Q&A

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Mentorship, sponsorship, and 'lifting as you rise'

Who was the first person in the industry to take a genuine bet on you, and how did that sponsorship change the trajectory of your career?

The first person to take a bet on me was my first boss in the Financial Markets at Barclays Bank, Emma Mugisha (Head of Retail and Digital Banking, Africa Subsidiaries at Access Bank). I had just started my banking career in the Operations department with Barclays Bank Uganda, and after six months, I had an interview for a role in Treasury. At the time, I had no prior experience or exposure, but she took the initiative to ensure that I got the prerequisite and ongoing training, exposure through interaction with dealers in the Uganda market and other markets, and continued coaching. To date, she continues to look out for me. Learning from and looking up to her has enabled me to grow through the ranks of Financial Markets, and has also greatly shaped my leadership attributes and other aspects of my life.

There is a difference between a mentor (who gives advice) and a sponsor (who advocates for you behind closed doors). Have you had a sponsor, and how did that dynamic work?

Sponsors in one's career can come in all forms. They are usually people of influence that you work or have worked with closely, someone you've interacted with in professional circles, or someone who has observed your technical or leadership ability and work ethic, and who will recommend you in rooms in which you are not present. Some will, from time to time, be open and advise you on areas that you need to polish and enhance in order to progress in your career.

The key is for you to always put your best foot forward, regardless of the task or audience you are interacting with, because among the audience there may be some people who will advocate for you behind closed doors.

As a successful leader now, what standard do you set for yourself when it comes to mentoring the next generation of female analysts and associates?

While mentoring women, I usually strive to ensure that, while focus may be on career growth and enhancement, all aspects of one's life are equally catered for. As one advances in their career, it is important to remain curious, willing to collaborate with others, and open to learning. I usually encourage young women that while they prioritise their careers, they should also leave room for other aspects of their lives. While there is no perfect formula, academic growth, family, friendships and hobbies are important for work/ life harmony. Seeing my mentees juggle life's ups and downs while managing to succeed and advance in their careers is always rewarding. A measure of effective mentorship is seeing the women I am able to inspire succeed, and majority usually reach out and give feedback on how they've benefited.

What is the most rewarding piece of advice you've ever given to a younger colleague that you watched them successfully put into practice?

There have been quite a number of colleagues that I have given advice to, but one thing I usually emphasize is that they should always grow their knowledge base through continued learning, reading, and interacting with peers in the industry. By remaining focused on achieving excellence, you ensure that you stay ahead of the ever-evolving industry dynamics. Some of the women I have mentored have taken this approach and continued to take on various career challenges. One such person is Gladys Kavuma, who now sits on the Board of NCBA Bank I am very proud of her because, from time to time, she challenges and advises me – we mutually benefit from each other's counsel.

Peer-to-peer support is vital. How do you build a strong network of allies among other women working in law, audit and banking to support your transaction pipelines?

It starts within the organisation, by identifying women in various departments in Absa Uganda and other Absa jurisdictions that I can reach out to when I need guidance on various aspects of work. And it cuts across levels of management; sometimes I may seek out my seniors, while at other times, my juniors have the information or guidance I require. Equally, I could be their point of contact when they need guidance. The next level of peer support would be from individuals who are external to the organisation: fellow Heads of Market, or dealers and people working with other key stakeholders and customers that we engage with. Over the years, I have realised that peer-to-peer support has to come from both men and women for one to have a balanced view/outcome. Male colleagues will most likely challenge you with bold ideas, which will give you a sense of fulfilment when you achieve your goals and aspirations or get a transaction done.

How can corporate finance institutions move beyond 'diversity checkboxes' to create environments where young women actually want to stay long-term?

Moving beyond diversity checkboxes requires institutions to become more deliberate about training and growing young women, while also ensuring that in boardrooms and the rooms that matter, women are well represented. It is also important to provide environments where young mothers can advance in their careers, but also still thrive as wives and mothers through flexi working hours, lactating rooms or creches. The introduction of mentoring and training programmes will enable women to grow their leadership and communication skills, and also gain exposure and continued career enhancement.

As women, we need to be confident in own our career journeys, and accept that we have so many virtues as nurturers that make us good leaders. Women are also usually good at multi-tasking. We need to remain curious, and open to learning and feedback.

We must learn to spot opportunities, and be bold to take the challenge as we continue to aspire for excellence in our careers. And by taking future leaders under our wings, we will make the world a better place.