Q&A

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Career genesis and defying boardroom demographics

The upper echelons of corporate finance and investment banking in Africa have traditionally been male-dominated. What initially drew you to this intense field, and how did you secure your first seat at a major transaction table?

My path into M&A was not a conventional one. I spent over sixteen years in senior in-house legal and compliance roles before moving into a law firm. Sitting on the client side of the table gave me a perspective that has stayed with me throughout my career. I learned that transactions are never simply about the legal documents. They are about businesses generally pursuing growth, managing risk, creating opportunities and, ultimately, making decisions that will shape their future.

When I joined ENS, I found myself advising on increasingly complex cross-border transactions across Africa. The transition from being the client to becoming the adviser was both challenging and immensely rewarding. It required a different mindset: moving from solving legal issues within one organisation to anticipating commercial and legal challenges across multiple jurisdictions, stakeholders and regulatory environments.

Looking back, I did not seek out M&A because of its reputation or intensity. I was drawn to it because it combines strategic thinking, technical skills and commercial judgment in equal measure. Every transaction presents a new puzzle, and no two deals are ever quite the same.

Looking back at your career across the continent, what do you consider your 'defining deal', the transaction that tested your strategic capabilities the most?

It is difficult to identify a single defining transaction because every significant deal teaches something different. The matters that have challenged me the most have generally involved multiple African jurisdictions, each with its own legal framework, regulatory expectations and commercial realities.

Those transactions emphasised that successful deal execution does not only depend on legal analysis. It requires bringing together diverse teams, aligning advisers across jurisdictions, understanding the commercial priorities of each stakeholder, and finding practical solutions where the law is only part of the equation.

Working across Africa has also taught me that there is no single blueprint for doing business on the continent. While legal principles may be familiar, each jurisdiction has its own regulatory culture, market dynamics and decision-making processes. Appreciating those nuances is often just as important as understanding the legal framework itself.

Can you take us inside a high-stakes deal room in your region? How do you command authority and manage boardroom dynamics when you are the only woman or the youngest person at the table?

Early in my career, I was conscious of being one of the younger professionals in the room. Like many young graduates, I assumed credibility came from having all the answers. Experience has taught me something different.

Authority is built long before the meeting begins. It comes from preparation, understanding the transaction in depth, and appreciating not only the legal issues but also the client's commercial objectives. When you consistently provide practical, well-reasoned advice and remain composed under pressure, people begin to trust your judgment. Once that trust is established, factors such as age or gender become far less significant than the value you bring to the discussion.

I have also learnt that influence does not always belong to the loudest voice. Some of the most productive moments in negotiations come from listening carefully, asking thoughtful questions, and knowing when a measured intervention will move the discussion forward. In complex transactions, collaboration and credibility are far more persuasive than volume.

If you could go back to the very first week of your career as a young analyst, what is the single piece of advice you wish you could give yourself?

I would tell myself not to be in such a hurry to have everything figured out.

Early in my career, I thought success meant having every answer immediately. Over time, I realised that the best advisers are those who remain curious, continue learning, and are willing to ask questions. There is no weakness in admitting you do not yet know something; the real value lies in having the discipline to find the answer and the judgment to apply it effectively.

I would also remind myself that careers are rarely linear. Moving from industry into a law firm was not part of a carefully mapped plan, yet it has been one of the most rewarding decisions I have made. Each stage of my career has contributed something valuable to the next, and experiences that once seemed unrelated have become some of my greatest professional strengths.

Finally, I would say this: invest as much in your reputation as you do in your technical skills. Transactions eventually close, but your integrity, reliability and professionalism stay with you long after the deal is done. Those are the qualities that clients, colleagues and counterparties remember, and they are what ultimately define a career.