

Gergana Ivanova Associate Director in Strategy & Transactions



Q *Where did your journey begin and how did you end up where you are today?*

A I pursued the chartered accountancy qualification because of the breadth of opportunities it offered post qualification to explore different roles in business and finance. After completing my studies at Wits, I did articles in audit at EY where I gained valuable cross-industry experience across both large listed and multinational companies as well as mid-market private businesses - these spanned various industries from mining to high fashion. As much as I had not specifically planned to pursue a career in corporate finance, at the end of my articles I found myself with a much-coveted offer to join the Transaction Advisory Services team.

I found a home in the Transaction Diligence (transaction support) which was well-suited to my analytical skills enhanced by an interest in commercial and strategic aspects of the transaction process. During my career in transaction support, I have worked on deals such as Kwande and ABI's acquisition of Isanti (a DealMakers BEE Deal of the Year), AECI's acquisition of Much Asphalt, and supporting private equity clients on acquisitions such as OMPE's acquisition of Footgear. I have also extensively worked with clients on exit readiness and preparation for the sales process and I'm further promoting the principles of what makes a great exit by facilitating the SAVCA Exits Masterclass 2021, as well as presenting the segment on exits at the SAVCA/GIBS PE Foundation Programme 2022.

One of the highlights of my career has been pioneering the use of data analytics in transaction support as well as spearheading the use of technology across the transaction lifecycle, having worked with technologies such as data preparation and visualisation, automation, artificial intelligence, as well as geolocation and special analytics.

As an associate director and leader, I'm passionate about growing diverse and highly effecting teams whilst also growing the next generation of female leaders in corporate finance. EY has a fantastic and inclusive people culture which truly makes this possible.

Q *Did you have a mentor and if so, tell us about that person and include the most valuable thing you learnt from them?*

A Mentorship is incredibly important when building a career and progressing in corporate finance and I have had the privilege of having amazing mentors, both male and female, who have helped me grow personally and professionally. Some of the best advice I received from my mentors was to find purpose in what I do, which is aligned with both my personal and professional aspirations, and then not be afraid to boldly go out there and live that purpose.

Some of my female mentors also taught me the importance of being your own spokesperson and verbalising your ambitions and aspirations with the people that matter. It's important to have a mentor, coach and sponsor, as they all play a different role, and remember that mentorship can come in many different forms, i.e. it does not need to be one individual and can also evolve with time.

Q *What has been the Best day in your career so far?*

A There are many to choose from but a great day that I keep coming back to is attending the leadership summit with the EMEIA partner leadership group in India. We spent the day on a "roadtrip" to visit the Taj Mahal where we spent the trip collaborating and networking, admiring beautiful architecture and eating good food.

Q *What qualities would you say are essential for a woman to thrive in the M&A industry?*

A As with everything, you need to begin by loving what you do and making sure that it is well aligned with your purpose.

Secondly, in a high-paced, high-performance environment, it is important to be able to build resilience so that you can perform at your best. That looks different for every person but it is important to figure out what helps reset you and make time for it. For me, hiking in the mountains and disconnecting from technology is a great way to feel recharged.

Lastly, learning to say "no" in the appropriate scenarios is important and can demonstrate strength and leadership

Q *What are the biggest changes you have seen in the industry in the course of your career?*

A There has been a level of sophistication and digitisation of the M&A process.

The sophistication has come in a number of forms including better structured and run processes, better planning and preparation around the M&A process (trends and numbers that are supportable and underpinned by data) and the broadening of the aspects considered that can make a transaction successful. These include better day 1 planning, actionable plans to realise synergies, better post transaction integration, more sophistication around being able to carve out businesses, and consideration of ESG issues (increasingly to do with the E and S parts of ESG).

In terms of digitisation this has come in many forms, from increased use of data analytics and technology on transactions, to highly sophisticated data rooms. We have also figured out that we are able to do a lot more virtually, which has reduced the need for (sometimes) unnecessary travel.

Q *What is your favourite quote?*

A "Great things never come from comfort zones" 🐾