

Deal Makers[®]

WOMEN 2025



Women of SA's M&A and Financial Markets Industry

FOREWORD



Marylou Greig
Editor

Each year on Women's Day, we pause to honour the courage, strength and resilience of women, both past and present, who have broken barriers and paved the way for future generations. In South Africa, this day holds deep historical significance, rooted in the 1956 march of 20,000 women to the Union Buildings in protest against unjust laws. It serves as both a tribute and a call to action; a reminder of how far we've come, and how much further we must go.

Within the South African M&A and financial markets industry, women continue to make strides, often quietly, often against the odds. This sector, long dominated by men, is slowly but surely beginning to recognise the immense value women bring to the table: not only through skill and insight, but through leadership, empathy, resilience and collaboration.

This collection of profiles and personal reflections is a celebration of those women. Each voice is unique, and each journey distinct, but common threads emerge; work hard, believe in yourself, and embrace the guidance and support of others. These stories are rich with lessons: from overcoming doubt to navigating complex deals, from building credibility to mentoring others in the quest to advance the visibility and influence of women in this industry.

It is our hope that these pages serve as more than just a showcase; that they be a source

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of inspiration to young women considering careers in finance, law or dealmaking. We hope that they offer encouragement to those who are navigating their own path, and serve as a reminder that they are not alone. Others have walked this road and thrived.

Let this be both a recognition of remarkable women and a beacon for the next generation.

This fifth edition of the feature will be released at the third DealMakers Women's Day networking event, which builds on the previous two years' success and will once again include a panel discussion. This year's panel members are Jo Mitchell-Marias, a Partner in Restructuring, Turnaround & Performance Improvement at Deloitte Africa; Amalia Lui, a Partner at Clyde & Co Tanzania; Shireen Motara, Founder and CEO of The Next Chapter Studio; Soria Hay, Founder and Head of Corporate Finance at Bravura; and Titi Sekhukhune, co-Founder and Partner at Infinite Partners.

My grateful thanks go to this dynamic industry for the continued support and participation in this feature and the networking event. And to my own team, who themselves are women juggling many roles, for their dedication and excellence in compiling this discourse – a collaboration and testament to the talented and resilient women in this space. 🙌

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The feature is available for download - www.dealmakerssouthafrica.com

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Q&A

Anna Parry

Senior Associate – Corporate team
Webber Wentzel

What did your path into this field look like – was it intentional or did you discover it along the way?

When I was growing up and studying, I didn't specifically plan to work in M&A. I discovered it along the way and, looking back, I can see how my path naturally led me there, and that it worked out for the best. I was very good at accounting at school, and most people expected me to become an accountant. I chose to study a BCom LLB (Accounting with Law) at university because I enjoyed accounting, but I didn't want to limit my options. I was also interested in analytical thinking, history, law and justice.

During my articles, I did a rotation in banking & finance and really enjoyed the experience of being a transactional lawyer. M&A turned out to be a good fit for me – it offers the kinds of transactional work I like, but also allows me to advise clients and get involved in different types of transactions. The accounting, economics and finance experience I gained during my BCom has also given me a solid foundation for understanding the commercial side of M&A.

What's the hardest lesson you've learnt, and how did it shape you?

I've always been quite hard on myself when I make a mistake, or if something doesn't go as planned. Over time, I've had to learn how to manage self-doubt and stress in those moments, and to avoid spiralling and catastrophising. One of the tough lessons has been learning to separate my sense of self-worth from my work. I've made a conscious effort to ground my self-worth in who I am as a person (outside of work), and to focus on the things that matter to me personally. When something goes wrong at work, I try to deal with it, learn from it, and move on.

What does self-care look like for you, and how do you prevent burnout?

When it comes to self-care, I love a good bath. I also enjoy walking – most weekends you'll find me on a long walk along the Sea Point promenade, listening to music or a podcast. Being outdoors and taking in nature is incredibly grounding.

I have also been meal-prepping for the last six years. Every Sunday, I prepare meals for the week ahead. It's a form of self-care because it takes away the stress during the week of having to cook after a long day, or wondering what to eat when I am already tired.

As for burnout, a key thing I do is to watch out for the early signs. It's important to speak to people – both at work and outside of work – and to take breaks where you can. At work, I've learnt to reach

out and speak to people when it becomes difficult to manage the volume and extent of work, before it's too late.

Have your views on work-life balance changed over time?

Yes. When I started as a candidate attorney and associate, I didn't have much work-life balance, and I didn't think it was important. Whereas now, as a senior associate, I have much better balance, and I see the value in it. In the early years, I was focused on proving myself and showing that I was hardworking and a valuable asset to the team. I threw myself into my work, often staying late most nights, working weekends, and usually being the last to leave the office. I felt that this was what was expected of me. But I missed out on many things outside of the office – there were even a few years in a row where I was late to my own birthday party! I didn't have any hobbies or anything else going on outside of work.


