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WHITE & CASE

Q *Where did your career start and how has it developed to where you are today?*

A I started as a trainee at ENS in the corporate team, and once I had completed my articles, I got an offer to join the team as an associate. Our team then moved across to White & Case to establish the corporate practice here. We started doing deals through the network, which meant more cross-border transactions.

A few years ago, I did a six-month secondment to the corporate team at our London office. While the beauty of M&A may be that it's essentially the same wherever it takes place, working in the UK gave me exposure to working with people from all over the world and experiencing different working styles.

My clients are mainly in the mining industry. I didn't deliberately set out with the goal of getting into this field of law. I fell into this specialisation when I was assigned to deals that just happened to be M&As in the mining industry. Before long, I was being assigned to them because I had the experience in this highly regulated sector.

I started out with the intention of becoming a competition lawyer, but I enjoyed corporate so much I never thought about moving on from it. What I enjoy most about transactions of this nature is that they can deal with every aspect of law – then I feel like the conductor in an orchestra bringing the music from each instrument together!

Q *What is the most challenging aspect of your job?*

A Right now, I'm finding that my biggest challenge is being a new mom. Achieving a work-life balance is tricky. Having a career I love and spending time with my family are equally important to me, but it can be a struggle to balance the

two. Advancing in your career and having a family seem to happen on the same timeline, and I think you need to learn to prioritise depending on the circumstances. So, for example, when you're at home you're at home and when you're at work you're at work.

This struggle may be the reason behind the shortage of female M&A partners at big law firms, because women think they can't have it all. The perception is that it's too hard to manage, but I've found that once you are a partner it's actually easier to manage because you have more control over your schedule.

The support of the firm and your team plays a big role, of course. And asking for the small things – like pushing a meeting out by an hour – can make a big difference to your day. But it doesn't just happen – the onus is on you to ask.

Q *Why would you recommend a career in M&A?*

A I have found it to be an engaging, satisfying career. I enjoy the intrigue of deal-making and the challenge of achieving the most favourable outcome for the client. Another aspect of M&A that I love is that no two deals are ever the same, which means that I am constantly learning new things on a daily basis. This can be demanding, but it can also be fun.

Q *What do you think are the skills needed to succeed in this field?*

A I think you need to be hard-working, committed, have technical competence and attention to detail, be able to multi-task, be pragmatic. Another important skill is to be able to learn on a continuous basis and to think out of the box when necessary.

When it comes to the skills you need in the mining sector – as I imagine for any particular sector – research the industry, stay current, thoroughly understand the business you're dealing with, and make

sure you know what's important to your clients.

I believe that women in particular should have self-confidence, the ability to support their convictions, and the right level of doubt so they think about things from every perspective. I believe that women bring empathy, a useful element of diversity and can be more well-rounded.

Q *What transactions you've worked on stand out most in your mind and why?*

A I find that when I have responsibility and play more of a leadership role on a deal, I feel that I add more value and ultimately my satisfaction level increases.

I acted for the third largest coal-mining company in the world on a transaction where they disposed of various mining assets in South Africa with a combined value of about US\$300 million. I was responsible for drafting agreements for the transaction, and I was involved in all the negotiations. I was an associate at the time but thrived on the increased responsibility.

Another example of where I played a big role was when I acted for a private equity group in relation to their acquisition of a company supplying security communication equipment and networks. I was responsible for commenting on, negotiating and finalising a complex sale agreement and managing closing of numerous transaction steps.

Q *What advice would you have appreciated as a young woman embarking on a legal career?*

A What I have learnt: Picture your end goal and work backwards from there. Always stay the course. Be true to yourself, your values. Ask...otherwise you won't get the opportunity. It's ok to take risks. Be direct and persistent in asking for what you want and when the opportunity arises speak up, step forward and take the lead. 🙌