

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

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Q&A

Jo Mitchell-Marais

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What did your path into Restructuring look like – was it intentional, or did you discover it along the way?

I like to think that Restructuring found me! As a student at UCT in the 1990s, I was very interested in research topics that explored corporate failure, and started my Masters with the topic: 'Predicting Corporate Failure Using Neural Networks'. Unfortunately, I did not get to complete my Masters as I moved to the UK in the middle of the programme. Fast forward three years, and I was an audit manager at one of the Big 4. One night, I found myself working late in the office with the Restructuring partner; she was one of a handful of female partners at the time. I overheard her conversation with a client, and I remember being intrigued by not only what she was saying to the client, but *how* she was saying it. I knew I needed to find out more, so I arranged a coffee chat the next week, and the rest is history.

Have there been key decisions that significantly impacted your career trajectory?

I decided early on in my career that I wasn't going to say 'no' to an opportunity that came my way because I was too scared, afraid I wasn't qualified enough, or that it would take me out of my comfort zone. Despite sometimes being terrified, I've said 'yes' anyway. This has led to many leadership roles (both in England and in South Africa), from leading the restructuring and insolvency Young Professionals in South-East England to now chairing the South African Restructuring & Insolvency Practitioners Association (SARIPA) – the first woman to hold this position in its 40-year history. I encourage my team to take advantage of every opportunity that comes their way – practice also makes perfect – and there is never a better time to start building your brand than right now.

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

There is a misconception that you need to be 'tough' in restructuring, and that 'tough' means you need to be aggressive. This is because the environment can be brutal and intense. Given what is at stake, the emotions in the boardroom can run very high. In too many job interviews, I've been asked how I would handle situations where men are shouting at me. In one interview, I was even asked whether I had ever cried in such a situation! I've been told I'm too 'nice' to be in restructuring, too 'softly-spoken' to be successful in this field.

Generally, I don't have a verbal response to these statements. I prefer to demonstrate with my actions. I firmly believe that my ability to be calm in a high-pressured environment, being able

to diffuse tension and to empathise, have made me the leader and restructuring professional that I am. I don't need to try to be aggressive or transactional to be successful; I just need to be myself.

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

Balance is always an interesting word for me; it implies equilibrium – 50/50. I don't see it this way. I see 'balance' more as 'alignment'. So, provided that there is alignment with what matters most to me at a given point in time, I am usually content. If a deal is at its peak, it matters most to me to be there in the thick of it with my team. If it is my Mom's 80th birthday, it matters most to me that I am present with my family, celebrating. I've found that setting boundaries is critical to getting this right – boundaries for others and myself! I have also learnt how to recharge – what gives me energy, what I need in order to enable me to perform at my best. I focus on these things when I feel out of alignment.

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

The first Restructuring partner that I worked for was female. She became my mentor and we still keep in touch today. We had very different styles, but this was accepted and encouraged. She made me believe that there was space for me in our field, that I didn't need to try to pretend to be anyone else but myself. She valued the different way we approached problems, and how we managed and dealt with clients, which ultimately led to better client outcomes.

When, in 2019, I was offered the position to build and develop the restructuring practice at Deloitte Africa, I jumped at the chance. At the time, I was the only female leader of a Big 4 restructuring practice in South Africa, and I knew I could succeed by being myself.

What barriers still need to be broken down in the restructuring industry for women?

Women are still significantly under-represented at senior levels in restructuring – whether as senior BRPs, advisers or bankers. It requires intentional sponsorship and more inclusive networking spaces to try to improve representation. We also need to demonstrate to young women that there is a path forward that's flexible; that sustainable models of work are possible, and that diverse leadership styles are the norm. 🙌

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Q&A

Nazeema Dharsey

Partner | Valuations & Modelling
Consulting Services
Deloitte Africa

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

I grew up in a family where my siblings pursued careers in Economics, Finance and Information Technology – a clear steer from my dad who was a medical doctor, but also had a keen interest in business. It was during my audit articles that I had to review a valuation and I had picked up an error. I had to discuss this with a CFO of a property company, who was so impressed. We had an interesting (albeit basic) discussion around strategy, what he thought of the future ambitions of the business, and I knew that this was for me.

I enjoy looking forward, learning from the past, and helping clients to think about their future. In a sense, it is also about putting together pieces of a puzzle – where one client has a need and another may have an offering which could be complementary. Matchmaking in a way.

