



Deal Makers

WOMEN 2023

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



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Marylou Greig
Editor

Women's Month in South Africa holds important significance as we continue to work together to empower women in all spheres of life. August is the time to reflect on the many achievements of the brave women of our past who fought against gender, race and class oppression, and to remember them as those who laid the foundation for the gender equitable society we work towards in South Africa.

Although the status of women in this country has improved in recent decades, gender inequalities persist, and the fact remains that women are still largely underrepresented in leadership positions. Education is one of the most important aspects of human development, and eliminating gender disparity starts by building a foundation with education in the early years, on which to increase the status and capabilities of women as they take their rightful place in teams and in corporate South Africa's boardrooms.

This, the third edition of the DealMakers Women of SA's M&A and Financial

Markets Industry, seeks not only to highlight the incredible women in this space, but also to offer inspiration to young women, and to give them courage where needed, as well as the realisation that they are not alone. Reading these profiles and thought articles, the clear takeaway is that feminine traits bring a different dimension to leadership – one that is more collaborative, empathetic and focused on relationship-building; essential elements necessary to complete a well-rounded team servicing an industry which navigates people dynamics.

This year, this feature will be released at the inaugural Women's Day platinum networking event. The panel facilitator is Lydia Shadrach-Razzino, a partner at Baker McKenzie and a previous winner of the DealMaker of the Year award. She is joined by Janice Johnston, CEO of Edge Growth Ventures, Fawzia Suliman, CFO of the JSE, and Ego Iwegbu, co-founder and CEO of The Good Mineral, MSLONDON Cosmetics and Miss Salon London. 

CONTENTS

2	Absa
12	Baker McKenzie
22	Benchmark International
24	Birkett Stewart McHendrie
25	Bowmans
26	Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr
38	Deal Leaders International
40	Deloitte Africa
46	ENSafrica
60	Eversheds Sutherland
62	EY
63	Fasken
64	Investec
70	Malan Scholes
72	Motsoeneng Bill Attorneys
74	Nedbank CIB
86	Norton Rose Fulbright
90	PSG Capital
92	PwC
94	Poswa
95	Rand Merchant Bank
96	Standard Bank
104	Vani Chetty Competition Law
106	Vunani Corporate Finance
108	Webber Wentel

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SHARON BRIGHTON

HEAD: LEGAL, INVESTMENT BANKING, AFRICA REGIONS, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is "Why she leads" important?

It's important, because as leaders, particularly women leaders, we are ambassadors for a future generation of women who look to us to know that "It Can Be".

What are the biggest contributors to your success?

Authenticity and hard work. It's too exhausting to be someone you're not and you only allow people to see what really drives you and what you are passionate about when you are being you. Be prepared to put in time and effort. Success doesn't come without putting in the work, pushing the boundaries, sleep deprivation, failure, uncomfortable conversations and an eagerness to learn – all of this has played a part in getting me to where I am now.

What are challenges that women leaders face, especially in financial services?

Sadly, there are still a number of barriers, most notably gender bias and stereotypes, prevalent in the workplace. Even if barriers are unconscious ones, they hinder effective women leadership.

Why is women leadership so important?

Diverse perspectives in any organisation are critical for remaining relevant, profitable and adaptable. Women bring a different energy, perspective and emotion to an organisation that should be embraced, rather than shut down. Women were created differently, not inferior to men.

What role can male corporate leaders play to foster and grow women leaders?

We need more men as advocates, mentors and sponsors of women in organisations. Men need to visibly show their support. Men who are more inclusive and proactively collaborate with women have the opportunity to see a different perspective or a different solution to a problem.

Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome?

I think most women do, because we are our own worst enemies – we constantly question our ability or inability to do things. In my career, I've suffered such severe imposter syndrome that it completely disabled me from functioning optimally. I realised I needed support to work through the overwhelming feelings with the help of a life coach. I wasn't aware that imposter syndrome can manifest in different ways – it includes the pursuit of unattainable perfectionism, working all the time, not being able to accept a compliment, always doubting your ability and/or the solution you put forward. It can lead to burnout, so my advice is: don't let the imposter in!