Eventually, that way of living became too much. I reached a point where I felt like a shell of a person outside of work, and I was unhappy. Over the last few years, I've been more intentional about building a life outside of work – things like running, cooking, listening to podcasts, connecting with friends, and getting more sleep. These small but meaningful activities help bring perspective and joy, and a break from the stress.

Of course, there are still times when I work late or on weekends, and the pressure hasn't disappeared. But now, I make a conscious effort to maintain a life outside of work and keep things as balanced as I can.

What kind of leader are you, and how did you develop your leadership style?

I want to be a leader who is approachable, but also respected because of who I am as a person and the quality of my work. I'm still learning and working on this.

In developing my leadership style, I've found it helpful to look at the qualities of my leaders and the people I've worked with over the years. I try to identify the qualities and working styles that I have admired and to cultivate those in myself. At the same time, I am mindful of avoiding qualities, styles and behaviours that I've found challenging or unconstructive.

I also believe that developing as a leader requires stepping into leadership roles, working with others, and fostering talent. 

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Q&A

Busisiwe Masango

Senior Associate – Competition, Trade & Investment team
Webber Wentzel

What initially drew you to a career in M&A or corporate finance?

It was the dynamic intersection of strategy, analysis, and real business impact. I've always been fascinated by how companies grow, evolve and create value, and M&A felt like a natural extension of that curiosity.

Can you share a defining moment or turning point in your career so far?

A defining moment in my career came about two years into my focus on corporate M&A. While the experience I gained was valuable, I started to realise that my true interests and strengths lay elsewhere, specifically in competition law, a niche area within M&A. I had always been drawn to the strategic and high-stakes nature of deal-making and, after some reflection, I decided to make a shift.

It wasn't an easy move, but it proved to be incredibly rewarding. I had to draw on both my Bachelor of Commerce and postgraduate LLB to bridge the gap and build expertise in a new field. The moment I made the transition, I felt a renewed sense of purpose and excitement, knowing I was in the right space to apply my skills in a way that aligned with my long-term goals.

Looking back, making that change was one of the most important decisions I've made in my career. It reminded me of the value of following what truly excites me and embracing challenges that push me to grow.

How have you built resilience in a high-pressure, male-dominated environment?

Building resilience in a high-pressure, male-dominated environment has been a combination of mindset, support networks, and continuously improving my skill set. I started by developing emotional intelligence, particularly in how I respond to stress and setbacks. Over time, I learnt to stay calm under pressure, pausing to assess situations rather than reacting impulsively, and approaching challenges with a more strategic mindset.

Having a solid support network has also made a significant difference. I've been intentional about connecting with other women and allies who understand the unique challenges of the environment and can offer perspective. These relationships, whether in or outside of work, have helped me stay grounded and encouraged me to keep pushing through.

What does self-care look like for you, and how do you prevent burnout?

Self-care looks like a mix of things – being outdoors, creative, and making sure I take moments of stillness. I love having time to just step away from everything and disconnect, whether it's going for a run or focusing on my breathing at Pilates. I think a big part of preventing burnout is finding that balance between productivity and rest. It's easy to get caught up in the hustle, but I try to check in with myself, notice when I'm feeling off, and give myself permission to step back when needed.

Did you have any mentors or role models? How did they influence your journey?

Yes, definitely! My mentors have shaped the way I approach challenges, interact with others, and navigate my goals. One of the most influential mentors I had was a woman I met during my articles. She emphasised the importance of resilience and taught me that failure is just a part of the process, not a permanent setback. Instead of focusing on how something went wrong, she pushed me to think about what I could learn from it. That mindset has been essential for me in growing and improving. Another mentor in my life showed me the value of humility and continuous learning. He always remained curious, even after achieving success, which kept him grounded and open-minded. He taught me that growth doesn't stop, and there's always something new to learn, no matter where you are. What stands out most, though, is how both mentors helped me believe in my potential even when things didn't seem clear or easy. Their encouragement gave me the confidence to take risks and trust my instincts.

What barriers still need to be broken down in M&A or the corporate finance industry for women?

While there have been significant strides toward gender equality, several barriers still need to be addressed for women to achieve full representation and equal opportunities. These barriers include:

- *Unconscious bias and stereotypes:* Women in M&A often face unconscious biases that assume men are more competent or suited for high-pressure deal-making roles. These biases can lead to women being overlooked for promotions, high-profile deals, or leadership roles.
- *Lack of representation in leadership:* Although more women are entering the industry, they remain underrepresented in senior leadership positions, especially at the executive level. Without visible female role models in these top positions, younger women may feel they lack the guidance or motivation to aspire to leadership roles themselves.
- *Work-life balance expectations:* The demanding nature of M&A, with long and often unpredictable hours, can disproportionately affect women, particularly those balancing family responsibilities. These pressures can limit career progression or lead to women stepping back at key points in their professional journey.

Addressing these barriers requires systemic change within firms, including better policies for work-life balance, more opportunities for mentorship, a focus on diversity in leadership roles, and a commitment to eradicate unconscious bias.

What advice would you give to your younger self starting out in this field?

