

Huneiza Goolam  
Partner



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## Many paths lead back to Webber Wentzel

by Lerato Ramango

A turning point in Huneiza Goolam's career was coming back to Webber Wentzel after a long break, having worked in other firms and sampled other careers.

"This long journey has made me realise that I want to be fully immersed in private practice," she says. "Working for a top firm like Webber Wentzel is where I want to end my career."

Huneiza entered law from several different directions, as it were. As a multi-talented individual, she found it difficult to choose a career out of school, and began by studying for an architectural degree. She moved onto a BCom in accounts, law and finance, and then decided on an LLB. The combination of a BCom and an LLB, and her fascination with the commercial world, have made her eminently qualified to be a corporate lawyer. Along the way, she has worked as a corporate financier and in-house lawyer, and also earned a qualification as a pastry chef from Le Cordon Bleu, a cooking school in Paris, France. But she missed the variety of deals that regularly come across the desk of a lawyer in private practice in a large firm.

Some of the most interesting transactions she's been involved in over the course of her 22-year career include the audacious attempted

hostile takeover of Energy Africa by its parent company during the early days of her career; and more recently, the acquisition of the Mintails dumps by Pan African Resources plc, which is set to change the landscape of the Western area of Johannesburg once in operation.

In Huneiza's experience, large South African legal firms tend to have a better representation of women and people of colour, both as lawyers and as partners, than the smaller firms. She says that across the South African legal profession, there is a clear determination to be more diverse, probably because of the country's history, but the smaller firms sometimes struggle to attract a wide field of candidates.

For most of Huneiza's career, she has operated in a male-dominated world, where she felt pressured to keep the same long hours as her male colleagues. Webber Wentzel's leadership, though, understands that women often have more family responsibilities than men, and encourages women to stay in the firm by offering them greater flexibility in their working hours.

Before she rejoined Webber Wentzel, Huneiza says, she was impressed when one of the other

female lawyers in a transaction, who came from Webber Wentzel and had a small child to look after, was clearly comfortable with expressing to her clients and peer group that she was unavailable at certain times. That comfort comes from knowing that the firm will support you.

One of the other features that make Webber Wentzel an attractive working environment for women is that it has made a big effort to attract and promote women into leadership positions.

Huneiza says that a good female leader is strong but empathetic, and understands that women have many talents. Women should not be limited to practising what some regard as the "soft" areas of law. It is also imperative to have women mentoring other women, she says, having had excellent female mentors, and mentoring other junior attorneys herself. She was impressed by two female clients, one of whom was a CEO of a listed company and the other a General Counsel for a telecoms company, who were tough, but also mothers, juggling both spheres of their lives effectively.

Her advice to a young female lawyer? "Never give up. Life can take many twists and turns, but always believe in yourself." 