Q&A

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Career journey and navigating the deal room

What initially drew you to the fast-paced world of corporate finance, and how did you secure your first major breakthrough in the industry?

What initially drew me to corporate finance was the combination of strategic problem-solving and the tangible impact that these types of decisions can have on businesses. I was fascinated by how transactions, capital allocation and growth strategies can fundamentally shape a company's future. I also enjoyed both the technical and commercial aspects, which made corporate finance a natural fit.

My background is actually debt structuring, and I deliberately moved into M&A to broaden my understanding of capital markets and their intricate mechanics and interconnectivity. As my career progressed into M&A, I have been fortunate to work on increasingly complex transactions across a range of sectors and industries. The breakthrough was less a single moment and more the point at which I transitioned from working in a support function to becoming a deal lead, responsible for driving deal execution, managing stakeholder relationships, and helping clients navigate critical strategic decisions. That experience established the foundation for a career spanning both debt and M&A advisory.

Looking back at your career, what do you consider your 'defining deal' – the one that tested you the most or reshaped how you view your capabilities?

One of the first defining deals of my career was a large debt capital raising transaction for a client seeking funding to support its growth objectives. The transaction was executed through the listing of a preference share instrument, and I quickly learned that a strong technical foundation is a prerequisite, rather than a differentiator. What differentiates individuals is the ability to apply that technical expertise within a broader commercial and strategic context.

The experience therefore exposed me not only to the technical aspects of structuring and raising capital, but also to the broader strategic considerations that influence decision-making by management teams, investors, lenders and shareholders. Rather than focusing solely on my area of responsibility, I sought to understand the perspectives of all stakeholders involved in the transaction and how different pieces of the deal came together to achieve a successful outcome.

That lesson has remained with me throughout my career and continues to shape my approach to transaction execution, reinforcing the importance of combining technical excellence with commercial judgement across the many transactions I have successfully advised on and executed since.

What is a common misconception people have about working in M&A in South Africa that you'd like to debunk?

One of the biggest misconceptions about working in M&A in South Africa is that the market is less sophisticated than larger international markets.

In my experience, South African transactions are often exceptionally complex, regardless of transaction size. South Africa remains the natural entry point into sub-Saharan Africa. Its mature financial markets, strategic location and depth of investment opportunities make it an attractive destination for global capital, particularly as investors look to unlock value across both the private and public sectors.

In addition, advisers are frequently required to navigate unique commercial, regulatory, socio-economic and personal considerations while still delivering outcomes that meet the strategic objectives of all parties involved.

If you could go back to the very first week of your career, what is the single piece of technical or professional advice you wish someone had given you?

If I could go back to the first week of my career, I would give myself this advice.

First, be willing to adapt and pivot. Early in your career, it's easy to believe that there is a single, linear path to success. In reality, a career is shaped by unexpected opportunities, changing markets, new industries, evolving client needs, and the people you encounter along the way. Some of my most valuable experiences have come from dealing with difficult clients, being open to stepping outside my comfort zone, and embracing change rather than resisting it.

Second, success is not determined or defined by individual effort. Over time, I have realised that no one succeeds in isolation. Your ability to succeed, deliver and create impact depends heavily on the relationships you build, the trust you earn, and the support of colleagues, leaders and stakeholders around you.

Third, make yourself heard, but do so in a way that is authentic to who you are. Early in my career, I sometimes assumed that experience or seniority alone determined whose voice mattered. Over time, I learnt that everyone brings a unique perspective, and that asking thoughtful questions, sharing well-considered views, and constructively challenging assumptions can add significant value. You do not need to be the loudest person in the room, but you do need to ensure your perspective is heard in a way that is true to who you are.