Q&A

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Mentorship, sponsorship and 'lifting as you rise'

Who was the first person in the industry to take a genuine bet on you, and how did that sponsorship change the trajectory of your career?

Honestly, it wasn't just one person – it was PPM Attorneys. The partners at the time (Malesela Phukubje, Lucien Pierce and Yasmeen Masithela) took a chance on me when no one else did and laid the foundation for the rest of my career. This experience shaped the entirety of my career, and the lessons learnt at PPM still have a huge impact on who I am as a professional and my leadership style – particularly the training of juniors.

How can corporate finance institutions move beyond 'diversity checkboxes' to create environments where young women actually want to stay long-term?

Succinctly, meet women where they are in their respective career paths – not everyone wants the partner track or the big sexy deals; sometimes the smaller deals are enough, and that has to be acceptable. We have to believe women when they say having this kind of career and managing a family, a home and life (whether you have children or not) is difficult – there is no wife at home! We have to shift our mindset from an all-or-nothing approach to being flexible and allowing young professionals an opportunity to carve their own path, though obviously not to the detriment of the firm – it's got to be a win for all concerned.

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Personal reflections and integration

The phrase 'work-life balance' can feel mythical in transactional finance. How do you personally define and manage the integration of a demanding career with your personal life?

It is, if it implies that each day starts and ends at a particular time, and you exist in a general state of Utopia. I adopt a practical approach – there are some days where my life requires all of me, and there are other days where my job requires all of me, and I have to respect wherever I am on that spectrum on any given day. This debunks the myth for me, and allows me to have the all illusive 'work-life balance'. This makes it sound easier than it is, but it is very possible, and when you're a junior, it requires open and honest conversations with your team.

How has your definition of 'success' changed from when you were an ambitious graduate to who you are today?

I'm still ambitious, and my definition of success hasn't changed – am I being the absolute best I can be and giving it my all? Some days, I am a rockstar and, other days, I fail epically. To me, success has always been fluid and was never measured in rands, cents or big titles. It's driven by giving my best every day and to not be found wanting.

Outside of the financial press and market tickers, what books, podcasts or philosophies shape how you lead and live?

There are too many to name here, but my approach to leading (and life) is very flexible and I'm always open to having my perspective questioned, challenged and shaped by what I'm reading at the moment. I know I don't have this leadership thing cornered, so flexibility gives me opportunities to keep evolving and adapting. Ultimately, I look for material that requires me to question my thoughts on leadership and life.

What is a personal passion or hobby you pursue that has absolutely nothing to do with finance, but keeps your perspective sharp?

I sit on the board of Rise Against Hunger – a non-profit organisation committed to eradicating world hunger – as an independent, non-executive director. This position gives me the opportunity to give back in a meaningful way, and use my skillset for the benefit of others. I also read ferociously across authors and genres, and I avoid social media.

If your life story up to this point had a headline in a business newspaper, what would it be?

Probably something along the lines of *"From Lenz to Sandton: The M&A lawyer defying the odds in a man's world"* – and yes, I used AI to write this headline.