

Q&A

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Q *Where did your financial markets journey begin, and how did you end up where you are today?*

A My corporate finance journey began in 2016, when I joined the Debt Capital Markets team at Absa Corporate and Investment Bank. I joined the bank's graduate program in 2015 after having completed my BEng in Industrial Engineering at the University of Pretoria, which had been supported by a two-year Absa bursary. In my first role as a performance improvement consultant, I applied my industrial engineering skills to improve the operational efficiency of the retail bank, predominantly working in the call centre.

Through the graduate program I met many colleagues working in corporate finance. One of them highlighted an opportunity to join the corporate finance team, and I applied. When I entered the process, I remember believing that I had a small chance of success, given my academic background. I was proven wrong and allowed to learn finance and economics on the job, while meeting with captains of industry.

In 2018/19 I had the incredible opportunity of completing the MPhil in Engineering for Sustainable Development at the University of Cambridge, supported by the FirstRand FNB Fund Education Scholarship. I extended my sabbatical to December 2019 to attend Unleash, a global innovation lab for solutions to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, in Shenzhen, China.

Upon my return, I joined our credit team for a six-month secondment, while working with business leaders on developing Absa's Sustainable Finance strategy. This brought together the skills I had learnt in the bank and the education and training I had received abroad. I am now working with a variety of teams across the bank to bring this strategy to life.

Q *Did you have a mentor at any point in your career? If so, who were they and what did you learn from them?*

A I've been fortunate to have several mentors in my career. The most influential is Trevor Biggs, who was my first boss. The first 12 months of my career were particularly challenging, and during that time he taught me how to build support structures for myself, how to navigate uncertainty and how to manage stakeholders.

Christine Clark also played an important mentorship role, helping me navigate hurdles I faced as a female in corporate finance. I feel very lucky that I have been able to garner advice from various senior colleagues such as David Renwick, Sam Erwin, Jack Ansell and Rudy Wuite when faced with career decisions and challenges in my new role.

Q *What, if any, hurdles have you had to overcome in an industry that has traditionally been male-dominated?*

A There were many gender-related and personal challenges I had to overcome in my corporate finance

career, from relatively benign hurdles such as learning to stand up for myself, to being confronted with inappropriate behaviour. I have been fortunate to be in an environment where such issues could be raised and addressed safely, and have diminished over time.

Q *What are some of the most memorable deals you have worked on?*

A Memorable deals from my time on the DCM desk include assisting one of the big corporates in their update of a Domestic Medium Term Note program post their unbundling of a significant portion of their business, and assisting Absa Group Treasury in the first Additional Tier 1 Capital raise. The former was particularly memorable, as we had to navigate disgruntled investors, market standards and client requirements. The latter was interesting due to the roadshow, in which much effort was required to educate and increase investor comfort on the new instrument.

Q *What advice would you give to young women who are looking to enter to financial markets?*

A Keep learning, wherever you are, whatever you are doing. You never know how newfound knowledge may help you tomorrow. Entering the corporate finance market is challenging, and the first few weeks and months may be especially testing. I would advise young girls to persevere through the challenges, as the space can be very rewarding and interesting to work in.