The variety of transactions, the way business responds to changing market conditions and the impact and value it unlocks, not on the business itself, but on society, is a key drawcard for me.

What was your first deal or transaction like, and what did you take away from it?

My first transaction taught me that even seasoned transactors can get caught up in deal fever, and that emotions play a pivotal part in executing a transaction. The role of the independent advisor is so critical, and my first engagement resulted in the client withdrawing from the auction process upon our advice. They thanked us a year later, when the target went into business rescue due to regulatory findings.

What's the hardest lesson you've learnt, and how did it shape you?

You are not an island. To be successful, you need your deal team, your internal administration team, your fellow partners and, most importantly, your personal circle. Trying to go at it alone will never work. Ask for advice, get the second opinion, and listen to your inner voice.

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

Yes. My initial views was that work and life are completely separate. In my current season of my life, there is a lot more grey, and I need to be agile and flexible when managing both. Your support system

is of utmost importance and surrounding yourself with those who understand and appreciate you, is critical. We try our best and that is all we can do. One needs to prioritise what is important to you and those closest to you.

An example is being at prize-giving on a Thursday morning and telling my clients that my sons need me, has brought about better client relationships as they too have a life outside work. Clients (male and female) often share their ways of attending rugby and still running listed companies at the same time. A non-negotiable is that quality and deliverables will never be compromised, and this is a priority. We will never get it 100% right, and if outsourcing your cupcake contribution to Woolies gets you through the day, so be it. Job creation, after all.

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

My mentors include past clients, partners, and my immediate family. I have been privileged to learn from the best and to extract the life lessons I've needed, depending on the season of my life. These individuals have played a key role in guiding career choices and navigating challenging circumstances, and have been my biggest cheerleaders.

What kind of leader are you, and how did you develop your leadership style?

I firmly believe in authenticity and transparency. As important as your career is, your personal support system is more important. As a leader, my clients and team come first. We work hard from the get-go to avoid surprises, and work with them to get the best outcome. And saying "please" and "thank you" goes a long way.

How has the landscape for women in finance changed since you started?

The boardroom has changed during my 18 years in corporate finance, from me being the only female, the only person of colour, and the only one (then) under 30. Today, it is our responsibility as leaders to groom the next generation of champions to lead with grace, inclusivity and authenticity. Our landscape today is made up of highly intelligent women and men, who are hardworking, motivated and wanting to make an impact, and this is exactly the environment I want my sons to make an impact in one day. 🙌

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Q&A

Thembeka Buthelezi

Partner | M&A Transaction Services
Consulting Services
Deloitte Africa

What initially drew you to a career in M&A and shaped your path in this field?

My path into M&A and corporate finance was a blend of intentional steps and discovery. My interest in business, M&A and dealmaking was piqued during my training as a Chartered Accountant (CA (SA)), where I was exposed to various facets of financial analysis, strategy and business operations. I've always been passionate about understanding the "why" behind business decisions, and M&A offered a dynamic environment where financial analysis intersects with strategic thinking. Qualifying as a CA provided a solid technical foundation, but it was through exposure to diverse clients, industries and deal environments during my early career that I discovered a strong affinity for transactions.

As I gained more experience, I realised how much I enjoyed the strategic depth, analytical challenge, and fast-paced and collaborative nature of M&A; being involved in the end-to-end lifecycle of a deal, from initial strategy and due diligence through to execution and post deal completion. So, what really drew me into M&A transaction services and corporate finance was the opportunity to support clients through pivotal business transformations. There's something incredibly fulfilling about supporting clients through such transformative milestones and seeing the long-term impact of those decisions.

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

A defining moment in my career was my transition into the Deloitte M&A Transaction Services team, which was a deliberate move that aligned with my evolving interests. Once I was immersed in the M&A space (with a focus on the deal execution phase), I had an opportunity to go on secondment to the Deloitte London M&A Sale and Purchase Agreements specialist team in 2019, and it was then that I knew I had found my niche.

Being a part of this specialised team on a global stage allowed me to focus on what truly excited me: negotiating, strategic thinking, and problem-solving under pressure. What makes this work exciting is the dynamic, high-impact nature of each deal. Every transaction is unique, requiring a blend of technical expertise, strategic thinking, and problem-solving. Being part of the end-to-end deal process – where real business transformations happen – means constantly learning, collaborating, and helping clients make critical decisions that shape their future. It's fast-paced, intellectually stimulating, and incredibly rewarding to see your input directly influence successful outcomes.