Don't rush the learning process. It's easy to get caught up in the pace and pressures of M&A, especially early on, but the more you can focus on building a solid understanding of the fundamentals, the better.

Embrace the discomfort. Some of the hardest moments, when you feel like you are out of your depth, will be the ones that teach you the most. 📖

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Q&A

Kayla Dodo

Senior Associate – Corporate team
Webber Wentzel

What did your path into this field look like – was it intentional or did you discover it along the way?

I had a very interesting and eye-opening path. Although I had a clear end goal in mind, I realised very early that the milestones along my journey would look different from the conventional route. Being in the M&A space at a top five firm was always the goal; how I would get there was unclear. I started my articles at a boutique law firm in Cape Town, where I was exposed to highly specialised work. That experience gave me a great segue into the private wealth and funds industry space, and I found myself doing specialised M&A and transactional work. As the famous meme goes, “It was at that moment, she knew...” I was certainly where I wanted to be. My final milestone was to return to private practice, now armed with a wealth of knowledge, but my career path was not linear, and somewhat unusual.

What was your first deal or transaction like, and what did you take away from it?

The first deal I worked on was a 25% Black Economic Empowerment vendor-financed portion of a 100% shareholder buyout. I recall the complexity of the deal, which triggered the need for me to upskill. My immediate takeaway was to head back to university, invest in further learning, and remind myself to stay “prayed up” as much as possible. It was a challenging point in my career.

What’s the hardest lesson you’ve learnt, and how did it shape you?

To pray first and foremost; I involve my Maker in everything I do. Secondly, the realisation that my career journey is personal and that I must take ownership of it. I’ve been fortunate to have great mentors and a supportive partner who have taken an interest in my career growth and development. For me, success means making sure my work ethic translates into taking control of my matters, contributing to business development in the space, and doing everything possible to ensure my absolute best.

How have you balanced your personal life with the demands of a career in finance?

I’ve come to realise that balance does not always mean a 50/50

split. Different aspects of life will require more of my time than others do. I understand that work can be all-encompassing and sometimes requires late nights to meet a deadline, but there are also times when my personal life needs my full attention and focus, and in each instance, I should be able to focus on what matters most. Giving 100% to every aspect of life and expecting perfection is not always possible and may lead to burnout.

Having a good spiritual anchor has always centred me and helped guide my next move. Also, a great hobby I’ve been perfecting is boating with my partner every other week – it’s the absolute best. I can’t stress enough how important it is to have a partner who’s equally yoked and shares your goals. [He’ll be so chuffed reading this].

What kind of leader are you, and how did you develop your leadership style?

My leadership style is collaborative. It has developed through a combination of (i) having had great leaders and mentors whose leadership style I’ve borrowed from and (ii) observing leaders whose characteristics and approaches didn’t align with my values and making a conscious decision not to replicate those traits. As a junior, I always valued working with partners who gave me room to grow independently, encouraged me to find solutions to complex problems, and created space to ask questions and bounce ideas.

I value independent thinking and make it a point to give my juniors (my bundles of joy) the same room to think for themselves. Before giving an instruction, I ask questions like: “How do you think we should do this and what is the approach?” or “Have you considered x, y or z?” and I’m always around to support and answer questions.

I love seeing my juniors come alive, and I’m for the transformation of the industry. There is something special about seeing juniors walk in on day one, unsure, overwhelmed, maybe even in tears, and watching them grow into titans of the industry. Imparting knowledge to those who will succeed or walk alongside me is my *modus operandi*. The future generation should inherit what I’ve learnt, build on it and go even further. 🙌



Q&A

Lebogang Maragelo
Senior Associate – Corporate team
Webber Wentzel

What initially drew you to a career in M&A?

I didn't grow up with anyone in my family working in this industry, so I only saw glimpses of it on television. But from a young age, my mom says I insisted I wanted to "be in business". I'd squeeze my little feet into the tips of her heels, carry a handbag, and gently coerce my little brother into being my personal driver who would take me to "important meetings", while my cousins played co-workers in our imaginary corporate office. But what's funny is that I always thought I might end up as a writer or storyteller of some sort – and in a way, that's exactly what dealmaking is. M&A is a kind of storytelling; two sides come together with a vision for something that doesn't yet exist. Often, they'll start with only a rough outline, then bring in a team of advisors to help articulate, shape and structure the narrative. After weeks of negotiations, long nights, drafting (and maybe even some near-tears), a deal emerges – a story of two parties choosing to come together, or sometimes parting ways. That creative, collaborative process of building something new out of complexity is what continues to draw me to M&A.

What's the hardest lesson you've learnt, and how did it shape you?

The hardest lesson I've learnt is accepting that to be at peace in this life, I need to give up the hope that the past could have been different. Working in this industry demands more than we often acknowledge, not just in time and energy, but in personal sacrifice. For a long time, I found myself replaying past decisions, mistakes and missed opportunities, carrying the weight of "what ifs" for far longer than was helpful or healthy. I used to think that if I revisited the past enough, I could somehow redeem it. Letting go of the hope that the past could be changed is slowly liberating me from the "tyranny of the past". It's allowed me to live with more grace (for myself and for those around me) and to be more present, compassionate, and resilient – both professionally and personally.