What is the connection between leadership and mentorship?

I see them as being closely linked. Leadership naturally manifests into mentorship and vice versa. Leaders guide individuals as well as organisations and strategy. Mentors assist mentees to understand the bigger picture and how organisations work.

How should women show up for and support each other in the work environment?

As women in leadership positions, it's incumbent upon us to promote and uplift others. Women often aren't advocates for other women and they can be quite judgemental. We should stop this and refuse to engage in destructive behaviour.

"Every woman should be the network, the mentor, or the sponsor for other women. We cannot rely solely on men."

What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

I would say: be yourself and believe in yourself. You know what you are capable of, so go out and do just that. Work hard, find a network, learn the culture of your organisation and always act with integrity.



YEWANDE SADIKU

HEAD: INVESTMENT BANKING, INTERNATIONAL, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is "Why she leads" important?

You can't open somebody's mind unless the person has examples of what is possible. "Why she leads" gives the role models. I also like the concept: She leads because she's been judged based on her age, gender and looks – rather than her ability and role. She knows the harm that unconscious biases can cause. That's why she leads.

What has been the value of mentorship in your life?

Formal programmes are useful for professional structure and objectives, but informal mentoring also works. I've even been mentored by many people I've never met, such as Nelson Mandela. I like the way he comported himself and I learnt from the way he dealt with difficult situations.

How do we focus on women leadership without alienating men?

We can't have more women leaders if we don't have men actively championing, supporting and sponsoring us. Men have more representation at almost every table, so we need them to address the imbalance. It doesn't need to be formal, but it does need to be done deliberately. We need men.

What are the biggest contributors to your success?

My support network of family and close friends, my tribe of fellow working mothers and the staff I have been lucky to have. The role models I've had in my career, both male and female, senior and junior to me – they have shown different admirable qualities. And the life skills that I have acquired along the way – they've given me options and kept me grounded; I think it is impossible to be truly successful as a woman if you aren't grounded.

What challenges do women face in the workplace?

A recent study shows while 29% of women now earn the same as their

spouses (up from 11% in 1972), women still do more for the home and family. We don't call it work because it's unpaid, but it is work. It's not easy to do more than one job and do both well. Many women just make it look that way.

Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome?

I battle with it more often than I admit. I also worry that people expect more of me than I'm capable of. These thoughts push me to spend a lot of time preparing, even for subjects that I know well. Then I push the thoughts of inadequacy out of my mind and face the task head on.

How do you handle negative feedback?

I ask myself how much preparation I really did, if I put in the right quality of effort, find out where I got it wrong, so I know what to do differently next time. I come away from negative feedback happy that I know, because I will work to ensure I never get that feedback again.

What are your thoughts on sponsorship in the workplace?

If you demonstrate ability and raise your hand, you'll find sponsors, even if it's not as part of a formal programme – bosses like people who deliver good quality, work well with others, and make their teams look good.

What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

Balance is elusive. You'll drop some balls but try not to drop the most important balls. Stand up to be counted. You can't win the lottery without buying a ticket. Take some risks.

"Experience and skill always come in disguise, not on a platter of gold with a ribbon around it. If you want skills and experience, you must be ready to put in the work."

Stay grounded and be shameless about the high standard that you set for yourself and the output that you are known for.



ZEN DLAMINI

EXECUTIVE HEAD: SOVEREIGN & PUBLIC SECTOR, CLIENT COVERAGE, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is “Why she leads” important?

“Why she leads” sends a message – it changes the narrative. Sharing our stories inspires women entering the workplace and upcoming leaders to know that anything is possible; their success is possible. It also helps us address some pessimism when we are dealing with so much adversity. “Why she leads” brings us a sense of hope and optimism – creating positivity by showcasing our successes and the positive path we are championing for women’s advancement in the workplace.

What has been the biggest contributor to your success?

My resilience and focus on output – I don’t sit back and let things self-resolve – I have the courage to get up and work on things that matter, and deliver, especially at work. I also keep abreast of the latest news and developments – your stomach will let you know when it’s hungry, the brain won’t let you know when it is starving. We must continuously feed the brain and keep that muscle in shape – it empowers and elevates you. Being able to have difficult conversations has also been key.

