



PROFILE

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WHAT I HAVE LEARNT

There is nothing quite like a milestone birthday approaching on the horizon to force one to reflect on life's journey. When it comes to my career, I marvel at how far I've come. I've achieved more than a young Monica could ever have dreamed of. More importantly, I consider myself to be one of the lucky ones who loves their job. This is what I was born to do. Yet even so, the road has not been without its challenges, and I have learnt some important lessons along the way.

I am excited about what lies ahead in my career. Global private capital markets have grown exponentially in the past decade, and this is expected to continue ('Global Private Market Report: 2025' (McKinsey)). It's a great opportunity for our team; however, the famous Winston Churchill quote that *"those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it"* reminds me to really think about the lessons learnt, so that I never repeat my old mistakes.

Relationships are critical

One of the biggest lessons of my career has been the importance of relationships. Building a relationship network is critical to business success. And without trust, there is no relationship. This is true for all relationships, including in business. With our clients, we all understand that buying or investing in a business requires the founder, the management team, and the business itself to be subjected to rigorous due diligence. This forms the basis of trust. So too with our colleagues, clients, fellow advisors, the investor community, potential acquirers and other stakeholders. Their trust is not automatic. We need to earn the trust to build the relationship.

Throughout my career, I have had to prove that I am trustworthy and have integrity. I have had to prove my worth by demonstrating my expertise, time and time again. Things like being on time, being professional, being diligent, following through on commitments made, and delivering high quality work product, etc. These are all proof points. As a black woman in finance, I've faced my share of prejudice. Yes, it's unfair and it can be exhausting to continually have to push back against some preconceived notion of who you are. However, over the years, I've learnt to *accept that some relationships just take a little longer than others to build*. That simple. So, I focus on nurturing the relationships in my network, one conference / email / video call / coffee / lunch / dinner at a time. I make it a priority.

All feedback matters

Looking back on my career, a particularly interesting observation has been how well structured, constructive feedback has been just as much a catalyst for change as that rude and obnoxious colleague's flippant remark that I pondered for hours afterwards! Both made me focus on development areas that needed improvement. That's because I have learnt that *ALL feedback can lead to positive change*. This knowledge has made me more open to hearing uncomfortable truths, and less likely to respond reflexively to blame the messenger. I try to objectively see where they are coming from, and try to see where I can improve. I wish I had known this when I started my career, back when I had thinner skin and took negative feedback personally.

When in doubt, pause

As women, one of the most damaging labels we can get is the dreaded e-word... 'emotional'. When I was at university, a game changer for me was reading the book *'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People'* by Stephen Covey. First published in 1989, this book has sold over 40 million copies in 40 languages, making it one of the most successful business books. The very first habit is learning to master how to respond, not react, to a given situation. And the difference between a response and a reaction lies in the time between stimulus and response. The longer that time, the better the quality of your response. I have a personal rule to never respond to an upsetting email / message within 24 hours. If I do, I am highly likely to escalate the situation. I apply this rule in my personal and professional life with great success. I've learnt that this is how *I enable the clearest, calmest version of myself to lead in challenging situations*. Try it!

Work-life balance

I'm a single mum of two pre-teens, working in a high pressure, male dominated environment. You can safely assume that work-life balance is a goal that I strive for on a daily basis. "It takes a village" is a favourite mantra in our home, and I'm the queen of lists and multi-tasking. Yet even with all these tools in use and my mother living around the corner, it would be impossible to achieve the level of work-life balance that I have without the support of leadership at RMB. Yes, the women in leadership (thank you, ladies), but notably, it's the men in our leadership team who are a key part of my 'village'. Throughout my career, my male colleagues have understood the challenges that I am facing and empowered me to *still* deliver for our clients with excellence in a way that has allowed me to sleep well at night, knowing that I had spent that precious quality time with my kids when it counted. Whether it's flexibility to work from home or trusting that I'll get the deliverable done even when a personal situation arises, *I have learnt that you can't do it all on your own; it takes a village*.

I wish young Monica had known these four lessons when she started working as a trainee accountant at PwC London:

Relationships are critical, so go ahead and join the others at the pub, even though you don't drink alcohol. Because it's not about the drink, it's about the relationships.

ALL feedback matters, so ignore the delivery or tone, and focus on shifting that misconception. Don't take it personally.

When in doubt, pause. So, go ahead, vent in an email, but save it in Drafts and see how your calmer self views that same email in 24 hours, before you click send. It will teach you to be more measured.

Work-life balance does not mean burning out from trying to do it all (team lead, mother, daughter, self). It means doing the best you can by prioritising what matters most that day, while leveraging the 'village' for support.

These four lessons learnt are a constant as I navigate my career. They empower me to pursue my career goals with confidence. If I can do it, then so you can you. Godspeed! 🙌