What does self-care look like for you, and how do you prevent burnout?

For me, self-care starts with remembering that work is something I do, not who I am. I try hard to make sure that my work doesn't become my identity, and having friends whose careers are completely different from mine helps keep me grounded and reminds me to keep perspective. I see self-care as the hard, but necessary, daily work we do to stay motivated, healthy and whole in a world that makes it difficult to be all these things at once. It's staying connected to friends and family, reading and writing purely

for joy, and making sure the interests that fuel me don't sit on the back burner for too long. Sometimes, it's getting up for boxing on a Saturday morning or playing tennis on a Sunday afternoon – even when staying in to binge a series feels easier. And often, it's simply having the courage to ask for help and speak up when I'm not okay.

Did you have any mentors or role models? How did they influence your journey?

Yes! I'm a huge advocate for mentorship, and both my life and career are a testament to the power it can have. As I've grown older, though, my view on mentorship and role models has evolved. My focus now is more on building a sustainable network – a community I can tap into, learn from, and do life with. For me, it's about being intentional about the people I surround myself with, and making sure that it's always people who are smarter and kinder than me – people who edify me. The shift towards community-building has helped me to stay grounded and energised, even in high-pressure environments like M&A. It's no longer about finding one person to guide me, but rather creating a circle that challenges and uplifts me – and what a beautiful circle it's becoming. 🍷

I'm a huge advocate for mentorship, and both my life and career are a testament to the power it can have.



Q&A

Lebohang Makhubedu

Senior Associate – Competition, Trade & Investment team
Webber Wentzel

What did your path into this field look like – was it intentional or did you discover it along the way?

One of my earliest memories was wanting to become a lawyer. My mother famously quotes the story of my first day in Grade 1, when I proudly declared that I would become an attorney. My decision to specialise in competition law was initially influenced by my keen interest in the interplay between economics and the law. Competition law brought the theoretical principles I learnt at university to life, allowing me to delve deep into various industries, understand differing client segments, how they operate, what drives them, and the impact that firms' actions have within markets and on consumers at large.

What was your first major multijurisdictional transaction like, and what did you take away from it?

As an associate, I worked on Heineken's acquisition of a controlling interest in Namibia Breweries, and the flavoured alcoholic beverages, wine and spirits operations of Distell. The multibillion rand transaction represented a landmark deal in the African beverage industry. My team and I worked on competition assessments spanning over 20 jurisdictions. Through this transaction, I grew immensely in my understanding of competition law regimes across the continent, and built relationships with authorities. I learnt how to advocate effectively for clients, and developed critical skills needed for managing the complexities of multijurisdictional filings.

How have you built resilience in a high-pressure, male-dominated environment?

A positive mindset and fierce determination. Those who know me and work with me often comment that no matter how tough things get, they are continually amazed at my ability to keep going and to see the upside. I've always been wired to see beyond the crisis or situation and work toward the best possible outcome.

That, coupled with a relentless drive to succeed, has helped me to remain resilient and thrive in this high-pressure profession.

Have your views on work-life balance changed over time?

I have learnt that it is up to you to define and create what balance looks like for you. It's not possible to always give 110% to everything; there's always some give and take. There are moments when certain aspects of your life need to take a backseat while others are prioritised, and that's okay. What matters is determining what is important to you and managing your time in a way that supports

those priorities, while also setting aside time for yourself to reset and recharge. A practical way to do this is to establish and maintain a routine that allows you to create structure within the chaos and promote intentional living.

What kind of leader are you, and how did you develop your leadership style?

My leadership style is that of a collaborator or supporter. I enjoy engaging and working in a team. I pride myself on being able to identify team members' talents and leverage diverse views and skills to achieve an optimal outcome.

I've always
been wired to
see beyond the
crisis or situation
and work toward
the best possible
outcome.

What advice would you give to your younger self starting out in this field?

Stay curious, stay hungry, and never get too comfortable. Seek and embrace new challenges that push you to grow.

Always remember who you are, how you got here, and the immense potential you possess.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

My faith and family. My faith keeps me grounded and reminds me of who I am and what's most important. My family – my parents, brother and husband – are my biggest cheerleaders, constantly motivating me to give my best and to be my best. 🙌

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Q&A

Liesl Olivier

Senior Associate – Corporate team
Webber Wentzel

What initially drew you to a career in M&A or corporate finance?

My first rotation during my articles was in the corporate team, and from that point on, I was hooked. From my view, it appeared the M&A team was always at the centre of the magic, holding the pen on the transaction documents and steering the deal in collaboration with various specialist teams and corporate advisors. Each deal has its key deal points and considerations, and no two deals are the same.

During my second rotation in a litigation team, I realised I missed the corporate work, so I signed up for the advanced company law class at WITS just to survive my time in litigation. As a corporate lawyer, I still feel like I'm at the centre of the magic.