How do you know when you’re ready for the next move?

You should master your space and everything that you do. You should be such an expert that you’re able to do your work with your eyes closed. Then you’re ready for the next move. Until you can confidently say to your boss, “I’m ready for your job,” keep working at your mastery and preparing yourself for more responsibility.

What do you do to maintain your confidence in a male-dominated industry?

Know a lot so that whatever situation you’re in, you can manage it easily. I’ve found myself in situations where men try to phase me out of the conversation, either by speaking a different language, or changing the topic to rugby for example. So what do I do? I talk about rugby, too.

Being a knowledge all-rounder empowers

you and enables you to have conversations even in spaces where you are undermined. You may even find the very people that tried to squeeze you out begin to turn to you for input because they know you will add value.

How can businesses make the work environment more supportive and conducive for women?

They need to be intentional about the mandate to support women, the number of women needed in leadership positions, and how to support them. Businesses must also be realistic about the commitments women have outside of work. It doesn’t mean we’re less committed to the organisation. People should be measured on their output, not whether they can stay for after-work drinks. Businesses should be more conscious of this.

What trait should every leader have?

Compassion – allow people to be themselves, their authentic selves, and understand them.

How should women show up for and support each other in the work environment?

It’s not a competition, it’s lifting each other up high and celebrating each other.

“I’ve stood on men’s shoulders to get where I am, but I want women to stand on my shoulders so that I lift as I rise.”

We must hold hands and drive our progress together. Let’s also take note of blind spots and help each other overcome these and always give constructive feedback.

What words of advice do you have for young women leaders?

I urge young women leaders to get sponsors and mentors; someone to bounce your ideas and thoughts off. Don’t be a lone ranger. Be curious and knowledgeable about a wide variety of subjects and make sure that you can hold conversations with different people. And my favourite – KYP or know your people.



ASHLEIGH PLEDGER

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER: TRANSACTION BANKING, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is “Why she leads” important?

Women in Africa still struggle for control over our bodies and fertility, equal opportunities, education. We still bear the bulk of raising children and running homes. We remain significantly underrepresented in leadership and governments and societies seem lethargic to rewrite the narrative for women. More can be proactively done to address this systemic imbalance. “Why she leads” gives women leaders visibility and inspire current and future generations to pursue their goals. It Can Be done!

What have been the biggest contributors to your success?

Education – I knew qualifying would give me the tools to be independent and write my own destiny. Persistence – steady and solid – and keeping my eye on the goals of quality delivery and living with integrity and authenticity.

What challenges do women leaders face, especially in financial services?

Women are as ambitious as men, but we face headwinds that signal it will be harder to advance. Women leaders are also doing more to support employee well-being and foster inclusion, but this critical work is spreading us thin and going mostly unrewarded. Women leaders want to work for companies that prioritise flexibility, employee wellbeing, diversity, equity, and inclusion. We’re not saying we’re tapping out; rather we’re saying trust me to juggle what’s on my plate in the most effective way possible and you won’t regret it.

What role can male corporate leaders play in fostering and growing women leaders?

Destroying the legacy stigma about a person being ‘less than’ because they are female, means male leaders need to proactively partner and support women leaders. This is pure leadership gold, as cynics realise the world doesn’t stop spinning when women participate more fully and equally. In fact, everyone benefits – we become people evolving on a journey together, not polarised into categories of men and women.

Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome?

Yes, I have. With time, I realised the world automatically assumes all men are capable and doing a great job, but this isn’t always the case. We’re all just humans at varying stages of our journey and levels of ability – give yourself permission to learn while continually striving for excellence – it gives you the quiet confidence to do your best and back yourself.

How do you handle criticism?

I handle criticism very well – I think this is my superpower. I’m not perfect and I get things wrong, but I’m always willing to own my part in learning and improving. I love evolving as a person.

If you could invite any three women (past or present) to dinner, who would they be and why?

