



Ariane Sabania

Head of Private Equity, Equity Investments,
Absa Corporate and Investment Banking.



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

A After reading law at Oxford, I started my professional career training as a lawyer with Linklaters in London. I worked in the UK and Japan for Linklaters, and in the USA for the International Monetary Fund before joining Absa in 2007 on secondment from Barclays. Initially, I joined Absa as a legal adviser with a focus on building the Pan-African derivatives business, before making the jump to the front office to look after the private equity portfolio.

I have found that my broad experience over the course of my career, both subject matter-wise and geographically, stands me in good stead now that I have diverse responsibilities in relation to the Absa private equity portfolio. This is particularly true when representing Absa on the boards and in other shareholder meetings with our investee companies across different industries.

Q Did you have a mentor at any point in your career? If so, who were they and what did you learn from them?

A I have had the privilege to work with and be mentored by some amazing and inspirational individuals over the years. The ones that particularly influenced my career include a former co-General Counsel of Absa Corporate

and Investment Bank who over years coached me through many situations and above all was a shining role model of how to be a successful woman in the workplace while staying true and authentic, as well as two male mentors and role models within Absa Group who helped me back myself to realise my dream and make the change from infrastructure to the front office.

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

A I have often found myself to be one of only a few women in the room – never as strikingly experienced as in a due diligence meeting in Japan, where there were about 25 attendees and I was the only woman, the youngest person, and one of only three foreigners. What could have been intimidating was instead a great learning experience.

However, growing up I often found myself to be the only girl in a group, whether on the football field or in a judo dojo. Looking back, I realise my parents played a key role by instilling in me the belief that it is neither gender nor background (whether social standing, race, nationality, or religious belief, all aspects where I often was different in relation to my peers) that determine success. Instead, attitude, work ethic, and actions are important.

Q What are some of the most memorable deals you have worked on?

A That's a tough one. I think the ones that stand out most are the ones from earlier in my career, probably because back then everything felt like a big deal! One particularly memorable one was my first ever deal at Linklaters, before I had even formally qualified as a lawyer. I personally persuaded the competition authorities of three countries to approve a deal that saw my client, a major player in the global petroleum market, end up with a 100% market share in a particular product area. It taught me a lot about perspectives and substance over form, as well as the value of constructing a persuasive and well-researched argument.

Q What advice would you give to young women who are looking to enter to financial markets?

A Focus on excellence, pay attention to the details and always ask who will benefit in what way in any given situation – whether in a deal or on the floor amongst your colleagues. If you can answer that question, you can figure out your role in everything.

Finally, take the time and put in the effort to build your network across your organisation and in the broader industry. It will pay off in broadening your horizon and allow you to have a greater impact with your work beyond your immediate team. 📌