What's the hardest lesson you've learnt, and how did it shape you?

A rude awakening for me was realising that *no one owes you anything*. You are responsible for your own career, and you need to take ownership of your work and career growth. Having moved past the initial fear and the need for external validation, I have learnt to embrace the unknown and discomfort of impostor syndrome, and to push through it to gain more experience and better my own skill set. That being said, I have greatly appreciated the time and training received from mentors and, understanding that they didn't owe me their time, it meant so much more when they did invest their time in me.

What does self-care look like for you, and how do you prevent burnout?

Running has become my escape and is my "me-time". I wish I had started running sooner in my career, but I love hitting the road,

and even better as part of a running club. As a lawyer, it's difficult to manage your own time, and work pressures are often driven by deal flow. But when I manage to stick to my running schedule where I can, I get that much-needed "me-time".

How do you mentor or support other women entering the field?

I like to lead by example and show other women that they can succeed in a corporate career. The playing field has been levelled, and you succeed by working hard and being a good person. I am also a firm believer in paying it forward so, where I can, I offer guidance and training to juniors.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

A clichéd response, but I often go back to my "why". I wanted to become a lawyer because, initially, a family member said I shouldn't do it (my rebellious act of youth). Over time, that reason has developed into a truly rewarding career where I get to make a difference for my clients. It's not all roses and sunshine every day, but it's been an incredibly rewarding experience that continues to challenge me.

Are there any emerging trends in M&A that you find particularly exciting or challenging?

This is not limited to M&A, but the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and the client approach is making law firms take notice. We need to navigate how best to use AI while continuing to showcase our value to clients and maintain a competitive edge. I certainly don't think the robots will take over our jobs, but we are standing at a crossroads, and risk taking a wrong turn if we don't embrace the AI wave. 🤖

Having moved past the initial fear and the need for external validation, I have learnt to embrace the unknown and discomfort of impostor syndrome, and to push through it to gain more experience and better my own skill set.



Q&A

Maanda Mashego

Senior Associate – Corporate team

Webber Wentzel

What did your path into this field look like – was it intentional or did you discover it along the way?

It was definitely more of an organic discovery, rather than something I intentionally pursued from the outset. My first meaningful encounter with M&A work came during my articles at Webber Wentzel. As part of my training, I had the opportunity to rotate between two dynamic corporate teams, both of which were involved in deal-related work. That hands-on exposure was invaluable. The environment was fast paced, the learning curve was intense, and the stakes felt very real. But I quickly realised that I thrived in that kind of setting. The complexity and collaborative nature of deal-making excited me, and from that point forward, my career began to orient itself naturally in that direction.

What was your first deal or transaction like, and what did you take away from it?

Although I can't pinpoint the very first transaction I worked on, I clearly remember the first deal I was involved in from its initial stages through to completion. It was a cross-border transaction between South Africa and the United States, which meant working across vastly different time zones. That brought about a fair share of late nights and early mornings, and sleep definitely took a backseat. The pressure was high and the pace relentless, but it pushed me to adapt quickly and build resilience. More than anything, it was the first time I saw myself not just as a junior team member, but as someone capable of adding real value in a demanding and complex process. That deal gave me the confidence to see myself as a dealmaker in my own right.

What's the hardest lesson you've learnt, and how did it shape you?

Rather than being a hard lesson in the traditional sense, the most transformative realisation I've had is that career choices are deeply personal and multifaceted. It's not just about the team you're joining or the technical role you're filling – it's about how well that choice aligns with your long-term personal growth, your values, and the kind of life you want to build outside the office. This understanding has shifted how I evaluate opportunities. I now gravitate towards roles and environments that challenge me, encourage continuous learning, and allow me to show up fully as myself. Choosing growth and meaning over immediate comfort or short-term convenience has been empowering. It's made me more intentional, more fulfilled, and more grounded in my career journey.

What does self-care look like for you, and how do you prevent burnout?

Jokes aside, the cornerstone of my self-care is getting enough quality sleep (lots and lots of it); it's something I genuinely prioritise and protect. Without it, everything else unravels. In addition to rest, I carve out consistent weekly time for spiritual connection and community through my church cell group. It's a grounding space where I can reflect, reset, and be supported. On a more physical level, I treat myself to a Thai massage about once a month; it's my way of releasing the physical tension that can accumulate from sitting at a desk or carrying mental stress. These routines, though simple, are deeply restorative and help me stay mentally sharp and emotionally balanced.

Did you have any mentors or role models? How did they influence your journey?

I've never really been drawn to formal mentorship programmes or the idea of having one singular role model. Instead, I've found myself learning the most from authentic, informal relationships with the people around me. These included friends, colleagues, and even family members – people who are driven, thoughtful, and navigating their careers with intention. I also host a podcast called *Voices of the Fraternity*, available on YouTube, Spotify and Apple Podcasts, where I interview professionals across diverse fields. Through these conversations, I'm constantly absorbing insights on leadership, growth and purpose. Even though the guests may not know it, many of them have mentored me through their stories and reflections. These experiences have shaped how I think about success, and have enriched my career path in powerful ways.

