

Penny Latter

Senior Transactor | Corporate Finance



Q *What led you to pursue a career in corporate finance?*

A When completing my accountancy articles at EY, I was involved in the audit of Investec's corporate finance division. At that time, Investec was still located at 55 Fox Street. The corporate finance division of Investec was highly regarded, and seen as an aspirational place to work, which remains true today.

In those days, the team was very small, and only comprised a handful of individuals; but the appeal to be involved in high profile transactions for clients in a dynamic, high-performing team environment, where no two transactions or days at work are ever the same, still holds true for me today.

Q *What was the toughest deal you have worked on and why?*

A There have been numerous challenges in navigating various deals, each with its own unique hurdles. One particular difficulty has been finding a balance between sensitive family and owner-shareholder dynamics and successful deal execution. Shareholders and owners who have dedicated their entire lives to building their companies, often with the involvement of their entire families, have to make hard decisions regarding M&A activities and achieving alignment on transaction value. These decisions, whether it involves restructuring, acquisitions, partial exits, or listings, can often be emotionally charged and not taken lightly.

Q *What, in your opinion, is the hardest part of a transaction?*

A The uncertainty as to whether a transaction will be successful, because of factors beyond one's control. It can often take years of hard work on the part of both clients and the whole advisory team to get a transaction all the way to final approval stage, only for it to be scuppered by an unanticipated regulatory hurdle or shareholder dissent at a very late stage in the approval process.

Q *What is your favourite sector in which to do a deal and why?*

A My interest has inherently leaned towards the retail sub-sector of the consumer services sector. I am fortunate to have been involved in the completion of many transactions in this sector during my time at Investec.

The impact of this sector – which encompasses various sub-sectors like clothing and food companies – on the everyday lives of all South Africans, in some way, is what particularly resonates with me.

Q *What in your opinion is the biggest difference between working on an external advisory team and being on the in-house M&A team?*

A The main distinction lies in the volume and variety of transactions one encounters while working with a broader range of clients on an external advisory team. While I have not personally been part of an in-house M&A team, I anticipate that conducting transactions as a member of a smaller team, solely for a single client without the support of a large team or a portfolio of clients to mitigate fluctuations through market cycles, could present its own challenges.

Q *Did you have a mentor and if so, what was the most important thing you learnt from them?*

A I have had, and still have, many people who have been mentors, without the official "mentor" title. At Investec, I have been and still am fortunate to learn from some of South Africa's best minds in banking and corporate finance, all of whom have been mentors over time, in different forms.

Q *What attributes do you think are essential for a good M&A executive?*

A I believe that possessing a strong work ethic, maintaining a positive can-do attitude, exhibiting the ability to be a team player and build strong relationships are essential attributes for anyone aspiring to become a successful M&A executive. While it may be easy for individuals to claim these qualities on paper, truly embodying and living these attributes will set one apart over time.

Q *If you could have dinner with any woman in history, who would it be and what would be the first thing you asked her?*

A Currently, without any influence from my daughters, I think it would probably be Taylor Swift, mostly for her work ethic, and her achievements as a businessperson and philanthropist, including her award as 2023 *Time* Person of the Year. The first question I would ask her would be to share any lessons she would communicate with her younger self as a way of saving herself in the future, from any mistakes or disappointments she has experienced along the way. 🎧



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