Q&A

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Mentorship, sponsorship, and 'lifting as you rise'

Who was the first person in the industry to take a genuine bet on you, and how did that sponsorship change the trajectory of your career?

I have been fortunate to work with managers and colleagues who invested in my growth. One person who stands out is Chris Edwards, Head of Absa Prime Services. He supported my move into Prime Services when I was still finding my place in the industry.

That move brought together the different strands of my career: my technical grounding in accounting and product control, my experience as an FX trader, and the broader business perspective I developed in the Global Markets COO team. In Prime Services, I could apply all of that, while building trusted client relationships and developing solutions around their needs.

His belief in me strengthened my confidence and expanded what I thought was possible. It showed me that taking a genuine bet on someone is not simply about opening a door. It is about trusting them with a meaningful opportunity and allowing them to prove what they can do. That experience shaped how I now support emerging talent.

There is a difference between a mentor (who gives advice) and a sponsor (who advocates for you behind closed doors). Have you had a sponsor, and how did that dynamic work?

Yes, and I have learned that both roles are valuable, but they serve different purposes. A mentor helps you think through choices, offers perspective and shares lessons from experience. A sponsor uses their influence to advocate for you when opportunities are being discussed and you are not in the room.

The sponsors in my career did more than encourage me. They put my name forward, trusted me with greater responsibility, and backed me before I had fully backed myself. That support built confidence because it was reinforced by action.

The dynamic also required accountability from me. Sponsorship creates an opportunity, but you still have to walk through the door, do the work, and justify the confidence placed in you. You need to remain open to feedback, keep learning, and deliver consistently. That combination of advocacy and accountability shaped my development. It is also why I try to notice potential in others, speak for them, and create opportunities where they can demonstrate their capabilities.

As a successful leader now, what standard do you set for yourself when it comes to mentoring the next generation of female analysts and associates?

My standard is simple: anyone I mentor should become more confident, more capable, and more willing to back herself. Mentoring is not about providing every answer. It is about helping someone recognise her strengths, identify gaps honestly, and develop the judgement to navigate challenges independently.

I encourage young women to build strong technical foundations because competence creates credibility. But I also focus on curiosity, adaptability, resilience and relationships. This is a demanding industry, and success depends on being able to learn continuously, listen closely, and solve meaningful problems for clients and colleagues.

I believe mentoring must include access. Advice is useful, but exposure to senior stakeholders, challenging assignments and visible opportunities is what helps people grow. I try to give honest feedback, advocate for the women I work with, and create space for them to contribute, rather than speaking on their behalf.

Having often been the only woman in the room, I feel a responsibility to ensure I am not the last. The most rewarding outcome is seeing someone step into an opportunity she once doubted she was ready for, build confidence through experience, and then create opportunities for others in turn.

How can corporate finance institutions move beyond 'diversity checkboxes' to create environments where young women actually want to stay long-term?

Institutions need to treat gender diversity as a sustained leadership priority, rather than a recruitment target. Bringing women into an organisation is only the beginning. The measure is whether they receive meaningful opportunities, develop into decision-making roles, and can see a credible future in the business.

Deliberate succession planning is essential. Organisations should identify talented women early, understand whether they are ready now, ready soon or ready later, and provide development aligned to that journey. This work cannot begin only when a senior position becomes available. It should start at graduate and middle-management levels, supported by clear development opportunities.

Accountability matters too. Leaders should be expected to develop diverse talent, create access to significant assignments, and address barriers that cause women to leave. Sponsorship must sit alongside mentorship, because guidance without opportunity will not change representation at senior levels. Flexible policies may help, but culture is determined by whether employees can use that support without limiting their progression.

Finally, visibility matters. When young women see women leading businesses, managing major mandates and participating in key decisions, ambition feels achievable, rather than theoretical. The goal is not simply to improve the numbers. It is to build an environment where women are supported, challenged, recognised and able to lead, while being valued for the perspectives and expertise they bring. That is how institutions create lasting change, rather than short-term progress.