What advice would you give to your younger self starting out in this field?

Take every chance you can to learn, whether that's through short courses, mentorship conversations, networking, or simply observing others in action. Don't wait until you feel "ready" to stretch yourself. Start investing in your growth early. Build your skillset, ask the awkward questions, and put yourself in rooms that challenge you. Most importantly, don't let self-doubt silence your voice. There will be moments when impostor syndrome shows up uninvited, but remember – you are already more capable than you think. Your instincts are sharp, your contributions matter, and with time, your confidence will catch up to your competence.

Believe in yourself, and your growth will follow that belief. 

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Q&A

Mieke Vlok

Senior Associate – Corporate team
Webber Wentzel

What did your path into this field look like – was it intentional, or did you discover it along the way?

My path into this field was incidental. I initially studied in an entirely different direction (journalism), and spent five years working at a media company. Only after that did I enter the legal sector, initially advising technology businesses on general commercial and regulatory matters. This quickly led to advising technology (mainly fintech) clients on investments and disposals. Today, I work as a corporate and commercial attorney, focusing on investment transactions and disposals, venture capital, restructurings and general mergers and acquisitions in the technology space. I am very passionate about the sector, and consider myself fortunate to work in a field that I love.

I initially had mixed feelings about the fact that I took a slightly longer and different route to joining the legal world than others. At times I felt like I was 'behind' my peers, since I only started my articles of clerkship in my late twenties. However, today I am extremely thankful for my alternative journey. I learnt a lot during my time in the media sector and consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience a different field.

What was your first deal or transaction like, and what did you take away from it?

The first big transaction I ever worked on was equal parts terrifying and exciting. It taught me how much of a team effort it takes to get a transaction across the line, and it cemented my love for checklists, trackers and to-do lists!

I am a firm believer that a transaction's success lies not only in proper structuring and advice along the way, but also in proper project management. Having a firm grip on all the various moving parts in a transaction means nothing slips through the cracks. Not only does this prevent small (but material) items from getting missed, but it also brings me peace of mind and makes the entire deal experience less stressful.

Have your views on work-life balance changed over time?

Yes, I've learnt that work-life balance does not always mean prioritising both. Some weeks or months, work takes priority. Other times, something else I care about comes first. Thinking about it this way helps me feel grounded, instead of always trying to split my time between both.

I really like the quote that is along the lines of "you can do anything, but not everything at once". Early on in my career I often tried to

do everything at the same time – working hard, advancing my career, setting personal goals, studying part time and more. This inevitably caused burnout and a general sense of failure where you feel like you are not doing anything properly. Now, I am much more measured with what I want to achieve and I try to focus on one or two things at a time instead of five.

What advice would you give to your younger self starting out in this field?

I would tell myself that it is okay to ask for help, and that nobody starts out knowing everything. A legal career is long and filled with numerous learning moments over the years, and every transaction (no matter how tough) teaches you something new that you can apply in future.

Sometimes there can be more than one right answer to a problem, and the key is figuring out which approach works best in this specific scenario. I would emphasise this, as I think this career has a tendency to attract perfectionists who want everything to fit neatly into a "yes" or "no" box.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

I remind myself that we have good days and bad days, and that it is okay if not every day is a good one. I also focus on the positives and what I am thankful for – I have a stimulating, fulfilling career. Though it can be demanding, it also comes with immense benefits, including the chance to work with some of the smartest people in many sectors. I may be tired at times, but I have never been bored or unfulfilled. I try not to take this for granted.

What does self-care look like for you, and how do you prevent burnout?

To me self-care often means saying no to some things, so I can make time for things that help me recharge. I know I function best when I stick to a routine, so I try and keep Sunday evening to Friday afternoon as consistent and routine as possible. This includes going to bed early, sticking to my scheduled workouts, and limiting other distractions during the work week. It allows me to prioritise work during the week, and then I can enjoy my weekends guilt free. I also try and schedule time for just myself during the weekends, instead of filling every hour of the weekend with social and other commitments. I find spending time at home with my husband and two cats doing everyday things like reading, cooking and watching a movie extremely relaxing, and consciously make time for this every weekend. 🐾



Q&A

Vuyokazi Xegwana

Senior Associate – Corporate team
Webber Wentzel

What initially drew you to a career in M&A or corporate finance?

During my articles of clerkship, I had the honour and privilege of working alongside some of the most talented and revered M&A lawyers in this business. If you have seen the classic film *'Brown Sugar'*, it's almost reminiscent of the scene where Dre asks Syd when she fell in love with hip hop, and after a slight hesitation, she replies, "I've been in love with you from the first day I saw you".

There is, for me, something remarkable about the ability of human beings who, even when expected to perform under immense pressure, still push the limits of human potential, and it is these people who drew me to a career in M&A. At my core, I had always wanted to explore whether capitalism, pervasive as it is, can be used as a tool for social justice and reform. Although I do not have a conclusive answer to that yet, I am packing my toolbox. Looking back, I was perhaps most struck by the underrepresentation of certain people, and what started as a question became a personal challenge.