I’d invite two guests. My late grandmother Muriel was wise, kind, feisty and never lost her open-mindedness. She wanted to learn and had a natural growth mindset and I loved how she embraced new technology! My second guest, Michelle Obama is an iconic modern women leader – deeply educated, self-made and an all-round wonderful human inspiring real change and shifts in the world.

What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

Don’t buy into the subtle messages, that are systemic and deeply ingrained in our society’s mindset, that you are less than or not appropriate for a role, simply because you are female. Despite the challenges, women are doing it and finding a way, so that you can too. Keep it up and don’t give up, and one day you’ll also make the decisions that will improve the situation for future generations.

“We need the voices of women leaders at every level of society to drive change and, in the process, inspire those around them and generations to come to pursue their ambitions.”

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BULELWA TETYANA MADONSELA

HEAD: STRATEGY ENABLEMENT – GLOBAL MARKETS, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is “Why she leads” important?

I strongly believe that Africa has been more matriarchal than we like to acknowledge. **‘Why she leads’** showcases that women can be just as successful when given the platform to lead.

What are the biggest challenges that women face in the workplace?

We work with people who have wives and partners at home taking care of life. As a woman in the workplace, I am that wife and partner. As women we also want to do everything. I always say, don’t be embarrassed about outsourcing things in your life – plan to make sure things can be taken care of so you don’t have to miss out on important engagements. You’ll be more present and show up fully in all your roles.

What is your approach to leadership?

I look for ways I can leave people better off for having me in their lives. I’m a very strong believer in empowering people.

“As a leader, I’m not afraid to show up as one who doesn’t know everything. If I purport to know everything it disempowers the people around me.”

Decisiveness is a trait every leader should have. The ability to make decisions is very comforting to teams – it gives them a sense of ‘our leader knows where we’re going’.

What is the value of curiosity in the workplace?

You can’t be successful without being curious. If you’re not curious about what’s happening around you, you can’t apply yourself holistically and have the meaningful conversations. People want to know that they’re noticed. If you notice what people are up to and you demonstrate that in the conversations you have, that will set you apart. Curiosity has always stood me in good stead and has always accelerated me to step into my next role at the next level.

How do you nurture and take care of yourself?

My spirituality is very important to me; it grounds me, enables me to maintain perspective and not always focus on my challenges. I volunteer in my church.

Self-care allows me to invest in myself. It makes you feel good about yourself; even if it’s the smallest thing, do it for yourself. For me, it’s my hair and nails and waking up early in the morning to exercise. I get to be alone in my zone, not worrying about anyone.

How should women show up for, and support each other in the work environment?

I struggle with women pulling each other down; it’s something that still exists. Women leaders should constantly look for ways to open up doors for those coming up. There’s enough room for other women around the table – let’s make space for others.

Do you have words of encouragement for young corporate women aspiring to make a mark?

Young women who want to step out of their comfort zone to do something meaningful with their life, should focus on self-awareness. Self-awareness is very important. As women, it’s something that differentiates us from men – God has given us a strong sense of intuition.

Self-awareness also means identifying your calling and purpose in life and finding ways to operate within those areas of passion, no matter the context you’re in.



MARLENE PILLAY

HEAD: REAL ESTATE FINANCE DEBT SOLUTIONS MANAGEMENT, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is “Why she leads” important?

I come from humble beginnings where female role models in business weren’t visible. Leadership visibility is necessary to encourage young people to aspire and be courageous in their own lives, despite their circumstances. **“Why she leads”** is an opportunity to elevate the visibility of female leaders. African women, in particular, must play a meaningful role in their own emancipation, whether in a boardroom, classroom, at home or elsewhere.

“Aim to be exceptional at every task and demonstrate your worth through actions. Always act with integrity, own your failures, find the silver lining, never miss deadlines, and make sure you look good doing it.”

What have been the biggest contributors to your success?

I’m blessed with a supportive mother, and a supportive husband who understands my career drive. Maintaining a positive attitude, focus, resilience, and hard work have also been crucial for meeting my goals and achieving success. And aligning with good mentors or go-to people. Success also comes from being who you really are, being authentic and not just a version of yourself – it frees you to focus on the big things and not sweat the small things.

