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?

Interestingly, when I was a young banker just entering the industry, it was men who, at two junctures in my career, gave me opportunities that changed the trajectory of my career. I owe a lot of what I have become today to the chances and opportunities that they gave me very early on.

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?

A mentor is really a coach, who helps by ‘holding up a mirror’, helping you see different perspectives of a situation or challenge. They’re there to offer advice and help you think through a problem to get to a solution. A sponsor is someone who supports you and your career in spaces and places where you are not present.

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I have been lucky enough to have both mentors and sponsors in my career, who have helped me grow tremendously. I therefore would highly recommend having either a mentor or sponsor in one’s career journey.

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?

I take being a leader, and a leader who mentors and sponsors young women, as a privilege. There is so much that I have learnt in my corporate career that can be shared with younger women to encourage them, and to show them that achievements of certain goals is indeed possible. I like relating my experiences, offering advice on navigating the corporate world, and giving guidance, understanding and encouragement.

What is the most rewarding piece of advice you’ve ever given to a younger colleague that you watched them successfully put into practice?

I truly believe that hard work pays off. I also believe in being thoroughly prepared for any engagement in the workplace and with clients. I make it a point to advise young people on the importance of experiencing different teams or workplaces, in order to gain perspectives on how different cultures work, and to learn how the same thing can be done differently.

Peer-to-peer support is vital. How do you build a strong network of allies among other women working in law, audit and banking to support your transaction pipelines?

I am very intentional about this. I find time to attend networking events, conferences and other functions that enable me to network, connect, and keep relationships alive. Any relationship, be it personal or business, requires attention and maintenance, so one must work at keeping relationships strong and supportive.

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

Organisations must honestly and truly work on direct and indirect gender biases, which still exist in many workplaces today. Organisations should work on being places of equal opportunity, where it is possible for both men and women who work hard, have the right skills, and are talented to have equal chances of success. Women in organisations must be able to believe that they have just as much a chance to succeed as a male colleague.