What was your first deal or transaction like, and what did you take away from it?

The first transaction I was involved in was enormous, and I learnt many things. For starters, that I could delay sleep for a few years (ha ha). It was complex, creative, purposeful, and continues to have an enduring impact on the South African media landscape and the lives of many ordinary South Africans like me.

As a young lawyer, it highlighted the importance of the intersection between technical expertise, commercial savviness, critical thinking and judgment, precision in drafting and communication (both internally as a team and with the client), and determination and commitment in a team that constantly sought to outdo itself. I still marvel at how intimately the team and, later, I came to understand the client's business and how this knowledge enabled us to craft bespoke solutions that initially addressed the unique challenges we encountered, but have since been replicated and become almost market precedent.

Have your views on work-life balance changed over time?

Surprisingly, yes. I used to believe in the idea of work-life balance, but now, on introspection, I am convinced that it's a bit of a fib we tell ourselves. Balance, in its simplest form, means a state of equilibrium or steadiness, and nothing could be further from the reality of our textured and multifaceted lives. Instead of balance,

I now subscribe to prioritisation. There are seasons when my work demands, and deserves, the fullness of my time and attention. But in most other seasons, it is being a present mom and someone who is in community with others that matters most.

Did you have any mentors or role models? How did they influence your journey?

Once, during a conversation with a dear mentor of mine, it dawned on me that the beautiful ones have indeed been born, that they exist in our midst, and are the flag bearers of our dreams and aspirations. I am privileged to continue to have many mentors who, by their very being, have validated and affirmed my existence.

To you, Pulane Kingston, for allowing me to collapse into your arms, for straightening my shoulders and for reminding me that it is neither a sale and purchase agreement, nor a negotiable instrument that defines my worth, but that it is innate and unconditional – and to the many women who are the backbone of our lives, I salute you.

What barriers still need to be broken down in M&A or corporate finance industry for women?

Literally, the fact that when discussing any important topic, the words barrier and women are often uttered in the same sentence. The only thing that separates women (particularly women of colour) from anyone else is opportunity. Maybe it is time for a paradigm shift, and that we centre a different narrative – one focusing less on what keeps women back or out and, instead, asks what more can be done to bring and keep women in, and more importantly, how to propel them forward.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

At the risk of sounding cliché, a post that I read recently put succinctly what I imagine keeps me going. It said, "What a blessing it is to be tired in the pursuit of a challenge of your own choosing". It is never lost on me what a privilege it is for me to be here now or what it took for the universe to conspire in my favour, and that not too long ago, structural systems existed to keep people who look like me out of spaces like this. Perhaps the word is gratitude, and a deep acknowledgement that to whom much is given, much ought to be expected. Dare I forget that on 8 June, I conquered the ultimate human race with a promising finish time of 10:16. Tough days, much like an up-run, are surmountable. 🏃‍♀️

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WOMEN WHO LIFT



Sally Hutton and Martine Leukes on their mentorship relationship

Success is not only measured by deals closed or accolades earned, but also by the ability to lift others – to recognise potential, nurture young talent, and actively create space for growth. That philosophy underlies the mentorship relationship between Sally Hutton and Martine Leukes, a pair whose dynamic combination illustrates the power of intentional support and a shared commitment to excellence.

Sally is a private equity M&A specialist and a partner at Webber Wentzel (having recently completed a decade as the firm’s managing partner). Martine is a corporate lawyer and senior associate in Sally’s team, with a focus on private equity and venture capital transactions.

Their professional paths first crossed in 2018, when Martine completed a rotation as a candidate attorney in Sally’s team. Their relationship deepened when Martine returned to the team as a first-year associate in 2020. Sally and Martine first worked directly together on a major transaction in 2021, when Martine supported Sally on the acquisition of Crossfin Technology, a leading player in the South African fintech industry by a consortium of investors led by the Ethos Mid-Market Fund (now Infinite Partners).

“The Crossfin transaction was the first time that Martine and I worked directly together on a major deal, and I immediately noticed that she had a calm confidence, good legal instincts, a sharp eye for both the bigger picture and for detail, and an incredible work ethic. She also has a wonderful way with people. Those are all valuable traits for dealmaking, which indicate the potential to go far in this field.”

But potential alone doesn’t build a career – it is shaped through opportunity, experience and exposure, trust, and mutual investment. Martine reflects that what has made Sally’s mentorship meaningful wasn’t just that Sally noticed her – it was what she did with that insight.

“Working with Sally directly over the past four years has been the most formative experience of my legal career. Sally’s guidance has not only sharpened my technical abilities, but she has also created space for me to meaningfully contribute, ask questions, and learn in real time. Sally gave me a seat at the table – and once I was there, she made sure I had a voice.”

Martine’s skills have been honed by working on some of the firm’s most complex M&A matters, including high-profile transactions with tight timelines and significant complexity and pressure.

