

WOMEN WHO LIFT



Sally Hutton and Martine Leukes on their mentorship relationship

Success is not only measured by deals closed or accolades earned, but also by the ability to lift others – to recognise potential, nurture young talent, and actively create space for growth. That philosophy underlies the mentorship relationship between Sally Hutton and Martine Leukes, a pair whose dynamic combination illustrates the power of intentional support and a shared commitment to excellence.

Sally is a private equity M&A specialist and a partner at Webber Wentzel (having recently completed a decade as the firm’s managing partner). Martine is a corporate lawyer and senior associate in Sally’s team, with a focus on private equity and venture capital transactions.

Their professional paths first crossed in 2018, when Martine completed a rotation as a candidate attorney in Sally’s team. Their relationship deepened when Martine returned to the team as a first-year associate in 2020. Sally and Martine first worked directly together on a major transaction in 2021, when Martine supported Sally on the acquisition of Crossfin Technology, a leading player in the South African fintech industry by a consortium of investors led by the Ethos Mid-Market Fund (now Infinite Partners).

“The Crossfin transaction was the first time that Martine and I worked directly together on a major deal, and I immediately noticed that she had a calm confidence, good legal instincts, a sharp eye for both the bigger picture and for detail, and an incredible work ethic. She also has a wonderful way with people. Those are all valuable traits for dealmaking, which indicate the potential to go far in this field.”

But potential alone doesn’t build a career – it is shaped through opportunity, experience and exposure, trust, and mutual investment. Martine reflects that what has made Sally’s mentorship meaningful wasn’t just that Sally noticed her – it was what she did with that insight.

“Working with Sally directly over the past four years has been the most formative experience of my legal career. Sally’s guidance has not only sharpened my technical abilities, but she has also created space for me to meaningfully contribute, ask questions, and learn in real time. Sally gave me a seat at the table – and once I was there, she made sure I had a voice.”

Martine’s skills have been honed by working on some of the firm’s most complex M&A matters, including high-profile transactions with tight timelines and significant complexity and pressure.

Working alongside Sally, Martine is encouraged to take ownership of deliverables, contribute to strategy formulation, and develop her client skills by engaging directly with clients – not in the background, but as a central member of the team. In so doing, Martine has developed strong client relationships. For instance, she played an

integral role in the team advising on the disposal of Retail Capital by Crossfin to TymeBank in 2022, and also supported Sally again on the disposal of Adumo by Crossfin to Lesaka last year.

“Mentorship is not just about giving advice – it’s about being present, consistently,” Martine says. “Sally shows up. Even during a fast-moving transaction, she makes time to check-in and provide real-time guidance. She listens and genuinely cares about the team’s wellbeing – both in and outside of the office. That kind of support is rare, and it’s made all the difference to my growth.”

While Sally brings deep experience and leadership to the table, she’s quick to point out that the relationship is a synergistic one.

“It is impossible to manage multiple transactions without teamwork and collaboration. Having someone like Martine on a deal team brings enormous peace of mind, as I know that she cares just as much as I do about getting things right. She gets on with things, but also knows when to check in for guidance or direction. Martine also has real emotional intelligence and brings a fresh lens – one that reflects the evolving expectations of younger professionals in the industry. That perspective encourages open dialogue and sometimes challenges the status quo, which keeps us all sharper and more adaptive. That helps me lead better too. And it’s so important to have fun when you work long hours – we laugh a lot.”

Their collaborative approach is evident in the way they bring out the best in each other. “Sally trusted me with real responsibility, but I always knew she was there,” Martine says. “She challenged me to think more boldly, but always with support and kindness. That kind of backing builds confidence fast.”

For Sally, mentoring is part of how she defines success. “Doing good work matters – but building great people matters more. If I’ve led significant deals but haven’t developed others in the process, then I’ve missed the point. We’re building the next generation of leaders and a legacy of excellence, not just closing deals.”

For Martine, it’s been transformative. “I’ve learnt that you don’t need to change who you are to succeed – you just need someone who sees your potential and is willing to guide you. Sally does that for me. We’ve worked crazy hours, faced tough issues, and debated differences of opinion – but always with respect. And we always have a glass of bubbles or a whiskey sour after a long transaction,” says Martine. “It’s not just mentorship. It’s partnership.”

Their story is a reminder that when women actively support one another, everyone benefits. 🙌

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