



Bella Ntshingila

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Q Where did your corporate finance journey begin, and what led you to pursue a career in the space that you are in?

A Let me start by saying that when I left high school, I had no idea what I wanted to study or do for a career; I was shooting in the dark, so to speak. I studied towards an accounting degree because I enjoyed accounting at school. In 2005, I started my career at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) as a trainee Auditor. I then moved to Nedbank Group Internal Audit, where my portfolio was largely in Retail Banking, and later Credit Risk. During my time at Nedbank, I was exposed to Global Markets, which sparked a lot of interest in me. I researched the qualification required to be in that space. I've always been a big believer in equipping myself with the necessary knowledge before embarking on a life/career-changing decision, so I went on to study further and completed an Honours degree in Financial Management, to gain a better understanding of the type of products that are traded in the Markets business.

In 2009, I started as a New Product Specialist at Absa Capital. This was a great way for me to have a practical view of what I had just studied in my course. A few years later, I went on to become an Operational Risk Manager (second line of defence), covering the Global Markets business, which was another step in learning more about the business. I was a woman with a plan, or so I thought.

I moved into Global Markets (first line of defence) in 2014, and I am currently heading up the Risk & Control function, which focuses largely on safeguarding the business against operational events which may culminate in losses and or reputational risk, as well as reducing the risk of future potential losses and managing inherent risk at an acceptable level. I have always had a love/passion for influencing and making an impactful change in the work I do, which is something that attracted me to the risk and control space.

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 "Motho ke motho ka Batho", loosely translated, means "no man is an island and you are who you are because of others." I grew up in a place where the whole community raised all the children in the area, where the saying "it takes a village to raise a child", was brought to life. That instilled in me the importance of leveraging the knowledge and experiences of others. The true mark of a great leader, I believe, is accepting that you can never know everything, and growth is in learning from others around you. Many great leaders have walked the very path I am on, so what better way to learn than to tap into their experience?

I have been very fortunate to have great mentors who have influenced my life (in Absa – Saloshni Pillay & Christine Clark), and I have also had phenomenal line managers, who have propelled me to greater heights and shaped the leader that I am today. The best advice I received from one of my mentors was to always be true to myself, and to be unapologetically authentic.

One other role, that at times gets overlooked, is the role of a sponsor – someone who can back you, be your voice when you are voiceless; someone with gravitas, who can push for your growth in the organisation. I had a sponsor early on in my career, and their role was invaluable.

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

A The Barclays Operational Risk System project – although it was many years ago, I chose this one because it was a turning point very early on in my career. When I was chosen to represent Africa at the Barclays Operational Risk Management System steering committee in London, I realised that I was way more resilient than I had given myself credit for. I was to be part of the team that would build

a tool to be used by all risk teams globally. I thought, "God, that flu I had a few weeks ago, I can do with it in a few months. But let me not dictate to you, even a headache will do; just make sure I'm sick when the time comes for me to leave."

All the negative thoughts started to build a home in my mind; thoughts like – why me? How can I do this all by myself? I had to tackle being in a foreign country, cultural differences, and preconceived ideas about a young girl coming from a third-world country. Once I accepted my fate, I went into beast mode, started doing some groundwork, pre-reading, and leveraged the expertise and experience of some of my team members back home. Let's just say that Africa had a voice in those sessions, and that voice was mine.

Q What piece of advice would you give a young woman joining your team?

A Learn to forgive yourself, the world is harsh enough. It's okay not to know everything. You are not an imposter; you belong where you are, and you have earned your seat at that table. Stop asking yourself, "Why me?" and start asking "Why not me?"

Lastly, always remember, *divine timing is always on time.*

FUN FACTS

Current book on your nightstand:

My bible, *A Year of Miracles* by Marianne Williamson, and *One day my soul just opened up* by Iyanla Vanzant.

Preferred music genre:

Pop, Rhythm & Blues, and house music.

Preferred holiday destination:

Must be the city of love – Paris.

Three words that your colleagues would use to describe you: Assertive, supportive and dependable. 🍀