Being admitted into the Deloitte Africa partnership as a fellow Partner was a key milestone that validated years of commitment, learning and resilience.

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

Like many women in M&A, I've occasionally encountered subtle biases, whether it's assumptions about assertiveness or being underestimated in male-dominated boardrooms. I navigated these by focusing on excellence and consistency. I also learnt to use my voice, stand firm in my technical expertise, and create space for others who might feel unseen. It's about showing up authentically and setting high standards, not only for yourself, but also for the culture you want to influence.

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

Work-life balance has evolved for me, and I now look at it more as work-life integration. This, especially in a demanding field like M&A, is less about perfect balance and more about intentional blending. Over time, I've learnt to integrate my professional and personal priorities in a way that allows both to coexist meaningfully. This means setting boundaries when needed, being present in the moments that matter, and recognising that some seasons are more intense than others.

Supportive leadership, a collaborative team, and a clear sense of purpose have all helped make integration more sustainable. I've also found that self-awareness, planning, and building in time to recharge (by travelling) are critical to showing up at my best, both at work and at home. Ultimately, it's about designing a life where success doesn't come at the expense of well-being, but rather alongside it.

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

Absolutely. Mentorship has played a powerful role in my journey. I've had mentors, both formal and informal, who've encouraged me to pursue leadership roles and who have shared their own journeys candidly. Having role models who looked like me, especially women in senior positions, made a huge difference. It showed me what's possible and helped me navigate challenges with greater confidence.

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

I'd tell my younger self: "Trust your journey." You don't need to have all the answers on day one. Be curious, stay grounded in your values, and be brave enough to take up space. Build meaningful relationships, invest in your learning, and don't be afraid to ask for help. Your authenticity is your strength – lean into it. 🌱

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Q&A

Nolwazi Ndaba

Partner | Valuations & Modelling
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Was there a pivotal moment or influence early on in your life that shaped your interest in finance?

Looking back, I don't think I realised it at the time, but money and business were always part of the conversations around me. Like most South Africans, I grew up in an environment where financial decisions had a direct and visible impact on daily life. I watched close family and friends run a small business, and I saw how tough financial decisions could impact, not just the business, but the people behind it. That left an impression. I became curious about how businesses actually work, what drives them, what holds them back, and how value is built. In high school, I naturally gravitated toward numbers; they provided a framework for thinking clearly and solving problems in a way that felt intuitive to me.

Fast-forward to university, specifically through courses like corporate finance and strategic thinking, and that's when everything started to come together. We were unpacking how to value a business and I remember thinking, this makes sense — this is what I want to do. It brought together my interests in business, people and decision-making, and that's really what set me on the path to where I am today.

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

It has to be when I became a Partner. It's more than a title — it's a shift in how you show up. It continues to push me on the path I had already started down, which is to lead more intentionally, to create space for others to grow, and to focus on shaping the future of our business.

What kind of leader are you, and how did you develop your leadership style?

My leadership style is deeply rooted in how I was raised. I grew up surrounded by people, specifically my parents and grandparents, who led with purpose and lived with a deep sense of responsibility toward others. They believed in putting people first, in staying grounded in values, and in knowing how to connect with the community and people around you to move things forward. I didn't realise it then, but I was learning some of the most important leadership lessons just by watching how they showed up in the world.

That influence shaped how I lead today. I'm intentional about building trust, leading with empathy, and creating spaces where people feel heard and supported. I believe in being clear, present, and honest, even when the stakes are high. I've also learnt that

leadership isn't static — it evolves. Early in my career, I leaned heavily on technical strength, but over time, I realised that influence, connection and purpose are what truly drive impact. Those early lessons from home still guide me today.

What barriers still need to be broken down for women in M&A?

There are still quite a few. In South Africa, and across the continent, you don't often see women leading in M&A or high-stakes finance roles, especially Black women. The talent is there, no question. But the visibility, the access to big opportunities, and the networks that help people move forward: these are still not equally distributed.

Many of our systems weren't built with us in mind, and you feel that in subtle ways. Sometimes it's in how clients respond to you in a room, or in who gets the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes it's the extra explaining you have to do to be seen as credible, especially when you're younger or don't fit the traditional mould.

What we really need is more people, especially those in leadership, to be intentional about opening doors, mentoring women, and normalising different styles of leadership. We also need to stop waiting for women to "prove" themselves first. If someone has potential, sponsor them. Give them the exposure.

