



Q&A

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What initially drew you to a career in M&A or corporate finance?

During my articles of clerkship, I had the honour and privilege of working alongside some of the most talented and revered M&A lawyers in this business. If you have seen the classic film *'Brown Sugar'*, it's almost reminiscent of the scene where Dre asks Syd when she fell in love with hip hop, and after a slight hesitation, she replies, *"I've been in love with you from the first day I saw you"*.

There is, for me, something remarkable about the ability of human beings who, even when expected to perform under immense pressure, still push the limits of human potential, and it is these people who drew me to a career in M&A. At my core, I had always wanted to explore whether capitalism, pervasive as it is, can be used as a tool for social justice and reform. Although I do not have a conclusive answer to that yet, I am packing my toolbox. Looking back, I was perhaps most struck by the underrepresentation of certain people, and what started as a question became a personal challenge.

What was your first deal or transaction like, and what did you take away from it?

The first transaction I was involved in was enormous, and I learnt many things. For starters, that I could delay sleep for a few years (ha ha). It was complex, creative, purposeful, and continues to have an enduring impact on the South African media landscape and the lives of many ordinary South Africans like me.

As a young lawyer, it highlighted the importance of the intersection between technical expertise, commercial savviness, critical thinking and judgment, precision in drafting and communication (both internally as a team and with the client), and determination and commitment in a team that constantly sought to outdo itself. I still marvel at how intimately the team and, later, I came to understand the client's business and how this knowledge enabled us to craft bespoke solutions that initially addressed the unique challenges we encountered, but have since been replicated and become almost market precedent.

Have your views on work-life balance changed over time?

Surprisingly, yes. I used to believe in the idea of work-life balance, but now, on introspection, I am convinced that it's a bit of a fib we tell ourselves. Balance, in its simplest form, means a state of equilibrium or steadiness, and nothing could be further from the reality of our textured and multifaceted lives. Instead of balance,

I now subscribe to prioritisation. There are seasons when my work demands, and deserves, the fullness of my time and attention. But in most other seasons, it is being a present mom and someone who is in community with others that matters most.

Did you have any mentors or role models? How did they influence your journey?

Once, during a conversation with a dear mentor of mine, it dawned on me that the beautiful ones have indeed been born, that they exist in our midst, and are the flag bearers of our dreams and aspirations. I am privileged to continue to have many mentors who, by their very being, have validated and affirmed my existence.

To you, Pulane Kingston, for allowing me to collapse into your arms, for straightening my shoulders and for reminding me that it is neither a sale and purchase agreement, nor a negotiable instrument that defines my worth, but that it is innate and unconditional – and to the many women who are the backbone of our lives, I salute you.

What barriers still need to be broken down in M&A or corporate finance industry for women?

Literally, the fact that when discussing any important topic, the words barrier and women are often uttered in the same sentence. The only thing that separates women (particularly women of colour) from anyone else is opportunity. Maybe it is time for a paradigm shift, and that we centre a different narrative – one focusing less on what keeps women back or out and, instead, asks what more can be done to bring and keep women in, and more importantly, how to propel them forward.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

At the risk of sounding cliché, a post that I read recently put succinctly what I imagine keeps me going. It said, *"What a blessing it is to be tired in the pursuit of a challenge of your own choosing"*. It is never lost on me what a privilege it is for me to be here now or what it took for the universe to conspire in my favour, and that not too long ago, structural systems existed to keep people who look like me out of spaces like this. Perhaps the word is gratitude, and a deep acknowledgement that to whom much is given, much ought to be expected. Dare I forget that on 8 June, I conquered the ultimate human race with a promising finish time of 10:16. Tough days, much like an up-run, are surmountable. 🏃‍♀️

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