What are the challenges that women leaders face, especially in financial services?

Unconscious bias – a nurturing leader could be ‘too soft to get the job done’, while being assertive and decisive could be ‘too bossy’. Bias fades but it requires a demonstration of resilience and positive outcomes. In *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg sums it up well: men are given opportunities based on potential, while women are given opportunities based on what has been delivered. That needs to change.

What is the value of mentorship in the workplace?

Mentorship is a virtuous circle – all of us need mentors and we should

offer mentorship and guidance to those coming up. The right conversations at the right time, can be highly impactful and influential. All leaders should be responsible for nurturing an abundant mindset and influencing the development of strong future leaders.

How can male corporate leaders foster and grow women leaders?

Male corporate leaders have arguably the most impactful role to play in enabling gender equality in the workplace. They should take intentional steps to create equal opportunities for women to succeed and thrive in the workplace – from the moment a woman enters the workforce, way before she assumes a leadership position and regardless of her personal life. It’s about finding the best people (male or female) for the job, so our organisations thrive.

What would you say to another woman thinking of changing fields because her industry is male dominated?

Be guided by your passion and don’t relinquish your power as a woman or a professional, because anything worthwhile takes sacrifice and patience. Be aspirant, push yourself forward and be courageous – be an example.

Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome?

I don’t believe I have, but there was a time when some opinions about my style of leadership or delivery affected me. Thankfully, I took some advice on board, and learned that not all opinions matter.

What advice do you have for young women starting their careers?

Be kind to yourself and those around you and find your balance early in your career. It’s controversial but I don’t believe in having it all. If you try to be the best at everything, you end up being mediocre or burnt out. Accept the choices you make to progress your career, enable your life with support (not guilt) and outsource the little things.

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CHINTU LING'OMBA

HEAD: CLIENT COVERAGE AFRICA REGIONS, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is 'Why she leads' important and where does it fit in SA's current context?

As a woman leader in the corporate environment, for me, representation matters. This campaign showcases women in leadership in Standard Bank – understanding the role Standard Bank plays in African countries where we're present actually sends the message to many women that it's possible to be a corporate leader on the continent.

What do you think helped you the most to make a career as a woman?

It's one thing to have the skills and capability which is non-negotiable, but I also don't underestimate the power of people guiding and helping me chart a path that's authentic to me. People who also speak up for me around tables I have no access to and where, let's be honest, they may not be naturally biased towards me, as a woman, an African, and in the SA context, a foreigner.

The importance of my own leadership journey's 'Holy Trinity': mentorship, coaching and sponsorship, has been a game changer for me. Leadership has a deep element of wisdom associated with it, that comes with one's own experience or one's ability to lean on others' experience to accelerate your own learning. So for me mentorship is a necessary aspect of learning from others. As I mature in my own career and leadership practice, knowing when to be one of these things for others means I myself get better at how I ask for the support I need.

How can male corporate leaders become allies that grow women leaders?

We underplay the absence of allies for women in leadership and decision-making roles in the corporate environment.

I've had more male than female sponsors in my own career. Partly because there are more men in leadership positions. Just that act of sponsorship

– done deliberately and voluntarily – can shift the dynamic, because this is where male corporate leaders actually have a level of control.

I emphasise voluntary – when the act of supporting women is voluntary, the allyship goes deeper across levels and actually helps to nurture and develop a sustainable leadership pipeline. It also becomes 'how we do things here', which becomes a self-fulfilling act of leadership development.

Why would companies benefit from having more women at the top?

Companies that have gender-diverse decision-makers make better long-term decisions and are sustainably better performers. It's necessarily about seeing the world through more than one lens when leading a company into the future.

How should women support one another in their organisations?

If you have the opportunity to mentor, coach or sponsor, seek out other women in your organisation.

"When you're in a decision-making position, don't be afraid to actively prioritise other women in your mentoring, coaching and sponsoring activities."

How do you deal with being underestimated or undervalued?

Being underestimated is relatively easy for me. If a decision is mine to make, I make it without apology. I no longer feel the need to prove myself. Undervaluing is a difficult one. I haven't been undervalued for growth opportunities, but I've certainly been undervalued as far as pay. So, once I have the data and the language, I'll raise this.