Working alongside Sally, Martine is encouraged to take ownership of deliverables, contribute to strategy formulation, and develop her client skills by engaging directly with clients – not in the background, but as a central member of the team. In so doing, Martine has developed strong client relationships. For instance, she played an

integral role in the team advising on the disposal of Retail Capital by Crossfin to TymeBank in 2022, and also supported Sally again on the disposal of Adumo by Crossfin to Lesaka last year.

“Mentorship is not just about giving advice – it’s about being present, consistently,” Martine says. “Sally shows up. Even during a fast-moving transaction, she makes time to check-in and provide real-time guidance. She listens and genuinely cares about the team’s wellbeing – both in and outside of the office. That kind of support is rare, and it’s made all the difference to my growth.”

While Sally brings deep experience and leadership to the table, she’s quick to point out that the relationship is a synergistic one.

“It is impossible to manage multiple transactions without teamwork and collaboration. Having someone like Martine on a deal team brings enormous peace of mind, as I know that she cares just as much as I do about getting things right. She gets on with things, but also knows when to check in for guidance or direction. Martine also has real emotional intelligence and brings a fresh lens – one that reflects the evolving expectations of younger professionals in the industry. That perspective encourages open dialogue and sometimes challenges the status quo, which keeps us all sharper and more adaptive. That helps me lead better too. And it’s so important to have fun when you work long hours – we laugh a lot.”

Their collaborative approach is evident in the way they bring out the best in each other. “Sally trusted me with real responsibility, but I always knew she was there,” Martine says. “She challenged me to think more boldly, but always with support and kindness. That kind of backing builds confidence fast.”

For Sally, mentoring is part of how she defines success. “Doing good work matters – but building great people matters more. If I’ve led significant deals but haven’t developed others in the process, then I’ve missed the point. We’re building the next generation of leaders and a legacy of excellence, not just closing deals.”

For Martine, it’s been transformative. “I’ve learnt that you don’t need to change who you are to succeed – you just need someone who sees your potential and is willing to guide you. Sally does that for me. We’ve worked crazy hours, faced tough issues, and debated differences of opinion – but always with respect. And we always have a glass of bubbles or a whiskey sour after a long transaction,” says Martine. “It’s not just mentorship. It’s partnership.”

Their story is a reminder that when women actively support one another, everyone benefits. 🙌

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WOMEN WHO LIFT



Inside the mentorship of Mirren Sharp by Hafiesa Samsodien

In a demanding profession that requires resilience, commitment and precision, the relationship between Partner, Hafiesa Samsodien and Senior Associate, Mirren Sharp reflects the benefits of mentorship in the legal field. Their story began in 2021, with a well-timed phone call.

Hafiesa was looking for a dedicated associate to support her growing practice. Mirren, in another team at the time, was quietly considering a move into corporate law. Hearing about this through internal channels, Hafiesa called Mirren on a Friday afternoon to offer her the role in corporate law. Within weeks, Mirren made the switch, and they've been working closely ever since.

Both describe their relationship as a collaboration built on agility, loyalty and a shared dedication to producing quality work. Trust is also an important aspect of the relationship, as Hafiesa explains:

"Trust plays a big role. As a partner, you rely on your team to take care of the details while you maintain oversight. Over time, and through close collaboration, we've developed the kind of trust that gives me confidence that matters are being handled with the care and diligence our clients expect."

Mirren agrees, adding, "When we started working together, Hafiesa put in a lot of time to teach and supervise me directly. That has given me the confidence to deal with aspects of the work independently, but I always know I can turn to her for guidance when necessary."

Striking the balance between guiding someone and giving them space to lead is something Hafiesa approaches with intention. "To do this successfully, you need to understand how your juniors address challenges, where they're confident and where there is still room to grow. This informs the degree to which I may step in to provide direction and when I step back. It's a dynamic process, and the balance shifts as juniors develop."

For Hafiesa, mentoring has also shaped her own growth as a leader. "It's made me more intentional about how I provide feedback, how I build my practice and how I support others in their development. I think it has also made me open to fresh perspectives that juniors may bring." When it comes to spotting rising talent, Hafiesa values "a good work ethic, responsiveness, critical thinking and initiative." And what does she admire most about Mirren? "Her excellent sense of humour and sparkling personality."

Mirren, in turn, reflects on how this mentorship has influenced her career trajectory. "Had it not been for Hafiesa giving me the opportunity to move to the team and giving me access to great work, I'd be in a very different position professionally." Beyond the technical skills, Mirren says the most valuable lesson she's learnt is to forge her own path in the industry. "Hafiesa has taught me not to wait for someone to pave the way, but to take responsibility for my own career." 🙌

WOMEN who lead

Over the years, I've learned that true leadership is full of paradoxes — it's being strong yet gentle, decisive yet compassionate, confident yet humble. It is about holding these contradictions with kindness and care for people. When we do, we create spaces where everyone can grow and thrive.

- Safiyya Patel

Managing Partner, Webber Wentzel

