



BULELWA TETYANA MADONSELA

HEAD: STRATEGY ENABLEMENT – GLOBAL MARKETS, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is “Why she leads” important?

I strongly believe that Africa has been more matriarchal than we like to acknowledge. **‘Why she leads’** showcases that women can be just as successful when given the platform to lead.

What are the biggest challenges that women face in the workplace?

We work with people who have wives and partners at home taking care of life. As a woman in the workplace, I am that wife and partner. As women we also want to do everything. I always say, don’t be embarrassed about outsourcing things in your life – plan to make sure things can be taken care of so you don’t have to miss out on important engagements. You’ll be more present and show up fully in all your roles.

What is your approach to leadership?

I look for ways I can leave people better off for having me in their lives. I’m a very strong believer in empowering people.

“As a leader, I’m not afraid to show up as one who doesn’t know everything. If I purport to know everything it disempowers the people around me.”

Decisiveness is a trait every leader should have. The ability to make decisions is very comforting to teams – it gives them a sense of ‘our leader knows where we’re going’.

What is the value of curiosity in the workplace?

You can’t be successful without being curious. If you’re not curious about what’s happening around you, you can’t apply yourself holistically and have the meaningful conversations. People want to know that they’re noticed. If you notice what people are up to and you demonstrate that in the conversations you have, that will set you apart. Curiosity has always stood me in good stead and has always accelerated me to step into my next role at the next level.

How do you nurture and take care of yourself?

My spirituality is very important to me; it grounds me, enables me to maintain perspective and not always focus on my challenges. I volunteer in my church.

Self-care allows me to invest in myself. It makes you feel good about yourself; even if it’s the smallest thing, do it for yourself. For me, it’s my hair and nails and waking up early in the morning to exercise. I get to be alone in my zone, not worrying about anyone.

How should women show up for, and support each other in the work environment?

I struggle with women pulling each other down; it’s something that still exists. Women leaders should constantly look for ways to open up doors for those coming up. There’s enough room for other women around the table – let’s make space for others.

Do you have words of encouragement for young corporate women aspiring to make a mark?

Young women who want to step out of their comfort zone to do something meaningful with their life, should focus on self-awareness. Self-awareness is very important. As women, it’s something that differentiates us from men – God has given us a strong sense of intuition.

Self-awareness also means identifying your calling and purpose in life and finding ways to operate within those areas of passion, no matter the context you’re in.



MARLENE PILLAY

HEAD: REAL ESTATE FINANCE DEBT SOLUTIONS MANAGEMENT, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is “Why she leads” important?

I come from humble beginnings where female role models in business weren’t visible. Leadership visibility is necessary to encourage young people to aspire and be courageous in their own lives, despite their circumstances. **“Why she leads”** is an opportunity to elevate the visibility of female leaders. African women, in particular, must play a meaningful role in their own emancipation, whether in a boardroom, classroom, at home or elsewhere.

“Aim to be exceptional at every task and demonstrate your worth through actions. Always act with integrity, own your failures, find the silver lining, never miss deadlines, and make sure you look good doing it.”

What have been the biggest contributors to your success?

I’m blessed with a supportive mother, and a supportive husband who understands my career drive. Maintaining a positive attitude, focus, resilience, and hard work have also been crucial for meeting my goals and achieving success. And aligning with good mentors or go-to people. Success also comes from being who you really are, being authentic and not just a version of yourself – it frees you to focus on the big things and not sweat the small things.

What are the challenges that women leaders face, especially in financial services?

Unconscious bias – a nurturing leader could be ‘too soft to get the job done’, while being assertive and decisive could be ‘too bossy’. Bias fades but it requires a demonstration of resilience and positive outcomes. In *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg sums it up well: men are given opportunities based on potential, while women are given opportunities based on what has been delivered. That needs to change.

What is the value of mentorship in the workplace?

Mentorship is a virtuous circle – all of us need mentors and we should

offer mentorship and guidance to those coming up. The right conversations at the right time, can be highly impactful and influential. All leaders should be responsible for nurturing an abundant mindset and influencing the development of strong future leaders.

How can male corporate leaders foster and grow women leaders?

Male corporate leaders have arguably the most impactful role to play in enabling gender equality in the workplace. They should take intentional steps to create equal opportunities for women to succeed and thrive in the workplace – from the moment a woman enters the workforce, way before she assumes a leadership position and regardless of her personal life. It’s about finding the best people (male or female) for the job, so our organisations thrive.

What would you say to another woman thinking of changing fields because her industry is male dominated?

Be guided by your passion and don’t relinquish your power as a woman or a professional, because anything worthwhile takes sacrifice and patience. Be aspirant, push yourself forward and be courageous – be an example.

Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome?

I don’t believe I have, but there was a time when some opinions about my style of leadership or delivery affected me. Thankfully, I took some advice on board, and learned that not all opinions matter.

What advice do you have for young women starting their careers?

Be kind to yourself and those around you and find your balance early in your career. It’s controversial but I don’t believe in having it all. If you try to be the best at everything, you end up being mediocre or burnt out. Accept the choices you make to progress your career, enable your life with support (not guilt) and outsource the little things.

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