about setting boundaries whenever possible. This might mean scheduling time for a walk, dinner with family, or simply an hour to recharge after a demanding transaction. While the nature of the work means there will be times when it takes precedence, I've found that protecting even small amounts of personal time is crucial for sustaining my well-being and effectiveness in this career.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

On difficult days, I remind myself of the broader purpose behind the work that I do. Being part of transformative transactions that influence companies and communities means that the impact of what we do goes beyond just numbers.

I'm also fortunate to work with highly capable colleagues and clients who challenge me to improve and develop professionally. Their commitment and resilience provide the motivation when challenges arise.

On a personal level, I keep perspective by recognising that setbacks and obstacles are part of the process. Each challenge presents an opportunity to learn and enhance my skills. Understanding that the work contributes meaningfully to the economy and the people affected by it helps me maintain my focus and determination.

What also keeps me engaged is knowing how much there still is to learn. The M&A landscape is constantly evolving, whether it's shifts in deal structures, sector dynamics, or how private capital is being deployed. Each transaction brings new nuances, and staying curious and open to that complexity is a big part of what makes this work rewarding over the long term. 🐾





INSIGHT

Georgina Armstrong

Transactor

Rand Merchant Bank

The story begins, as so many do, with a journey. A bookseller in a garage, a London-based antiques salesman who branched out into shells, then oil, and a Western Cape retailer with just eight stores. Fast forward to Amazon, Shell and Shoprite – three household names, and definitely companies you should trust with your money, based on their history.

Compelling investment rationale, or not so much?

Ultimately, these three stories, and most of those belonging to listed equities – globally and locally – are about evolution. It isn't always a revolutionary change, but each story is about constant innovation, strategic shifts, and goal progression. These are stories that aren't done justice through backward-looking, snapshot-in-time results presentations. A forward-looking understanding cannot be assumed based on a previous period's headline earnings, and not even on guidance or outlook statements.

It is all about a compelling equity story; not just an investment case, but an actual story. An equity story is a narrative that a company crafts, combining financial data with qualitative information, such as a company's competitive advantages, market position and management team, to provide a compelling reason for investors to buy its stock. Essentially, it's a comprehensive summary of a company's strategy, and its potential for future growth and profitability, tailored to resonate with investors. While this is not new news, it is important to remember that not all stories are created equal, and they certainly aren't all told with the same efficacy and impact.

The difference in story-telling ability is massive; a poorly told story might bore the dinner table, or your investor universe, while a well-told story has the power to captivate, persuade and create lasting impact by engaging both the logical and emotional centres of the audience's brain. It fosters connection, inspires action, and can even drive change.

And so, we get to the crux of this humble article. The role of Capital Markets Days (CMDs) in defining and delivering the equity story.

Consider this, you spend the day unpacking a new strategy, giving insights into a relatively complicated federated model, all while showcasing the depth and skill of your broader management team. Your share price rallies on the day and keeps going in the months after, with the event having acted as a catalyst for an equity rerating.

Alternatively, you could dedicate a morning to going into detail on a poorly understood part of your business that is ascribed zero in your broader valuation. Experts are brought in to illustrate the market positioning and growth potential. The share price rallies: optionality turns into material value and shortly thereafter, an offer is received for said part of the business, resulting in a disposal and accelerated shareholder value creation.

There are more examples of value-delivering outcomes such as these from CMD engagements, but the key takeaway from the stories above is that each company had something new or compelling to talk about. The time was dedicated to helping investors and analysts understand certain areas of the business that were of specific interest to them, or which were visibly misunderstood by the broader market.

Asking fund managers and analysts to sit through hours and hours of content that offers no new insights or tangible progress on strategy will not endear you to your audience. Think reading the latest best seller versus your school history textbook. Ultimately, it only makes sense to host a CMD if the audience stands to benefit beyond what they can gain from reading your company website and other already-published material.

And so, it should go without saying that the success of a CMD, as with the heart of any great story, relies on content. A well-crafted and compelling presentation is an art that requires a careful blend of storytelling, data visualisation and strategic messaging. Setting out a narrative that leaves your audience with a clear understanding of the investment thesis, while being mindful of their time, is at the core of a successful CMD.


The content of your CMD will depend on your underlying goals. Being strategic in your communications means defining exactly what you want the audience to walk away knowing – and creatively finding a way for this messaging to shine through.

Interactive and dynamic elements like videos, animated graphics, data visualisations, demos, polls, product displays, AR & VR experiences, and well-run Q&A sessions help your audience walk away with a deeper understanding of the messaging. Keep in mind that when you invest in engaging content in a thoughtful way, it can be leveraged across the forward investor relations calendar and other marketing initiatives. Additionally, employing techniques to create a more personal experience allows for more meaningful conversations between investors and company executives.

