Q&A

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Mentorship, sisterhood, and 'lifting as you rise'

There is a powerful African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together." How do you practically apply this to building support networks among female professionals across African finance?

In dealmaking, we constantly create synergies for clients, yet rarely apply the same principle to our own professional networks. Across telecoms, energy, financial services and FMCG, one lesson has remained constant: women succeed best when we invest deliberately in one another. I build support networks by making introductions across firms, sectors and jurisdictions, sharing opportunities rather than guarding them, and creating space for junior women to do meaningful work. Today's junior female lawyer may become tomorrow's co-counsel, client or counterparty, so I stay connected long after a transaction closes. Those relationships strengthen not only individual careers, but African finance as a whole.

In your journey, have you experienced the difference between a mentor (who gives advice) and a sponsor (who actively advocates for your promotion behind closed doors)? How are you playing the role of sponsor for others now?

I know the difference intimately. Mentors teach, challenge and help you grow. Sponsors use their influence to create opportunities you could not access alone.

After my husband's terminal illness and passing, I stepped away from practice – a widow, mother of three, and professionally adrift. My appointment as Director and Senior Counsel for Legal and Corporate Affairs in Cummins' Africa and Middle East office in Johannesburg came because someone mentioned my name in a room I was not in, vouched for my capability, and gave me an opportunity when I could not advocate for myself. That restored my career and my confidence.

That experience shaped how I lead. I do more than mentor talented women; I sponsor them – putting them forward for transactions, introducing them to clients, and ensuring decision-makers know their capabilities. Mentorship develops potential; sponsorship gives it a platform.

How can financial institutions in East and West Africa move past superficial 'diversity quotas' to build environments where young women are genuinely fast-tracked into front-office, revenue-generating deal roles?

Let me be blunt: quotas without architecture is theatre. Hiring more women means little if they are concentrated in support functions while the revenue-generating work remains unchanged.

Institutions serious about developing female dealmakers must change three things. First, intentional deal allocation: staff young women on complex, high-value transactions early, with real responsibility and client exposure – not as note-takers. You cannot become a dealmaker from the sidelines. Second, institutionalised sponsorship: promotion should not depend on a senior leader's discretion; structured programmes must hold leaders accountable for identifying and championing talent. Third, redesigned career paths: too many women leave the pipeline because institutions treat motherhood or caring responsibilities as interruptions, rather than life stages. Flexible staffing, transition support and re-entry pathways retain talent already invested in. The pipeline is not the problem; the systems are.

What is the most rewarding piece of tactical advice you've ever given to a junior female colleague that you watched her successfully put into practice?

I told a young associate before her first sole client meeting: "Go so prepared that your preparation becomes your confidence." She had been told the regulator's office would expect someone more senior, a male. I said: know the file better than anyone, anticipate every question, and speak with quiet authority. She did, and the regulator directed all follow-up queries to her personally. Preparation is the great equaliser. In markets where bias still operates – where people expect a large firm's leader to be a man – mastery of substance commands the space. I have watched that associate grow into a confident, client-winning lawyer, and I trace it to that meeting where she chose preparation over self-doubt.

Building a deal pipeline relies heavily on networks that are often built in informal spaces. How can young women build authentic, high-value networks on their own terms?

Let your preparation, integrity and quality of work be your introduction. Authentic relationships built on trust and competence will always outlast performative networking.

Who was the first person in the African financial sector to take a genuine gamble on your capabilities, and how did that shift your professional trajectory?

Kojo Bentsi-Enchill, during my formative years at Bentsi-Enchill, Letsa & Ankomah. He saw potential in me before I had credentials to prove it. From Zuarungu in Northern Ghana with no family connections in law, I had no obvious path into corporate practice. Yet he invested in developing me, entrusted me with meaningful work, and advocated for me in rooms I was not in – mentorship and sponsorship that fundamentally shaped my career.

Under his guidance, I gained early exposure to complex transactions, learning not only the craft of dealmaking but commercial judgement, integrity and leadership. That belief gave me confidence to pursue opportunities I might otherwise have thought beyond reach, and taught me a lasting lesson: talent is universal, but opportunity is not. That is why I now identify potential early, particularly in young women, and give them challenging work, visibility and opportunity before every credential is in place.