Rivashni Naidoo

Principal: Mining and Critical Minerals

What first drew you to Mining and Critical Minerals?
I started my journey at Nedbank as a graduate in the Mining and Critical Minerals Lending Middle Office Team. It was a great learning ground because it gave me a good understanding of how the bank works and exposed me to the finer details of mining finance transactions. At the beginning of my career, I wasn't sure of exactly where I belonged in the bank. Very quickly, I realised that I wanted to be closer to the action – involved in the analysis, the discussions, and the decisions – rather than only supporting the process behind the scenes. What attracted me to mining and critical minerals, and what continues to keep me engaged today, is the complexity and diversity of the sector. After 10 years, I am still learning, growing, and excited by the opportunities and challenges that the industry presents.

Was there someone who saw something in you before you saw it in yourself?
Yes. I think often we as women undervalue ourselves: we think we must be 100% perfect to be seen and, if we know 99% and don't know the 1%, we focus on the 1%. That's my personality trait and certainly something I've struggled with in my career.
I've always set very high standards for myself and wanted to get everything right. Not because I believe I am perfect, but because I have always felt the need to prove that I am capable. A few years into my career, I was fortunate to have a manager, a woman of colour, who saw potential in me before I fully saw it in myself and advocated for me. She was my voice when I didn't have one. That gave me the confidence to believe in myself, and that's when I decided to go after what I wanted.

How do you make sure your voice is heard?
My clients would probably describe me as hardworking, reliable, and genuinely pleasant to deal with. In investment banking, however, these qualities can sometimes lead people to assume that you are not someone who leads big deals, especially as a woman.
But I've learned that being effective isn't about being the loudest person in the room. Sometimes people speak simply to be heard. What matters is that when you do speak, you add value. You know the details, you understand the client, you understand the risks, and you make promises you can keep, because that's how trust is built. You make sure you're heard by listening first.

Is there a transaction that changed how you think about leadership?
I had just been promoted to senior transactor and was dealing with the loss of my father when a major client needed us to move quickly on a flagship transaction during the Mining Indaba week. When the legal agreements came in, we had to go back to Credit on very short notice, with senior leadership focused on the indaba itself. I had to be the senior in the room. It was me, our credit executive and our legal team working late into the nights to find a way to make it happen for the client. It was probably the hardest and most stressful thing I had done on a transaction.
What stood out for me afterwards was that leadership in that moment was about staying calm, having the uncomfortable conversations, and finding a way to get it done.

This year's theme is 'Big Deal Energy'. What does that mean to you?
It means confidence, but confidence that comes from doing your homework, knowing your audience and knowing your bank. It's about listening and structuring the right solution. For me, owning the room doesn't mean being the loudest person there. It means knowing what the client needs, what is possible, and delivering on what you promise.

What's the biggest misconception about women in corporate and investment banking?
The biggest misconception is that the loudest or most confident-looking person in the room is automatically the one who will deliver the most. I don't want to generalise, because that wouldn't be fair, but I have found that women are often strong listeners. We prove time and again that you don't have to be the loudest person in the room to write deals, lead deals, or be a leader.

What would you tell your 20-year-old self
You don't have to have everything figured out on day 1, and honestly, you don't know everything – nobody does. Learn the basics, set your foundation, and make sure you understand not just the job but also who you are.
I may not always have known what I was capable of, but I knew my values. Perhaps I'm a little stubborn about them, but that's how I eventually found my voice.

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When you think about your legacy, what would you want it to be?

A perception I'd like to change is that empathetic leadership is somehow synonymous with being soft, overly accommodating, or unwilling to make difficult decisions.

For me, empathy isn't about being nice for the sake of being nice. It's about taking the time to understand people, listening to what they need, understanding the challenges they are facing, and then finding practical solutions that enable them to perform at their best.

If there's 1 thing I'd like my leadership legacy to reflect, it's that you can lead with empathy and still be exceptionally results-driven. The 2 are not mutually exclusive. In fact, I believe they reinforce each other. I would hope people see me as someone who has found that balance, cared about people, listened, and showed understanding, while also driving outcomes and bringing out the best in those around her. Because ultimately, great leadership is not just about what you achieve; it's about how you help others achieve their potential as well.

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