

Puleng Khunou

Divisional Executive: Client Coverage



What was your motivation to enter the world of infrastructure and public sector finance?

I have always aspired to be a successful woman who is driven to make a positive impact on society and on others witnessing success. My mother taught me the importance of expressing yourself clearly at a very young age, and when you think about it, that's precisely what the corporate world is about. Corporate Client Coverage projects vary across stakeholders including government agencies, private companies, and communities, which aligns with my personal values and is what drew me to the field. It has always represented success to me, and that resonated with me.

What did you want to be as a child?

My primary focus was always to ensure I succeed in whatever I did. I suppose you could say I've been working all my life. In both primary and high school, I worked in my family's spaza shop and during my university years, I worked in retail. I've always had a strong drive to be independent.

How have you managed to navigate this male-dominated environment?

It has its challenges but is not necessarily difficult. I am experienced in this field and believe me when I say it is possible to thrive; it's all about the right mindset and confidence.

During my early banking career in Pretoria I recall having to navigate a language barrier when reviewing financial statements prepared in Afrikaans. I relied on my ability to communicate well and allowed myself to be open and vulnerable, without adopting a negative attitude. Some of the most challenging clients at the time became good friends, and we still catch up for coffee or dinner from time to time.

How have you overcome challenges and remained resilient?

For me, it's important to maintain a positive outlook and treat my ability to overcome obstacles and view setbacks as a growth opportunity. Learning about the job, myself, and others has given me the resilience to navigate whatever challenges that come my way, be adaptable and open to change, and most importantly, rely on a strong support structure both within and outside the workplace.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I enjoy being part of a team that sees a project or transaction through from start to finish. Working with highly skilled and experienced professionals to ensure successful implementation is very fulfilling. I also value the experience of leading others and being led; that's where constant learning happens.

How do you manage a work-life balance?

Every day when I wake up, I'm intentional about putting myself first and filling my cup so that I can pour into others. That's the positive energy I bring to my children and my work. It's what works best for me, and because of that, I don't seek external validation.

What is the role of infrastructure as an anchor for economic growth and development in South Africa?

Infrastructure is a key enabler of the growth that our country needs.

Real progress depends on strong partnerships between the public and private sectors, with financiers like Nedbank playing a central role. However, we need to be involved from the project's inception and included in the decision-making process. The sooner we are brought in, the more effectively we can accelerate infrastructure investment. Implementation is key.

What is your advice to women aspiring to be finance professionals?

Don't lose your voice and work hard, that is what success is built on. Have a deep understanding of who you are as an individual and prioritise what matters. And most importantly, look after your mental well-being – this will enable you to take care of your loved ones.

