



Q&A

Gertrude Dube

Head of Public Sector, Construction and Technology, Media and Telecommunications Finance

Q: Gertrude, can you tell us about your background and what led you to your current role at Nedbank?

A: Absolutely! My story is quite wide ranging, but I'll do my best to condense it. My parents were in exile in Botswana, where I grew up and did most of my schooling. I also earned my BCom degree at a university in Botswana. After that, I became a chartered management accountant. Back in the day it was challenging to qualify as a chartered accountant in South Africa, especially from a foreign country, so I ended up in the United Kingdom, sponsored by the Council for Refugees, to write my Chartered Institute of Management Accountants exams. In 1991, after I had completed my studies, I returned to Botswana and started my career at Zimbank in credit risk and regulatory reporting. This experience gave me a solid foundation in banking.

My career brought me to South Africa, where I joined Telkom, managing the finance function of their fleet leasing division. I was responsible for an operating budget of around R600 million and managing a fleet of vehicles including panel shops. After a successful stint there, I felt the need to return to banking, which led me to Nedcor Investment Bank, Nedbank's investment banking arm at the time. I've subsequently held various roles, from structured finance to my current position in public sector banking, heading up a team focused on infrastructure development and other critical sectors.

Q: What excites you most about working in the public sector?

A: The public sector is often misunderstood and underestimated, but it's where we can make the most meaningful impact. This sector drives crucial infrastructure projects that are the backbone of our economy, such as rail, ports, pipelines, and energy. Despite challenges like load-shedding, institutions such as Transnet, Eskom and Sanral are vital. Funding these projects not only supports economic growth but also improves the quality of life for many communities, especially those that are underserved.

As a South African bank, we pride ourselves on using our financial expertise to do good. This means driving projects that might not be glamorous but are essential for societal development. Public sector projects align with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure). These projects directly impact communities, providing infrastructure that wouldn't exist without our funding. What excites me the most is knowing that our work makes a tangible difference in people's lives.

Q: How have your experiences shaped your approach to your work and leadership?

A: Joining the banking sector a few years after 1994, exclusion was still prevalent, and it took a lot of negotiation and resilience to navigate that environment. These experiences taught me the value of diversity and inclusion. When we talk about the Rainbow Nation and the value of diversity, we acknowledge that everyone brings something unique to the table because of their different backgrounds and

experiences. I've made it a point to mentor young African females, especially those from rural areas, helping them navigate and succeed in this environment. I believe in creating a culture where everyone feels included and valued. This commitment is driven by my belief in giving back and helping others overcome the challenges I faced. While overt discrimination might not be as blatant today, unconscious bias still exists. People often don't realise the impact of their words and actions, and part of my role is to address these biases and promote a more inclusive environment.

Q: Can you tell us more about your mother's influence on you?

A: My mother, who is turning 91 this October, has been a tremendous influence. She was a strict teacher who valued education and hard work. Despite the challenges, including my father's early death, she raised us with a strong sense of discipline and determination. Her stern but loving approach taught me the importance of perseverance and striving for excellence.

She taught us the importance of education and working hard to achieve our goals. For example, she would check our homework meticulously, ensuring it was done correctly, sometimes even late into the night. Her influence has been a guiding force in my life, reminding me that I can achieve anything regardless of others' perceptions if I apply myself. This belief in self-determination and resilience has been crucial in my career and personal life.

Q: What advice would you give to young women aspiring to enter the banking sector?

A: I'd advise them to be clear about their motivations and understand that hard work is essential. Work-life balance is a choice and, while it's important, young women must be prepared to put in long hours, especially when required. Many young professionals are attracted to investment banking because they perceive it as glamorous, but it's far from that. They need to understand the fundamentals of banking, not just the specific products they work with.

It's also important to look out for mentorship and be willing to learn from every experience. Understanding core aspects of banking, such as treasury and credit, is vital. They should never be afraid to voice their opinions and contribute meaningfully. I always tell young professionals to come prepared with solutions, not just problems. This proactive approach is crucial for their development and success.

For young women, navigating unconscious biases and asserting their presence is especially important. They need to understand that their unique perspectives are valuable and that they should never shy away from expressing their ideas. Mentoring young African females is a passion of mine because I've seen first-hand how transformative it can be.

Q: How, outside of work, do you unwind and manage stress?

A: Golf is my go-to activity for unwinding. It requires patience, time and focus, and I find it incredibly

therapeutic. My brother-in-law introduced me to it and it allows me to think and reflect on various aspects of my life and work. Whether I'm having a great day on the course or not, it teaches me resilience and the importance of a positive mindset.

Playing golf also offers a wonderful opportunity to meet new people and even to conduct business in a relaxed setting: I've met many interesting people on the golf course and have had productive business discussions there. Additionally, my daily commute provides time for reflection and preparation, helping me stay balanced and ready for the day ahead.

Q: What role does mentorship play in your leadership style, and why is it important to you?

A: Mentorship is a cornerstone of my leadership style. Having never had a mentor myself, I understand the challenges of navigating a career without guidance. This drives my commitment to mentoring young professionals, especially African females from rural areas. These young women often face a unique set of challenges and cultural barriers, which can impede their progress. By providing mentorship, I aim to help them build confidence, develop critical thinking skills and navigate the corporate environment.

Mentorship is more than career advice; it's about helping individuals recognise their potential and understand their worth. I teach mentees to voice their opinions confidently and approach problems with a solution-oriented mindset. By mentoring these young professionals, I want to create a more inclusive and supportive workplace where everyone can thrive.

Q: Given your experience, what key lessons have you learned that you'd like to share with aspiring bankers?

A: One of the critical lessons I've learned is the importance of understanding the basics of banking. It's about more than just the specific products but about understanding the overall business, including treasury and credit. This broad understanding is crucial for making informed decisions and managing risk.

Another important lesson is the value of hard work and perseverance. Success in banking requires dedication and a willingness to work long hours when necessary. It's also essential to be proactive and come prepared with solutions, not just problems. This approach demonstrates competence and builds confidence and respect among peers and superiors.

Lastly, I've learned the importance of creating diversity and inclusion. Different perspectives bring valuable insights, and creating an environment where everyone feels valued and included leads to better decision-making and a more dynamic workplace.

