



Q&A

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What did your path into this field look like – was it intentional or did you discover it along the way?

I was a young associate at a small law firm, desperately looking for a position in commercial law, when I received a call from a recruiter asking me if I wanted an interview at a corporate finance house. I knew nothing about the corporate finance industry, but saw it as an opportunity to get into a more commercial position. I still remember going to find the DealMakers magazine at Hyde Park, and carefully studying all the deals and everything there was to know about corporate finance. I've always considered myself extremely lucky to have gotten the job and my start in the corporate finance world. I've had to work incredibly hard to get to where I am today, but I think it's important to recognise the fact that if it wasn't for a lucky break, my life could have been completely different and I would have been none the wiser. I am fortunate in that I unknowingly found a career that I really enjoy, and which is suited to my personality.

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

My first big transaction was a reverse listing of a platinum exploration company into a cash shell – at about the time of Marikana. To this day, it remains one of the most complex and difficult transactions I have worked on. It included just about every big corporate action that there is in one document, and nothing was straightforward or easy. I learnt that, some days you need to have nerves of steel and endless patience, to do this job. You need to be flexible and anticipate the unexpected because everything can, and will, change more than once.

What's the hardest lesson you've learnt, and how did it shape you?

By far, my hardest lesson in corporate finance has been learning to maintain work-life balance; it's something I work on every day. Early in my career, I was told that you want to be your clients' trusted advisor and that has always stuck with me. However, being a trusted advisor means being readily available to your clients, which makes work-life balance difficult. As a mom, I've had to learn to set boundaries and learn the hard way that it's okay to take time off and not be available at all times.

How have you balanced your personal life with the demands of a career in finance?

Having a work-life balance isn't perfect and it's a constant balancing act. Some days, work requires 90% of my time and

everything else sort of falls by the wayside; but then there are other days where my personal life requires more time. The trick is to ensure that over the long-run, the two balance out. When I reach a point where I feel like I'm not touching ground with myself anymore, I take a day's leave just for me, where I do the things that make me happy and reinvigorate me.

I'm also a big believer in leaving Jo'burg from time to time, although, more often than not, life tends to get in the way. There's something about stepping away from everything in your life and having a change of scenery that puts everything into perspective. The worries racing through my head all day become smaller, more appropriate to the level of concern required.

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

My mom is a pretty tough cookie, and was a bit of a trailblazer for her daughters. She did stuff like going to West Berlin on her own at 21 years old in the early 1970s, and a few years later, she packed up her whole life to go and do an MBA at UCT, where she was one of only two women in her class. As a result, growing up, I never felt that there were things I couldn't do just because I'm a girl. It's incredibly liberating to have had a strong and independent mother because I didn't have many of the societal norms often imposed on women and, from a young age, I was taught that you can be whatever you want to be in life; there are no limits.

In my career, I've been really fortunate to have worked for people who put so much time and effort into me and who have pushed and challenged me to grow in ways I wouldn't have done on my own.

Over the last few years, I've also experienced just how powerful it can be to have a group of empowered women working together. There is really something magical that happens when you have a group of ladies at the peak of their respective professions, working together to get that impossible transaction done.

I am also incredibly lucky to work with an amazing team of women with strong female leadership. We support and root for each other on a daily basis, and it is so valuable to have a team behind you where you know everyone has your back and there is always a safe set of hands if needed. 🙌