How do you continue to learn and expand your knowledge?

Traditional learning methods and information exchange with experts/people who know more still – work for me – reverse mentoring from younger people has been an incredibly powerful learning tool for me.

DEBORA BEKKER

EXECUTIVE: EQUITY RISK SOUTH AFRICA, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is "Why she leads" important?

Standard Bank boasts excellent talent, and it behoves us to showcase it. Women have stories of inspiration or are simply superlative in their roles, but their contributions may go unnoticed in a male-dominated field. "Why she leads" is an opportunity to elevate and celebrate our women leaders.

What are the biggest contributors to your success?

Excellent training and wholesome, empowering relationships with mentors, role models and confidants. Without these, my journey would have been significantly less fulfilling. More importantly, my partner has consistently provided incredible support, whether with difficult career-related matters, celebrating successes or family logistics.

What challenges do women leaders face, especially in financial services?

Not having an enabling domestic environment – the so-called triple burden of womanhood – means that the majority of women have more to juggle than their male counterparts. We need to enable and encourage men to take up non-career-related responsibilities with paternity leave and flexible working hours.

What is the value of mentorship in the workplace?

Good mentorship nurtures leaders and can unlock a young person's perspective on work, planning, career building, networking, conflict resolution and work-life balance.

"Leadership is taught, not just innate. Incrementally increasing exposure to appropriate levels of responsibility is the key to nurturing talent."

What role can male corporate leaders play in fostering and growing women leaders?

True equal treatment transcends formal rules and gestures and is

achieved when women are de facto equals. A true ally for gender equality is not just someone who is 'on your side', but somebody who seeks to see your perspective, however jarring it might be to their own.

How do you handle criticism?

I take professional criticism in the best spirit possible, and where I've succeeded in making the necessary changes, it has made a vastly positive difference. I'm also lucky that I'm amnesic to non-professional criticism.

What's your approach to taking care of yourself and your mental health?

I'd love to have enough time to exercise, take time off, practice gratitude, pamper myself and connect with loved ones. Realistically, self-care is more prosaic – protecting my mental bandwidth, celebrating small victories, and not despairing when I can't achieve everything.

How should women support each other in organisations?

Go out of your way to make other women feel seen and encouraged. Show compassion in times of conflict, disappointment and/or grief.

Which women would you invite to dinner and why?

Jacinda Ardern – she's a strong yet compassionate leader who understands the compromises that need to be made. Winnie Byanyima, for her eloquence and actions towards social justice and gender equality in Africa.

What is your advice for the next generation of female leaders?

You can achieve almost anything, but you're unlikely to achieve everything. Be explicit about your goals and plan accordingly.

There is something to be said for limiting your targets, being easy on yourself for your imperfections and leaning hard into your strengths and passions.

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THANDIWE LEGWAILA

HEAD: TRANSACTION BANKING, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is "Why she leads" important?

With empirical evidence, the platform demonstrates that we can lead successful businesses, instead turning the question into 'Why not her?' in a very unapologetic way. We have an opportunity to share the challenges we've overcome, giving hope to women that it can be done.

What have been the biggest contributors to your success?

I spent a lot of my time with my father in my childhood. He believed in me so much and shaped my thinking and life outlook. He raised me with so much love and would tell me every day, "You know, Thandiwe, you are a very capable individual, just like a man. You can be anything you want to be in the world if you set your mind to it." My dad's teachings set me up for success and my hard work paid off.

Is corporate culture today more supportive of young women in the position you were once in?

Yes, there's more understanding now of the compromises women have to make. In our environment, we accommodate women, encourage them to take longer maternity leave, and promote them while they're on maternity leave. We're also very comfortable with a hybrid working environment – your output is important, not your presence at work.

Why is it important to support women and create work environments that allow them to fulfil the many roles they play?

Some leaders see women as a liability. Instead, they should be asking, "How do we support that very capable woman who goes on maternity leave, to come back and integrate into the organisation?" We shouldn't put women in positions of having to choose between parenthood and a career. Instead, let's create workplaces that allow them to do both to the extent that they wish.

