



Melanie Steen

Associate Principal: Leveraged and Diversified Finance

What motivated you to enter the world of investment banking?

I've always had an affinity for problem-solving and found building relationships with people very energising, so becoming a banker felt like a natural fit. Investment Banking stood out for me because it's deal-driven, interactive, and solution-oriented. I love structure, challenges, and the sense of personal achievement when you close a transaction. There's something incredibly special about seeing one of your ideas develop into a successful transaction.

How have you navigated what is still a male-dominated industry?

Interestingly, I've had the privilege of working under female leaders for most of my career. These are women who broke barriers and led with strength and empathy, showing me that it is possible, which has had an enormous influence on me. While women are still in the minority, I have seen more and more women around the table, where their voices and ideas are heard. That's why I feel so strongly about mentoring young women – especially those in our graduate and rotational programmes. They're eager, hungry to learn, and determined to thrive. It's inspiring.

How did you find your way up to where you are now?

I started in risk and transitioned to the front office not too long ago, and although it was a mental shift and a steep learning curve, it was also a very natural

move for me. I love engaging with clients, understanding their needs, and helping them solve complex problems. Having a risk background has given me a solid foundation for assessing deals. I'm now part of the Leveraged Finance Team, working across multiple industries and the capital structure. It's fast-paced, technical, and no two deals are the same, which keeps me motivated and creates an environment for constant learning.

Any career highlights so far?

One that stands out is a deal we closed in the private education sector. It was rewarding because it felt so tangible – funding an industry that needs attention and investment. Education is a sector close to my heart, not just for the development it drives, but because of the way it can uplift individuals and bridge systemic gaps, including bringing more women into formal economic participation. This deal was impactful, and being able to contribute to something that important was deeply fulfilling.

Can you share some of the challenges you've faced and how you've dealt with them?

Like many women, especially entering a new role, I've wrestled with impostor syndrome. Being one of the only women in the room or being new in a demanding role can make you second-guess yourself. I've learned that when your team and leadership back you, you gain confidence, and start to own your space. I've also been fortunate to be part of the Tabono Women's Advancement Programme at Nedbank. It's a confidential and honest space where women share their challenges, show up, and learn from one another. It's helped me feel more present and more grounded.

As a young mom, how do you manage work-life balance?

I think the idea of perfectly balancing a career and motherhood is non-existent. There are times when your family will need more of you, and other days, your career will. What matters is that your kids see a mom who is chasing her

dreams, demonstrating what's possible and providing for them, while showing them love and softness at the same time. I'm a mom of twin toddlers, and some days are absolute chaos, so I've had to find my rhythm. As an example, I have set boundaries in the early evening to solely focus on my kids (Godzilla hour), and often log back on afterwards, as I prefer pushing in the week to free up my weekends. My husband and I also heavily rely on each other in terms of tag-teaming with the twins. I have learnt to lean on my mom community. My colleagues, male and female, have been incredibly supportive. I've had moments where I've missed school events and felt torn, but I'm learning to be flexible where I can and present when it matters the most.

Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?

I'd be happy to remain a leveraged finance transactor as I absolutely love what I do. There is still a lot for me to learn, and a lot I can still bring to this role. Ultimately, I want to grow into someone my clients turn to instinctively, and be a sharper, more strategic transactor. It's not about titles for me; it's about expertise, reliability, and ensuring you are always adding value.

What is your advice to aspiring women in investment banking?

It's not all glamorous lunches and power suits. It's long hours, high stakes, and always having to be 'on'. It's enriching if you're committed, curious, and relational. Don't forget what you bring to the table as a woman: fresh thinking, empathy, and resilience. Don't be afraid to ask for what you need, whether it's support, flexibility, mentorship, or an opportunity. What's the worst that can happen? Someone can only say no. So, speak up, back yourself, and stay the course.

