



Tishanya Naidoo

Principal : Venture Capital

# Q&A

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

**A** My journey began the day I got one of the lowest scores in my class for mathematics and my teacher advised I move into the standard grade class. It was the first time I experienced the unique mixture of stubbornness in needing to prove my teacher wrong but the frustration of not knowing how to start climbing the mountain of improving my results. I went to my parents with my conundrum. They asked me what I hated the most about maths. When I told them it was fractions, they said that it is most likely what I need to fix, first. They delegated responsibility to my uncle, who loved maths and was a maths teacher himself, to wake me up at 4am every single day of my December holidays to deal with what I hated the most, which effectively ended up being the entire grade 8 curriculum. Initially, I found a deep sense of motivation from my need to defy the discount my teacher had placed on me but as the holiday progressed, I found my motivation grew from an addiction to being able to overcome something I initially found to be insurmountable. I got 97% for Mathematics in Matric and tutored matric students throughout my university years.

In retrospect, my conundrum is one that all entrepreneurs face: the drive to build something they truly believe in but not knowing how to overcome the insurmountable obstacles that stem their growth. I believe this is the value Venture Capital brings to an economy. VCs are like the parents that listen carefully to your problem and give you access to the appropriate avenues of a solution because they believe in your idea as much as you do. I get to live my passion of overcoming challenges through the company's I journey with. I get to give the gift my

parents gave me so many years ago, to the entrepreneurs that will one day change the world we live in.

**Q** What, if any, hurdles did you have to face in an industry that has traditionally been male dominated?

**A** Throughout my career, I have always been lucky enough to work closely with men that have been fierce proponents of equality. I am acutely aware that, in this regard, I am the exception and not the rule.

However, I have encountered men, in my periphery, that have questioned my ability to do my job, the way my superiors believed I could, simply because I was a woman.

**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** A mentor that changed my life is Monique Mathys-Graaf. She has taught me more lessons than I can count but the 3 that stand out for me are:

- Pick the meat from the bones (learn the lesson but don't let the criticism break your spirit).
- If you are ever triggered emotionally by a situation, remove the emotion by focusing on the outcomes you want and make decisions in-line with that.
- No idea is too outlandish if you are deliberate and intentional about its execution.

**Q** What is the biggest / most complex transaction you have worked on so far in your career?

**A** A deal that is a great deal now because we managed to unlock the intellectual property and protect it appropriately.

**Q** Which deal challenged you the most and why?

**A** The same deal I referred to above. It had many unique challenges and

it often felt like an impossible task. We also had to sell the deal to an IC that was accustomed to reviewing Private Equity deals.

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

**A** I could single out a best day but for me the best days would be the days you stick your head above the water and realise you have made progress.

The worst day was when one of the start-ups I had worked with had to shut-down.

**Q** What advice would you give to other women thinking of entering the Private Equity industry?

**A** Network as much as you can and remain humble.

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

**A** A strong sense of understanding themselves and a willingness to learn.

**Q** What in your opinion are the most exciting elements of working within the private equity space?

**A** Getting to meet a wide variety of people, with varied lived experiences and being able to learn from them.

**Q** Working within the PE/VC space, you meet many new entrepreneurs. Which women entrepreneurs stood out for you and why?

**A** A female lead on one of my deals has taught me the true meaning of having patience and being bold about being a woman in the truly male-dominated mining industry.

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

**A** A prior focus on the high levels of risk associated with VC has shifted significantly to a focus on potential for return and organic economic growth.