



THANDIWE LEGWAILA

HEAD: TRANSACTION BANKING, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is "Why she leads" important?

With empirical evidence, the platform demonstrates that we can lead successful businesses, instead turning the question into 'Why not her?' in a very unapologetic way. We have an opportunity to share the challenges we've overcome, giving hope to women that it can be done.

What have been the biggest contributors to your success?

I spent a lot of my time with my father in my childhood. He believed in me so much and shaped my thinking and life outlook. He raised me with so much love and would tell me every day, "You know, Thandiwe, you are a very capable individual, just like a man. You can be anything you want to be in the world if you set your mind to it." My dad's teachings set me up for success and my hard work paid off.

Is corporate culture today more supportive of young women in the position you were once in?

Yes, there's more understanding now of the compromises women have to make. In our environment, we accommodate women, encourage them to take longer maternity leave, and promote them while they're on maternity leave. We're also very comfortable with a hybrid working environment – your output is important, not your presence at work.

Why is it important to support women and create work environments that allow them to fulfil the many roles they play?

Some leaders see women as a liability. Instead, they should be asking, "How do we support that very capable woman who goes on maternity leave, to come back and integrate into the organisation?" We shouldn't put women in positions of having to choose between parenthood and a career. Instead, let's create workplaces that allow them to do both to the extent that they wish.

How do we focus on women leadership without alienating men?

Sometimes to make a visible change, you've got to be unapologetic about the agenda.

"I'm unapologetic about our focus on accelerating the promotion of women into leadership positions and our investment towards their learning and development."

What trait should every leader have?

Courage! We don't want amagwala (cowards) as leaders. You must lead with confidence.

How do you handle negative feedback?

I receive it and immediately there and then, say I'm gonna do better. I haven't always been this way. At first, I hated criticism, but professional coaching helped me realise that negative feedback is a powerful tool to help you grow, develop and attend to your blind spots.

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

Senior women in organisations have the responsibility of sharing their journeys with the rest of the women in the business. We must pay it forward.

At this stage of your life, what does success look like?

I grew up poor, so I've always had a very clear view of what success looks like. I want to be successful in everything I do – not necessarily driven by material things, but by that feeling of achievement that I've actually overcome poverty and left it behind. In everything that I do, I look to do it so well that it creates further growth opportunities for me. My focus now is on my legacy rather than on accumulating wealth. I look forward to leaving behind a business that has grown our people and given a voice to women – the voice I battled to find.



ELIZABETH MUCHEMI

HEAD: GLOBAL MARKETS INTERNATIONAL, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

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

We should create space for one another to let our voices be heard and positively highlight how different we are.

"There's this monolithic view that African women, for example, are all the same – that one of us speaks for the masses. It's just not true. Let's not be afraid to highlight the great tapestry of women's different thoughts, experiences, and expertise."

Given how few of us there are, we should also be teaching each other, and stepping into the gaps for each other when needed, especially in corporate and leadership.

How do you balance motherhood with being a working professional woman?

Balance is a wonderful idea/concept to aspire to. For me, creating balance with a high-paced job and children requires constantly creating solutions and managing different needs. It's a constant process. Sometimes certain areas of life get more attention than others, so I accept that as my reality, but at times it can be very difficult. You feel like you're overprioritising work, and then when you try to correct that, you feel like your work may suffer. So, if you're not careful, you can get stuck in this mental tug of war. Being in a senior role can heighten that. The lesson I'm trying to learn is to really pace myself better, manage my uncompromising 'red line' priorities, and to keep pushing ahead. My North Star remains my faith and my family – without them, none of this is worth it.

How can male corporate leaders be allies, fostering and growing women leaders?

The contribution of men is critical. Men and women alike, who are truly interested in lifting others up, can form a powerful force for change; the more we help each other, the better for women and society. We need to work hand in hand for the equality, growth, and nurturing of women leaders. More men fostering partnerships and stepping in as sponsors, also makes for a more wholesome understanding of women

in corporate leadership, encouraging further sponsorship of women.

Is there a trait that every leader should have?

Wise compassion – my faith principle of doing unto others as you would have done to you. Some may see compassion as a sign of weakness or slow judgement, i.e., an inability to make the tough decisions or to take swift decisive actions. But that is not the case – I actually think it creates quite the opposite effect, as you're focused on growth and your team achieving the best. You have to get comfortable with that being fine and not pivoting to other people's way of leading. I think in the long run, wise compassion pays it dues.

What is your proudest professional achievement thus far?

In my previous role, I was part of a team that started and developed the Africa franchise for a global investment bank. I had many firsts in that role – driving the business strategy, opening new markets, and closing new types of transactions. I also became one of the first African female managing directors of the bank. More exciting to me now, is the platform I have joined at Standard Bank – I believe this to be a culmination of those efforts and my role now gives me a great platform to build out a business once again, but on a greater scale with the support of a great team.

At this stage of your life, what does success look like?

Success to me is a combination of being joyful in what I do and succeeding in what I set out to achieve; working with people I constantly learn from, but who I can also laugh with, and, being able to create, develop and deliver a plan that leads to sustainable growth.

What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

You are enough. In fact, you are more than enough, so just take that shot because you are incredible.

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