

INSIGHT

Soria Hay

Founder and Head of Corporate Finance
Bravura Group



Dear younger me,

You're 29, standing on the precipice of a bold idea. You don't know it yet, but that spark – the quiet, relentless desire to do things differently – is about to change the face of corporate finance in Southern Africa.

You've walked away from a traditional legal career, honed your skills in corporate finance, and now, with a four-year-old daughter and a one-year-old son, you're founding your own firm. You'll name it *Bravura* – a word from music, a field you've always loved. It means great technical skill and brilliance shown in performance. But more than that, it means daring. Expression. Soul. You'll choose this name because what you're building must be more than clever deal structures and clean spreadsheets. It must be a masterpiece, crafted with discipline, heart and boldness.

Under your guidance, *Bravura* will grow into one of the largest, award-winning independent advisory and structuring houses in Southern Africa, with offices in South Africa, Namibia and Mauritius. Along the way, it will earn the trust of high net worth clients, bold entrepreneurs, blue-chip companies and corporate trailblazers who value insight, integrity and innovation. But beyond the numbers, you'll build something deeper: an enduring culture of excellence.

You'll learn that leadership isn't a job title; it's a way of being. It's in how you listen, teach and create space for others to lead. The people who'll thrive at *Bravura* may not be the loudest, but they'll be driven, principled and resilient. You'll reject outdated hierarchies. At *Bravura*, leadership will never be a pyramid; it will be a circle. And in that circle, everyone has a voice.

Your belief in mentorship will guide you. Not mentorship from the top down, but side-by-side support; investment in potential; and honest, sometimes hard conversations. You'll teach by doing, by showing up, and by holding others to the same high standards you hold for yourself: that you're only as good as your last email, your last meeting, your last deliverable. That excellence is the bare minimum. That average is easy, but brilliance is a choice.

You'll be a mother. A partner. And a leader. And you'll find your own rhythm, holding these roles together. It won't be about balance, because balance is a myth. It will be about clarity: choosing your priorities, protecting your time, and being present where it matters. Birthdays. School concerts. Celebrating the wins and learning from the losses. You'll remind your team: if you don't make time for your health, you'll be forced to make time for your illness. You'll encourage exercise, boundaries and self-discipline. Not as luxuries, but as necessities for sustainable success.

You'll often say, "Tomorrow is not another day." It's not just a phrase. It's a call to urgency, to show up every day with intention. And you'll teach your team that proactivity isn't about meeting client expectations; it's about exceeding them. Not for applause, but for pride.

At *Bravura*, you'll build a space where people have agency. Where some 55+ team members feel they can make a difference. Where, regardless of how young or junior they may be, they are expected to carry the conversation in front of CEOs, to speak with insight, and to lead without waiting to be asked. Because confidence isn't arrogance. It's clarity. And clarity is power.

You'll also speak truth about entrepreneurship. You'll tell young leaders: start with two questions – "What do I love?" and "Where will my first cash come from?" That's your business plan. Without passion and cashflow, you don't have a business. And even as you scale, you'll keep coming back to this truth: watch your cash. Forget fancy models, cash is the lifeblood. And so is origination. You'll teach your team that implementation and origination must coexist. That doing the work and creating the pipeline are not separate disciplines. They're symbiotic. Neglect one, and the other collapses.

This will become the *Bravura* way: high standards, strong relationships, and relentless delivery. When you meet potential clients, you won't just pitch. You'll listen. You'll ideate. You'll plant seeds that grow into long-term value.

When it comes to client relationships, you'll remind your team: we are worthy. We don't stay in environments that don't value what we bring to the table. We work where we can make a difference, and where that difference is recognised. And above all else, every day, we will try harder.

You'll channel all of this into building something that outlasts you. You'll launch the Corporate Finance Graduate Academy, designed to give academically gifted African women the opportunity to thrive in a traditionally exclusive field. Not as a tick box, but as a mission to unlock talent that deserves to be seen. And you'll support organisations like Abraham Kriel Bambanani (AKB) – a 120 year old foundation that provides a beacon of hope for young hearts. Because creating value must also mean creating impact.

You'll continue to lead deals, shape strategy and review every document down to the last comma. But you'll also hang Norman Catherine's art on your boardroom walls, as a reminder that in finance, creativity is as essential as rigour. That a powerful idea, like powerful artwork, moves people.

One day, you'll be asked to sit on a panel. To speak not only about your experience, but your philosophy. You'll reflect on the business you built, the leaders you've grown, the values you've protected. And you'll realise: this is what leadership looks like. It's not loud. Not flashy. It's real. And it's yours.

So go ahead. Start the company. Hang the art. Raise your children. Build your masterpiece. Because you can have it all.

With possibility,

Soria 

bravura
Bold thinking. Bespoke solutions.