To fully drive home the message, seize the opportunity to immerse your audience in your company brand, highlighting softer messages such as values and purpose, and tangibly presenting innovations and key differentiators through the conscious buildout of a physical and digital environment. By really thinking through the attendee experience and creating a unique journey to complement the company's offer, you are not only telling a story, but allowing investors to feel part of it, creating a more memorable experience with longer-lasting impact.

Lastly, never ignore the epilogue. A CMD does not end when the presentations are over. The importance of a well-structured follow-up strategy to ensure that key messages resonate beyond the event and provide valuable insights for future improvements cannot be underestimated or overlooked.

Gathering feedback, analysing engagement metrics, and maintaining ongoing communication with investors are essential steps to maximise the event's impact internally. Every author wants to know when they have written a best seller!

The moral of this story is this; stories are hardwired into our very biology. We are storytelling organisms that use narrative structures to organise our thoughts, and because we use stories to recall facts, our knowledge is based on stories themselves. So don't save stories for bedtime, use them to influence investment time horizons. 





INSIGHT

Masechaba Makhura

Transactor

Rand Merchant Bank

Mastering the maze of a complex capital raise

"What we need to do is quite simple! Amend the Terms and Conditions of two separate debt instruments, both held by several different funders, listed on two separate exchanges, denominated in two different currencies, and overseen by three separate regulators. A maze of complex capital raising....."

The reason we need to amend the Terms and Conditions is to facilitate an underwritten equity capital raise to rebalance its capital structure. Did I mention that we still require debtholder, shareholder and regulatory approval support to get the deal over the line? Our deadline - four months. It's simple right?"

That's when the adventure began!

I was tasked to step into a lead advisory role on the transaction, which consisted of multiple inter-conditional steps to amend separate debt instruments, and obtain all necessary regulatory and shareholder approvals in order to achieve the end goal of successfully implementing a R7,5 billion capital raise, all within an extremely tight timeframe. Not only was this a challenging and daunting task, but the time constraints and implications of a failed capital raise made the pressure immense.

The first step in approaching any complex transaction in Investment Banking is to break it down into key components. It is important to understand how each component works, its dependencies, its challenges, and how it fits together with the other elements involved in the transaction. Once there is a detailed plan, all workstreams are populated into a detailed working timetable to ensure that your deadlines are met. This is no small feat, as it needs to consider the tight deadlines and demands of debtholders, shareholders, the client, and the regulators. Deadlines and pressure are synonymous with capital raises and company restructurings. It is managing the complexities and tasks as a lead banker that really ratchets up the pressure.

Running such a complex capital raise means hosting daily calls to coordinate and execute the various workstreams, liaising with two sets of legal counsel, two sponsor teams, a debt adviser, one other financial adviser, the client, and the three regulators. Aside from coordinating multiple parties, the restructure of the agreements and the capital raise was highly technical in nature.

We managed to get agreements signed and other key documentation and stakeholder approvals drafted and ready to go within the given timeframe, but in order to launch the capital raise, we needed critical regulatory approval within two weeks or the entire inter-conditional debt restructure and capital raise would be at risk.

Fortunately, something that I have learnt in my career is that it is very important to build strong relationships with clients, investors, regulators and advisers. So, given our strong relationships with

the three relevant regulators, we were able to obtain the necessary approvals – albeit slightly later than envisaged – and this behemoth inter-conditional debt restructure and underwritten capital raise was successfully implemented.

This transaction took me out of my comfort zone, but on reflection, I am very proud that my experience and the support and experience of my team played a significant role in navigating the numerous moving parts and inter-conditionality between each complex step in the transaction. There is nothing more satisfying than successfully getting to the finish line with a happy client, and entrenching RMB's role as a trusted advisor.

Navigating a complex and stressful transaction isn't easy. Especially when, out of more than 19 advisers, you're one of only two women on the transaction. Sometimes it can be daunting when you are in such a minority. So, how did I give the best of myself? I had two important practices that I leaned into during the most stressful periods, enabling me to exercise a bit more grace and patience.

The first was that I saw the '*human past the title*', which involved recognising that every individual, regardless of their role or status, has unique experiences, emotions and perspectives. I valued their personal stories and tried to understand their motivations beyond their professional identity. I engaged in genuine conversations, actively listened, and showed empathy. By focusing on their character, values and personal journey, I was able to build deeper connections and foster mutual respect. This enhanced open and honest communication prevented misunderstandings and fostered a collaborative environment.

The capital raise results proved to be impressive, and the extensive shareholder process resulted in the transaction being well supported and oversubscribed. This provided the client additional time and flexibility to deliver on its strategy and realise maximum value for its stakeholders.

As an investment banker, the fast-paced and high-pressure environment demands consistent performance and mental clarity. To stay grounded, the second practice that I engaged was prioritising daily movement and mindfulness, recognising that personal wellbeing is critical to professional success. Whether it's a morning workout, a walk in between meetings, or having a fresh bouquet of colourful flowers on my office desk, these practices helped me to manage stress, maintain focus, and approach challenges with a clear, composed mindset. Integrating wellness into my routine not only enhances my productivity and decision-making, but also sets a foundation for long-term performance in a demanding industry.

