



Kerusha Makan

Principal: Transactional Sales

Transactional services often operates behind the scenes. What do you wish more business leaders understood about the role it plays?

Transactional services is the flow business that keeps organisations moving. When it works well, it sits quietly in the background, enabling payments, liquidity and operational confidence every day. People often think transactional banking is simply about processing payments. It isn't. It's about being trusted with people's salaries, a company's liquidity, and the systems that keep a business running. When those systems work, nobody notices them. When they don't, everyone does.

That's why I'm obsessive about consistency. There's a saying about the coffee stain on an airline tray. If you notice 1 coffee stain, you start wondering what else hasn't been done properly. It's the same in banking. Trust is built, or lost, through the small things we do every day.

The next frontier is making banking almost invisible. Through APIs, deeper integration and smarter digital connectivity, banking should work seamlessly in the background, making it easier for clients to run their businesses.

What has saying no taught you about trust?

The first time I had to say no, I was terrified; you feel like you're letting someone down. Women especially are taught to please, so it takes practice. But a 'no' said kindly builds trust rather

than breaks it. If a client tries something that breaches the rules, I'll say no and explain why. Clients don't always like hearing no in the moment, but they do appreciate honesty. When they know you're protecting them rather than simply blocking them, that's when trust really grows.

How did growing up in Athlone shape the person you've become?

I grew up in Rylands, Athlone, in Cape Town, a community of entrepreneurs, hustlers and dreamers striving to build better lives for themselves and their families. Community and relationships are at the heart of everything there. My mother worked in banking, and from a young age, I admired her confidence, professionalism and independence.

My parents worked hard to provide for us and taught me that success comes through effort, not entitlement. That lesson instilled a strong sense of responsibility and determination that has guided me throughout my career.

Years later, I bought a home in Athlone and only realised afterwards that it was one of the last houses before the southern suburbs begin. I am still there, 14 years later. Staying rooted in the community that shaped me keeps me connected to my values and reminds me of the greatest gifts my parents gave me: unconditional love and the belief that, with hard work and determination, anything is possible. Those lessons remain the foundation of who I am today.

You've said no one is coming to save you. Where did that mindset come from?

A leader once pulled me aside after a workshop and said, 'Be careful what you say; it can lead the whole room.' I thought: 'But why? I'm just me.' That's when I realised leadership isn't about title; it's about taking ownership. No one is coming to save you. If you want the next opportunity, you have to ask for it and go after it.

What does Big Deal Energy mean to you?

For me, it was never only about the size of the deal. It's the impact you bring, the consistency you show and the calmness you create when everyone else is under pressure. Some of the best leaders I've worked with have had that cool, calm presence. That's Big Deal Energy to me.

What misconception about women in CIB would you most like to challenge?

That women can't work well with other women. It's the opposite of my experience; I've had incredible men and women back me. Once, one of our credit heads introduced me to a woman who'd just joined, specifically so she'd have female companionship in the office. She wanted her to know she wasn't alone. Banking has changed so much in the 14 years I've been in it. The bias hasn't disappeared; people still underestimate what a younger woman knows. But there's space for all of us.

If the lift doors opened and your 20-year-old self walked in, what would you tell her?

It's going to be okay. In your 20s, you're chasing and searching for something, and by your 30s, you find more peace. You still have to fight for it every day, maybe a little less as time goes on, but it'll be fine.

'A 'no' said kindly builds trust.'

