

# Q&A

## Somaya Joshua

Head of Commercial Property Finance, Africa Regional Operations, Absa Corporate and Investment Banking.



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

**A** I began my banking career as a junior analyst in a team responsible for Participation Mortgage bonds at Standard Bank. As my career progressed, I've played numerous roles as a property banker offering a range of funding solutions to external clients and partnering a broad range of internal stakeholders implementing and improving technologies, optimising capital consumption and managing funding, operations and risk functions on the continent. In my current role, I have regional responsibility for Absa's commercial property finance business outside of South Africa.

**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 had a few mentors, some of whom have become lifelong friends. They taught me the ropes as a young professional.

The head of our division was my longest mentor. He was a shaper, a sharp mind, brilliant, in the details, in the trenches, solving problems and supporting and developing his teams. I've had mentors in my personal and spiritual life, in business across front office teams, credit, technology, structured debt, finance and operations teams.

My "bestie" mentor became my dearest friend. I often said he could build a human in Excel! Humble, hard-working, super smart, a great leader and a formidable dealmaker.

My mentors taught me many things, most notably the art of negotiation, that the details matter and that as you manage and lead, always hire people who are smarter than you are.

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

**A** The industry is tough. I've had to push my way into conversations and double-up efforts to build networks. As a black female,

I had little common ground to just be okay with "talking about nothing". I read somewhere that the best leaders know when to follow, so I allowed myself to follow my transactors into their networks. I learnt to really listen to clients' needs and to understand and find ways to enable their strategies. In doing that, I earned trust and built valuable relationships.

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

**A** Recently, it was closing a cross-border development finance transaction in Kenya while leading an all-female deal team. More broadly, it has to be funding into the affordable and student housing sectors in South Africa. .

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

**A** The same advice I give my daughters: Be authentic. Be kind to yourself. You've arrived, so continually create space for new arrivals. 📌

