



Mercy Vella
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Q&A



Q *What led you to pursue a career in Investment Banking?*

A After my high school education, I was advised to take up an undergraduate degree in Commerce. The first lecture I attended was on accounting, and that class felt like I had been cast in the wrong play. Most of my classmates had taken Business Studies in high school, and were therefore familiar with the accounting lingo, but to me, the idea of a balance sheet and hearing words like “debit” and “credit” sounded so foreign. When we got to third year and had to choose our areas of specialisation, I opted to take Finance, which had a unit in Corporate Finance – that was my first exposure to investment banking, albeit from a theoretical perspective. And to be honest, even upon graduating, I was still unsure of the path I wanted to take.

My first job was as an Accounts Assistant in an Advertising Agency, and we had a section that served as a lounge area/ library in the office. One day, I picked up one of the magazines and came across an interview where the interviewee mentioned that one of his best reads was a book called *Too Big to Fail* by Andrew Ross. That day, I got a soft copy of the book and it was such a page turner to me. The description of how the crisis started and the efforts that the Federal Reserve took to ensure that the entire financial system did not collapse was so intriguing to me. Wall Street was the genesis of the crisis, and reading that book made me want to be part of that financial ecosystem. I am miles away from New York, but I am grateful that I was able to make

my career transition to Investment Banking, and now work in one of the most renowned investment banks in Kenya.

Q *If you could change one thing on your career path to date, what would it be and why?*

A The need to take mentorship more seriously from the onset. As you grow through your career, you experience challenges and situations that only a much more experienced person can guide you through. Mentorship is important, as I have realised that it is very easy to settle for mediocrity and to be complacent in life. Having someone to act as a sounding board helps one to build their confidence and esteem. Equally, it is good to know that you have someone in your corner, vouching for you. A mentor should be a cheerleader who affirms you on your journey.

Q *What piece of advice would you give a young woman joining your team on her first deal?*

A Whatever the task at hand, you should never miss a deadline – this was the first rule I was given when I joined Corporate Finance. Transactions can be very stressful, given that they tend to have different milestones that need to be met, and time constraints are always there. Being a reliable team player who does what they need to do, on time, helps a lot. Whatever it is that you have committed to do, give it your best shot and learn as you go.

Q *If you could host a lunch with any women from the past or the present*

who would your THREE guests be and why?

A Indra Nooyi – I just finished reading her book, *My Life in Full*, and reading how she was able to build her career as an immigrant in corporate America was really inspiring. Some of the struggles between balancing work and life and how this ever-elusive balance affects women in the workforce really resonated with me.

Lidia Poet – she was the first female lawyer in Italy. I watched a docuseries about her. Beyond the dramatisation of her character, I would want to know what motivated her to bounce back, to try to break the barriers that she had to negotiate in her efforts to join the bar.

My maternal grandmother – she is from a different generation, where being a woman only meant that you were to farm and tend to the needs of your household, and she now sees her granddaughters doing things that she never got the chance to do.

FUN FACTS

Favourite colour: Brown.

Favourite restaurant: Any restaurant that offers “all you can eat”, count me in!

Red wine or white wine: White wine.

Item not yet completed on your bucket list:
Going to watch a World Cup match; hopefully I will get to tick this off my bucket list soon. 🍷