The good news is things are shifting. I'm seeing more women step into leadership roles, own their expertise, and challenge outdated norms. But the pace of change still depends on how brave we're willing to be, not just individually, but as an industry.

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

I've always found this to be such a powerful question.

I'd tell her: You belong here — don't shrink yourself to fit into spaces that were never designed with you in mind. Your voice, your perspective, your way of leading — it all has value, even if it looks different from what's around you.

I'd also remind her that it's okay not to have it all figured out. The journey is as important as the destination. Ask questions, stay curious, and don't be afraid to take up space. The technical skills will come, but what will really set you apart is your integrity, your ability to build trust, and how you make people feel.

And finally, I'd say: find your tribe. The work is demanding, but it doesn't have to be lonely. Surround yourself with people who see you, stretch you, and remind you who you are when things get tough. 🙌

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Q&A

Hannah Marais

Senior Associate Director
South Africa Economic Advisory Leader
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Deloitte Africa

What shaped your interest in finance?

My interest in finance was not something I deliberately pursued. More than 18 years ago, I was an economist by training, and started my career and professional exposure by working across Africa and other emerging markets. It became evident to me that finance and access to finance were foundational to the diversification and inclusive development of our economies.

Whether it is providing working capital to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), private equity and venture capital for nurturing Africa's innovation ecosystem and scaling homegrown enterprises, channelling long-term investment into infrastructure and industrialisation, or unlocking intra-African trade opportunities under regional trade agreements, finance sits at the heart of our continent's progress. It determines who participates in the economy, how value chains are built, and whether countries can fully leverage both their natural resources and human capital.

This triggered my interest in external finance from global actors such as China, and how this significantly altered Africa's infrastructure landscape from the late 2000s. I also began working more closely within the domestic financial ecosystem, as strengthening the continent's long-term growth and resilience will also hinge on deeper local capital markets. Building trust in financial institutions and expanding access to finance at all levels – from micro-entrepreneurs to large-scale investment – creates financial inclusion that does not only allow banking access, but economic empowerment and opportunity.

What did your path into this field look like – was it intentional, or did you discover it along the way?

Given the above, it's clear that my path was not intentional. But, working across sectors, I have had the privilege of being at the intersection of economics and finance. For example, I've supported Deloitte Africa on industry research into private equity in Africa over the past decade, assisting to identify trends, opportunities, markets and projects for investment across countries and industries, while also focusing on highlighting the challenges faced by smaller businesses and women-owned enterprises – from financial literacy to inclusion and access. I've also had the opportunity to work on a diverse portfolio of research, market studies and economic assignments for investment and commercial banks, payments network processors, asset managers, development finance institutions, investment funds, insurance companies, telecommunication and technology companies, as well as private equity players.

More recently, I have had the privilege to "connect the dots" and help fly the African flag as part of South Africa's G20 Presidency, and specifically the voice of business in this grouping, under the

B20. With Deloitte Africa appointed as the Knowledge Partner to the B20 Finance & Infrastructure Taskforce, I have been part of conversations that are shaping key actions and recommendations for greater access to finance, particularly for women and small businesses on our continent, to help unlock sustainable growth through infrastructure development.

What does work-life balance mean for you and have your views on work-life balance changed over time?

For much of my career, I was deeply work-orientated – my professional ambitions and responsibilities often dictated the rhythm of my life. In hindsight, work-life balance was not something I consciously pursued. I thrived on intensity, long hours, and the sense of purpose that came from pushing myself to deliver at a high level.

While I am still goal and purpose-driven, some adjustments needed to be made with the birth of my daughter in 2018. Becoming a parent fundamentally reshaped how I define balance and what I value day to day, with demands on my time now no longer only professional, but certainly very personal, emotional and constant. Navigating this new terrain required intentional adjustments, including building a strong support system, learning to say "no" without guilt, and accepting that I can step back and trust others to lead and execute. Work-life balance to me is less about rigid boundaries and more about conscious choices, including clarity about what truly matters and being able to "switch off" from work so I can be present in the moment with my husband and our two beautiful children.

Did you have a mentor and, if so, what was the most important thing you learnt from them?

Throughout my career, I've drawn inspiration from a wide range of individuals, each leaving a quiet but meaningful imprint on how I think, lead and live.

