



WOMEN WHO LIFT

Inside the collaborative mentorship of Lerisha Naidu and Tanya Seitz

Lerisha Naidu
Managing Partner | Baker McKenzie South Africa

Lerisha Naidu is the Managing Partner of Baker McKenzie in Johannesburg and heads the firm's Antitrust & Competition Practice Group. She advises clients across multiple African jurisdictions on complex merger control, cartel investigations and competition compliance. Lerisha has led some of the continent's most high-profile matters, including cross-border transactions and industry-wide cartel cases. Recognised for her legal expertise and leadership, she was named Southern Africa Partner of the Year at the African Legal Awards 2023. She also champions the firm's diversity, inclusion, pro bono and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

"I'm not a fan of the word "reverse" in "reverse mentoring". Mentorship is multi-directional – it needn't be named as such. When I was much younger, I was gifted a book called Illusions by Richard Bach. In it, Bach philosophised that "we teach best what we most need to learn". - *Lerisha Naidu*

How did you meet?

Lerisha (Lee) and Tanya met during the latter half of 2014. Lee had just joined Baker McKenzie as a Senior Associate, and Tanya was a first year Trainee.

How has your mentorship influenced you throughout your relationship?

Through the mutual mentoring relationship and learning journey with and alongside Tanya Seitz, I have grown as a person, a lawyer and a leader.

Tanya has always exemplified qualities of leadership, demonstrating that leadership does not arise by dint of a title, but is rather the personification of a set of qualities and values. Tanya consistently challenged me to confront imposter voices that sought to persuade me against rising to the occasion. In so doing, Tanya's voice has been an empowering one as I journeyed towards leadership and impact. I have valued Tanya's positive energy, which is a key ingredient in the building of high performance teams.

Tanya has displayed a level of grit and resilience to keep going that has inspired me to do the same. And her professional commitment to client-centricity is second to none. Tanya's candour is courageous and bold – it is precisely what we need to confront real issues that simmer beneath the surface.

This journey of mentorship, camaraderie and the celebration of each other's success has been both special and indispensable to my career story. Not only am I proud to call Tanya a fellow partner, but I am inspired by the powerhouse that she is, and grateful for her powerful role in my own story.

Tanya Seitz
Partner | Baker McKenzie South Africa

Tanya Seitz is a Partner in Baker McKenzie's Corporate M&A Practice in Johannesburg, where she advises local and multinational clients on complex cross-border transactions, including public and private M&A, global reorganisations, takeovers, and equity capital markets. She routinely represents and advises multinational and listed clients across a range of industry sectors, notably in infrastructure, consumer goods and retail, and transportation in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. In 2018 and 2019, she was listed in the Acritas Stars Report, and in 2019, she was shortlisted as Most Promising Newcomer at the African Legal Awards. In 2025, she was shortlisted as a Rising Star for the IFLR Women in Business Law EMEA Awards.

"Mentorship between women is a powerful alliance – where wisdom is shared, confidence is nurtured, and leadership is born." - *Tanya Seitz*

In every step of my professional and personal journey, I've been fortunate to walk alongside Lee, who has not only guided me, but also shaped me.

She has taught me that humility is not weakness, but strength in its most grounded form. She showed me that resilience isn't about avoiding failure, but about rising with purpose after you fail. And most importantly, she inspired in me a deep passion for people and for purpose-driven work. Careers are not just built on skills, but on relationships and values.

Through her example, I've learnt the power of honesty, even when it's uncomfortable. She encourages openness, creating space for real conversations and meaningful growth. She models authenticity, proving that being true to yourself is enough, and essential.

Over the years, I have had the pleasure and the privilege to support Lee's journey from Senior Associate to Managing Partner of Baker McKenzie South Africa. I am proud to call her my mentor, my leader, and above all else, my friend.

Can you both share a specific moment or experience in your mentorship journey that profoundly changed your approach to leadership or your perception of mentorship itself?

At a certain point in my career as an associate, I found myself supporting a senior partner in relation to a topic that required an inter-generational perspective. I realised that I could make a contribution to decision-making, despite embedded hierarchical notions that associates are potentially too junior to make a contribution to matters outside of billable work. The reality is that diversity is a superpower, and that an openness to listening to perspectives across the board provides a richness to decision-making. Since then, I have always curated a set of advisors and mentors based on their influence, their balance, their wisdom and their depth, as opposed to their titles. For this reason, I am an advocate of multi-directional mentorship.

I wouldn't say that there is a specific moment or experience that has changed my approach; rather learnings over the years. I had always understood that a leader led by example, jumping straight into the task at hand. And while this approach may work well in circumstances which require transferring knowledge and providing direct advice, Lee has made me aware of the impact that coaching-based mentoring can have. This empowers the mentee through self-discovery and builds critical thinking, as opposed to the more hierarchical structure of conventional mentoring.

How do you navigate disagreements or differences of opinion within your mentorship relationship and what has that taught you both about effective collaboration?

Feedback, dissonance, candour and impartiality are key to cultivating authentic spaces – and authentic spaces foster growth and development. Foundations of respect and trust are indefensible to a productive and constructive mentor / mentee relationship, and conversations that take place on that foundation must feature rigour and robust engagement in order to arrive at authentic and meaningful outcomes. It is really important that the mentor – mentee relationship is characterised by courageous conversations. This is a prerequisite for the growth and development that can arise from these crucial relationships.

I believe honesty and trust are key. We address things openly, without defensiveness, and focus on understanding each other's perspectives, rather than trying to 'win' the conversation. It is about creating a space where each person can be bluntly honest without backlash or judgement.

Can you share one piece of advice or insight you gained from the other that you still apply regularly in your professional or personal life?

From Tanya, I have learnt that we are duty-bound to have courageous conversations in order to make a meaningful difference.

One of the most valuable lessons I've learnt from Lee is to show up as your unapologetic self. This fosters authentic spaces and meaningful relationships.

What have been the most rewarding aspects of being both a leader and a mentor?

Leadership and mentorship that is intentional, purpose-driven and people-centric is deeply rewarding. The opportunity to create space for growth and development has network effects, and one is able to scale impact through intentional leadership that is robust and empowering. One of the hallmarks of leadership is to enable those that one leads to pay it forward. There is nothing more gratifying than to watch those that you have mentored rise to positions of influence and impact.

Seeing real, measurable growth in both your mentees and mentors. As a mentor, watching someone gain confidence, sharpen their thinking, and step into their potential is incredibly fulfilling. It's not about giving answers, but about creating the space for people to find their own. Likewise, watching your mentor evolve, adapt, lead and continue to challenge themselves alongside those whom they guide is equally as rewarding.