How do we focus on women leadership without alienating men?

Sometimes to make a visible change, you've got to be unapologetic about the agenda.

"I'm unapologetic about our focus on accelerating the promotion of women into leadership positions and our investment towards their learning and development."

What trait should every leader have?

Courage! We don't want amagwala (cowards) as leaders. You must lead with confidence.

How do you handle negative feedback?

I receive it and immediately there and then, say I'm gonna do better. I haven't always been this way. At first, I hated criticism, but professional coaching helped me realise that negative feedback is a powerful tool to help you grow, develop and attend to your blind spots.

How should women show up for and support each other in the work environment?

Senior women in organisations have the responsibility of sharing their journeys with the rest of the women in the business. We must pay it forward.

At this stage of your life, what does success look like?

I grew up poor, so I've always had a very clear view of what success looks like. I want to be successful in everything I do – not necessarily driven by material things, but by that feeling of achievement that I've actually overcome poverty and left it behind. In everything that I do, I look to do it so well that it creates further growth opportunities for me. My focus now is on my legacy rather than on accumulating wealth. I look forward to leaving behind a business that has grown our people and given a voice to women – the voice I battled to find.



ELIZABETH MUCHEMI

HEAD: GLOBAL MARKETS INTERNATIONAL, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

How should women show up for and support each other in the work environment?

We should create space for one another to let our voices be heard and positively highlight how different we are.

"There's this monolithic view that African women, for example, are all the same – that one of us speaks for the masses. It's just not true. Let's not be afraid to highlight the great tapestry of women's different thoughts, experiences, and expertise."

Given how few of us there are, we should also be teaching each other, and stepping into the gaps for each other when needed, especially in corporate and leadership.

How do you balance motherhood with being a working professional woman?

Balance is a wonderful idea/concept to aspire to. For me, creating balance with a high-paced job and children requires constantly creating solutions and managing different needs. It's a constant process. Sometimes certain areas of life get more attention than others, so I accept that as my reality, but at times it can be very difficult. You feel like you're overprioritising work, and then when you try to correct that, you feel like your work may suffer. So, if you're not careful, you can get stuck in this mental tug of war. Being in a senior role can heighten that. The lesson I'm trying to learn is to really pace myself better, manage my uncompromising 'red line' priorities, and to keep pushing ahead. My North Star remains my faith and my family – without them, none of this is worth it.

How can male corporate leaders be allies, fostering and growing women leaders?

The contribution of men is critical. Men and women alike, who are truly interested in lifting others up, can form a powerful force for change; the more we help each other, the better for women and society. We need to work hand in hand for the equality, growth, and nurturing of women leaders. More men fostering partnerships and stepping in as sponsors, also makes for a more wholesome understanding of women

in corporate leadership, encouraging further sponsorship of women.

Is there a trait that every leader should have?

Wise compassion – my faith principle of doing unto others as you would have done to you. Some may see compassion as a sign of weakness or slow judgement, i.e., an inability to make the tough decisions or to take swift decisive actions. But that is not the case – I actually think it creates quite the opposite effect, as you're focused on growth and your team achieving the best. You have to get comfortable with that being fine and not pivoting to other people's way of leading. I think in the long run, wise compassion pays it dues.

What is your proudest professional achievement thus far?

In my previous role, I was part of a team that started and developed the Africa franchise for a global investment bank. I had many firsts in that role – driving the business strategy, opening new markets, and closing new types of transactions. I also became one of the first African female managing directors of the bank. More exciting to me now, is the platform I have joined at Standard Bank – I believe this to be a culmination of those efforts and my role now gives me a great platform to build out a business once again, but on a greater scale with the support of a great team.

At this stage of your life, what does success look like?

Success to me is a combination of being joyful in what I do and succeeding in what I set out to achieve; working with people I constantly learn from, but who I can also laugh with, and, being able to create, develop and deliver a plan that leads to sustainable growth.

What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

You are enough. In fact, you are more than enough, so just take that shot because you are incredible.

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