One of the most valuable lessons taken from them is confidence – not just the kind that shows up on a stage, but a deep grounded confidence in my capabilities and knowledge, leadership and persuasion, communication and professionalism; and importantly, my ability to inspire others.

The second lesson has been more personal: that how we engage and accept one another, especially in today's fractured world, matters more than ever. True connection is rooted in humility and purpose. It's not about self-promotion or personal recognition, but about making space for others to grow and thrive. Those who have inspired me have led with generosity – of time, insights, and care – and with a commitment to lifting others. Their example always reminds me that lasting impact comes from what we give, rather than what we take. 🌱

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Q&A

Nashmitha Pillay

Associate Director | M&A Transaction Services
Consulting Services
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How have you built resilience in a high-pressure, male-dominated environment?

I am incredibly fortunate to have a strong support system in place. My family, especially my mother and husband, have played a crucial role in my career, enabling me to focus on the demands of work and to show up as my best self on a daily basis.

I have built resilience by being true to myself and not changing who I am or compromising on my values to succeed; by having mentors and advisors who are invested in my growth, who have provided guidance and support throughout my career; and lastly, by taking time to reflect and having self-awareness.

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

For me, self-care isn't necessarily a full spa day (although, I do love spa days!). I try to practice small acts of self-care regularly, including exercising as often as I can, and getting my nails and hair done.

Have your views on work life balance changed over time?

Since becoming a mom, I have been more intentional about integrating work and my personal life, rather than striving for work-life balance. It is important for me to show up for my kids and be a present parent. It is equally important for me to achieve my professional goals. Work-life integration allows me to be flexible in managing both the demands of my career and my personal life.

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

I have been fortunate to have a few mentors throughout my career, all of whom have been instrumental in my journey. The best advice

I received from one of my mentors is "perseverance pays profits".

How do you mentor or support other women entering the field?

By being my authentic self and sharing my career journey (ups and downs) with young women starting out in the field. I am transparent about how I manage work, family and personal pursuits, so that other women can feel confident in doing the same. Understanding the struggles and experiences of my mentors has personally helped me to navigate and persevere through my own challenging times.

What kind of leader are you, and how did you develop your leadership style?

Being a good leader comes with time and experience. I do not believe that there is a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership, and I tend to adapt my leadership style to different situations.

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

While M&A has traditionally been male-dominated, I think we have come a long way in terms of women taking a seat at the table.

I have been fortunate to have many women come before me, who challenged industry norms and broke through glass ceilings. However, there is always room for more women to hold leadership positions in M&A.

If you could rewrite one chapter of your journey, what would it be and why?

I would not change a thing. Hindsight is always 20/20, but I believe that my personal and professional journey, with all its ups and downs, has shaped the woman I am today and where I am in my career. 🙌

I have built
resilience by being
true to myself
and not changing
who I am or
compromising
on my values to
succeed



Q&A

Tendayi Jena

Associate Director | M&A Value Creation
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What initially drew you to a career in M&A or corporate finance?

Initially, it was the opportunity to lead deals with a pragmatic, business-oriented approach, helping clients achieve their strategic objectives. After completing my MBA, and having previously worked in Finance, I knew that a career in M&A perfectly aligned with my skills and interest. The dynamic nature of M&A, characterised by complex challenges, was incredibly appealing to me. I've found that each deal presents a unique set of circumstances – be it an asset acquisition, a business merger, or a carve-out – and each offers an opportunity to apply my expertise and make a tangible difference. The satisfaction of seeing deal value realisation and business transformation is what continues to fuel my passion for Post Merger Integrations (PMI).

Have there been key decisions that significantly impacted your career trajectory?

One of the most pivotal decisions in my career was putting my hand up to help my firm build a PMI practice from the ground up in South Africa. This decision significantly impacted my career trajectory as my contribution enabled us to extend our service offerings to M&A clients, thereby enhancing our firm's value proposition in the market. The success of the PMI practice underscored my strategic vision and leadership potential, paving the way for my advancement within the firm.

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

Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to have mentors who provided guidance and support. Their insights helped me navigate complex situations, and encouraged me to embrace challenges. Observing their leadership styles and dedication to excellence inspired me to develop my own approach to leadership.

Building strong
relationships
and networks is
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underestimate the
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challenges.

How do you mentor or support other women entering the field?