Balance, I've found, is a strategic advantage. 





Q&A

Nicole Lancefield

Transactor

Rand Merchant Bank

Can you share a defining moment or turning point in your career so far?

During my first year in corporate finance, I found myself in a meeting discussing a complex issue that threatened to derail an important deal. As I listened to my experienced colleagues thinking aloud, exploring creative solutions, a spark of inspiration struck. I took a leap and suggested an idea – a bold thought born in the moment. The team embraced it, and my contribution proved pivotal in solving the challenge, enabling the deal to move forward. Witnessing my suggestion come to life and seeing its tangible impact solidified my passion for corporate finance. It was a defining moment that taught me the power of courage and creativity, igniting a deep-seated drive to shape meaningful outcomes in this dynamic field.

This experience highlighted the importance of creating a safe space for both juniors and women to speak out. Having such an environment allowed me to have the courage to share my ideas, and it continues to do so. The support and openness of my team played a crucial role in this, demonstrating that when people feel safe and valued, they are more likely to contribute innovative solutions.

Can you share an experience where mentorship played a crucial role in overcoming gender-based challenges or biases in your career?

At the start of my journey in corporate finance, I initially tried to conform to the prevailing norms, often mimicking the majority of the team – which was (and is) male-dominated – and adhering to what seemed to be unspoken rules. But this shifted when I started working under an extraordinary woman whose intelligence, drive and unwavering commitment to fairness shaped not just my career, but my identity within this field. She stood up firmly for herself and, importantly, for me, teaching me the value of asserting my presence and being unapologetically female in an environment where subtle barriers often persisted.

Her mentorship transformed my perspective. She demonstrated how perceptions could be altered, fostering a more inclusive workspace where mutual respect and equality thrived. Perhaps her most valuable lesson was helping me recognise and combat imposter syndrome, a struggle faced by countless women navigating male-dominated industries. She taught me that resilience does not just emerge from personal strength, but also from the solidarity among women – helping others stand taller while standing tall yourself.

Her influence didn't stop at me; the changes she championed rippled through our team, cultivating an atmosphere where awareness of equality became ingrained. This evolution highlighted the profound impact women can have when they lift each other and actively teach those around them, including male colleagues, about the importance of equity. The unwavering support of allies, both female and male, has made my professional journey not just enriching, but deeply empowering. It is a testament to the transformative power of mentorship, and the essential role women play in shaping inclusive workplaces that recognise and celebrate diverse contributions.

What barriers still need to be broken down in M&A or the corporate finance industry for women?

Corporate finance often revolves around serving clients and, in many cases, the adage that “the client is always right” applies. However, a significant challenge arises when many clients in leadership positions, whether in large, listed companies or private equity firms, are predominantly men who may possess unconscious biases. These biases can manifest subtly, such as looking to male colleagues for validation, or not fully giving weight to the insights shared by women. While progress has been made, and though these dynamics have improved over time, there is still work to be done.

Navigating these situations can be particularly challenging, as it's rarely appropriate to call out a client or create conflict. By actively participating in discussions, sharing their insights and demonstrating their expertise, women can challenge existing biases and reshape perceptions. It is essential for women to have the courage to keep fighting and breaking down these barriers by being proactive and vocal in their contributions. In addition, one of the most effective ways to address this is through the confidence and support displayed by male colleagues and leaders. When they affirm and reinforce your expertise in front of clients, it becomes a powerful tool for overcoming these biases and establishing credibility. My male counterparts within my team have played a crucial role in this regard, and continue to actively support me in breaking down barriers. Their allyship and willingness to champion equality in everyday interactions underscores the importance of collective efforts in fostering equality within professional spaces.

What advice would you give to your younger self starting out in this field?

If I could speak to my younger self, I would say: trust in your abilities, and never underestimate the power of your voice. There will be moments when you feel overshadowed or overlooked, especially in an industry that has traditionally been male dominated. But remember, your perspective is unique and valuable; never let doubts or biases diminish your confidence.

Build a network of allies early on. Seek mentors who genuinely support your growth, and colleagues who recognise your capabilities and advocate for you. Allyship is not just about having people who stand by you, but also about learning to stand firm for others as you grow into your role.

I would also remind myself to redefine success on my own terms. It's easy to get caught up in chasing external validation, but true fulfillment comes from staying authentic and aligning your career with your values and purpose. Be bold in challenging norms, but approach these challenges with diplomacy and resilience.

Finally, prioritise self-care and balance. The demands of corporate finance can be intense, but taking time for yourself will make you stronger and more effective in the long run. Embrace the journey with optimism, and learn from each step – it's all part of building the future you envision. 