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Lerisha advises and represents international and domestic clients in mergers and acquisitions, prohibited practices (including cartel-related matters), and compliance and risk mitigation. She has appeared before the Competition Tribunal of South Africa in merger proceedings, and has also worked on matters relating to clients involved in Tribunal proceedings.

Lerisha has acted in a number of high-profile matters involving industry-wide and global cartels (eg, in the construction, aviation and gas industries), interim relief applications, contested mergers and dawn raids. She has also participated in a number of compliance initiatives, including training sessions for firms' employees related to competition risk mitigation.

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

A This question often invokes something in me – not because of the opportunity to engage in a lengthy diatribe about “where it all began” but because it offers occasion to acknowledge important things like: humble beginnings (and yet, still, comparative privilege relative to the beginnings of others); the self-sacrifice of others so that I could have the chance to get ahead; the richness of community, books, music, the wisdom of the older generations, the blood, sweat and tears of parents and caregivers. I am where I am today because I am the product of an invested community, intent on making a difference by enabling future generations! And beyond that, I am the product of “the four ships” – mentorship, sponsorship, allyship and friendship – I have been a beneficiary of these investments from generous teachers along the way, for which I am profoundly grateful.

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

A Let's depersonalise this. Women have had to show up with more to offer, more preparedness, more

conscientiousness, more diplomacy, more diligence and more eloquence to be considered comparable to their male counterparts. If she is confident, it is not because it comes naturally (at least, not at first) but because she assumes it. And if she is too confident, her arrogance is insufferable. Women have had to juggle, to hustle for access, to compartmentalise aspects of their identity that patriarchal spaces regard as vulnerabilities (like managing motherhood and deadlines all at once). Let's face it – the words “if any” in the question are probably aspirational. The corporate legal sector has come a long way, but we should own the problems to ensure meaningful change.

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 I am the product of mentors. Naming them will break the word count. So will an itemisation of the lessons, none of which are any more valuable than the other. The repository of lessons is, indeed, my most prized internal resource. To take the lessons and, with humility, hold them close – if I had to reduce it, that would be the most valuable of all.

Q What would you say to another woman who was thinking of changing fields because the industry is so male-dominated?

A I would say: Leave because you are averse to the timesheet. Or because it is not your vocation and does not bring you joy. Leave because there is something more fulfilling. Or more engaging. Or less time-consuming and more balanced. Leave to find your calling. But do not walk away from the thing you love for a reason that your very presence can change.

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

A I have seen environments embrace authenticity more and shun it less. I have seen incremental efforts at inclusion

and a larger push towards meaningful diversity. These are ingredients in the project of change

Q What is one goal you have set yourself for 2022 and are you on track to reach it?

A I am hopeless at goal-setting. I achieve everything but the very thing I identified as most important to begin with. I think it is because goals, for me, are fluid things – the dynamism of the everyday means that a goal at the start warps into something different at the end. I suppose it is okay – because it is the incremental gains that make the difference.

Q What is your go-to power song?

A I am a deep lover of music – old school stuff, house music, amapiano on one day and Nina Simone on the other, hip hop and R&B and then Roxette's first album on the same playlist. Queen and then reggae. One of the most iconic albums (that I hardly listen to because it is that special!) is the Miseducation of Lauryn Hill. And then there's Jill Scott and Jasmine Sullivan and HER and Aaliyah and... wait, this question is a trap.

Q If you could invite any 3 women (past or present) to dinner, who would they be and why?

A I would not have a dinner – I'd have a party! And they would ALL be there! My grandmothers and my mother! My loved ones. Nina Simone, for sure. Ruth Bader Ginsburg too. Brené Brown. Winnie Mandela. Frida Kahlo. Virginia Wolf. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Coco Chanel. Viola Davis. Janet Jackson. Maya Angelou. Rosa Parks. Marsha P Johnson. All my favourite female musicians, poets and artists. It is incredible that the list of prolific and iconic women is voluminous, endless and growing by the day. I should add my nieces to this – they are both in the single digits as of today but most likely to make the list in years to come! 🍷