Mentoring and supporting women in the field is a responsibility I embrace, aiming to build the support network many of us wish we had. I participate in mentorship programmes that focus on sharing both technical knowledge and the unwritten rules of navigating the corporate landscape. Creating an environment where women feel confident to voice their ideas and take on challenges is essential. I share my experiences in my career development, network building and leadership, emphasising that setbacks can be valuable learning experiences. My ultimate goal is to empower women to become confident leaders in M&A.

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

I would tell my younger self to embrace every opportunity for learning and growth, even if it seems daunting at first. It's important to stay curious and adaptable, as the field of M&A is constantly evolving. Building strong relationships and networks is invaluable, and never underestimate the power of resilience and perseverance in overcoming challenges. 🙌



Q&A

Christelle van den Heever

Senior Manager | M&A Deal Transformation
Consulting Services
Deloitte Africa

What did your path into this field look like – was it intentional, or did you discover it along the way?

My journey into this field was quite serendipitous, as it was something I discovered later in my career rather than pursuing intentionally from the outset. I found myself working on three different integration and carve-out projects, and it was during these experiences that I realised the potential for building a career in this area. With a background in Industrial Engineering, I developed my skillset through numerous large-scale, cross-functional business and technology transformation projects. Although I initially assumed that a finance background was a prerequisite for engaging in M&A projects, I've come to appreciate that my extensive experience across various functions and industries allows me to swiftly comprehend how the different components of a business interconnect. This understanding has proven invaluable in evaluating how a carve-out or integration affects various facets of a business, encompassing people, processes and technology.

What was your first deal or transaction like, and what did you take away from it?

My first significant transaction was the carve-out and sale of more than 50 retail stores from a well-known national retailer. This experience was both challenging and rewarding, as it required close collaboration with a diverse group of individuals across the business. The anticipation leading up to Day 1 was palpable, following months of meticulous preparation and planning. Each day during the cutover period was filled with engaging check-ins, ensuring that every detail was accounted for and that the transition would proceed smoothly. Witnessing everything come together seamlessly on Day 1 was an incredibly gratifying moment, as it highlighted the collective effort and dedication of everyone involved in the project. This experience taught me the importance of teamwork and thorough preparation for achieving successful outcomes in complex transactions.

What's the hardest lesson you've learnt, and how did it shape you?

The hardest lesson I've learnt in my career is that solving complex problems goes beyond merely constructing academically correct solutions; it's fundamentally about engaging with real people – genuine human beings with unique perspectives and motivations. Initially, I focused heavily on the technical aspects of problem-solving, but I soon realised that the human element is equally, if not more important. I had to cultivate the skill of listening attentively and taking the time to understand what drives individuals, as these factors can significantly influence the success or failure of a solution. This lesson has shaped me by emphasising the

importance of empathy and communication in my approach to problem-solving. Additionally, part of this journey involved learning to listen to myself, trusting my instincts, and recognising my own needs and motivations. This holistic understanding has been critical for developing solutions that are not only effective, but also resonate with the people involved.

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

For me, self-care is a multifaceted practice that involves being intentional about the choices I make in both my personal and professional life. It's about consciously deciding what aspects I'm willing to compromise on, and recognising the moments when it's important to stand firm on my principles. This intentionality extends to being fully present in whatever activity I'm engaged in, whether it's burning the midnight oil on a demanding project or enjoying a leisurely walk with my dogs. By immersing myself in the moment, I find that I can better appreciate the nuances of each experience and maintain a sense of balance. This approach not only helps me manage stress effectively, but also prevents burnout by ensuring that I remain connected to the things that bring me joy and fulfilment. Ultimately, self-care is about nurturing my wellbeing, and creating a sustainable rhythm that supports both my personal growth and professional success.

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

Over time, my perspective on work-life balance has undergone a significant transformation. Initially, I viewed it as something that could be achieved by taking a holiday or a break after completing a major project. However, I've come to realise that true work-life balance is a daily practice, requiring consistent attention and effort to maintain equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal wellbeing. This shift in understanding has been influenced by insights from our M&A leadership team, who emphasise the importance of creating regular opportunities for team members to connect on a social level. By encouraging individuals to share their hobbies, passions and interests, we foster a sense of community and support that is essential for achieving balance at the team level, contributing to a more fulfilling and sustainable work environment.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

On tough days, my motivation comes from being immersed in a high-performing environment alongside high-achieving individuals. The collaborative spirit and shared commitment to success create an atmosphere where continuous growth is not just encouraged, but expected. 🧠

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