



## 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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