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Principal: Property Finance

What did your parents teach you that you only came to appreciate later?
My parents taught me that everything, including success, comes at some kind of sacrifice. I often say I grew up watching 2 very different kinds of builders. My dad built a building and painting business, and as a child, I didn't understand why he often had to continue working after dinner. My mom was a different kind of builder; she built our home – taking and fetching me from school, attending my sports games, making sure dinner was ready.
That was a different type of sacrifice, and also a gift.

What drew you to property finance, and when did the human side of it become real to you?
My interest in property began at home. I grew up in a family where property was often discussed, and the realities of entrepreneurship were ever-present. When I started working, I attended roof wettings and key handovers.
Once, I watched a couple in their 50s or 60s receive the keys to the first home they had ever owned. The pride and emotion on their faces weren't something you easily forget. I realised then that while I was a small cog in a much bigger wheel, my role as a property banker was ultimately having a real impact on somebody's life. That's a powerful thing to witness.

If you could change 1 thing about access in this industry, what would it be?
Exposure is equally important. Education is a powerful tool, but so is being exposed to different conversations and ways of thinking. You need to be in the room with people who challenge your way of thinking. Exposure shapes how you think and what you believe is possible. If you don't know something exists, you can't aspire to it. As women in the property profession, we have a responsibility to open doors and bring others into the room.

What do you look for in the people and businesses you back?
Integrity, vision, and execution. I look for people and businesses that are authentic and can execute. People can misrepresent themselves – that's where the problems start. I can generally get a good sense of someone by asking a lot of questions. This is also to fully understand their vision because, when values and visions are aligned there is enormous potential to achieve great things together.

Who shaped the way you lead?
Many leaders have shaped the way I lead, but the 1 who stands out most was my team leader in affordable housing. He had an incredible ability to understand people and adapt his approach to bring out the best in everyone. He was an inspirational leader; he taught me to surround myself with talented people and to lead with integrity.

Is there a client relationship or project that stands out?
Yes, there's a client I've worked with for almost 10 years. They started as a small developer, and over the years, I've watched their business grow significantly. What makes their growth particularly special is the impact that they have had on the communities in which they develop.

What was it like being a woman in this industry, and how did your confidence develop?
It was very intimidating, especially early on. Property is still a male-dominated industry. I am often the only woman in the room. I used to find that intimidating, but after sometime, I've learnt to trust myself and the value I bring. Women often still have to earn respect rather than being given it, so my philosophy has always been to prepare thoroughly,

voice my opinions, and then let my work speak for itself. I've never believed much in luck; luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. Confidence isn't about being the loudest person in the room, it is about recognising you belong, backing yourself and knowing that you've earned a seat at the table.

What does Big Deal Energy mean to you, what would you tell your younger self, and what legacy do you want to leave?
People often expect a dealmaker to be loud and in your face. For me, Big Deal Energy is more about the confidence that comes from competence, knowing that when you say something, you can deliver. If I could tell 20-year-old Lesley something, I would. I'd tell her, 'Dream on dreamer! Keep dreaming because those dreams are possible.' When I think about the legacy I want to leave, I don't think about the buildings I've financed; I think about people, whether that's helping colleagues grow or helping clients build something that outlasts the transaction. More than anything, I hope people simply say: 'I'm glad Lesley was there, she made a difference'.

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