

Jo Mitchell-Marais

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Q *What led you to pursue a career in corporate finance?*

A This is a question that I often ask myself! I was drawn to restructuring in university, and wanted to pursue a Masters in predicting corporate failure using neural networks in 2001. It wasn't until 2005 that I leapt from audit into the Business Recovery Services division at my then-employer, and I've never looked back. At the heart of it, I believe that restructuring and working with businesses and individuals that are living through an under-performing business or a financially distressed business, fulfils a deep desire to help – help people and help businesses. I firmly believe that it costs more to create a job than to save a job, and there should be just as much focus on job preservation as on job creation.

Q *What, in your opinion, is the hardest part of a transaction?*

A In restructuring, obtaining alignment amongst stakeholders can be very difficult. Typically, the engagement starts with stakeholders at opposite ends of the spectrum, and you need to move them, little by little, closer together; acknowledging each position, feelings and requirements and then inching toward each other. Whilst there is generally no clear winner in a restructuring outcome, everyone needs to feel that they have won a little. The most significant workstream in any of our restructuring mandates is stakeholder management.

Q *If you could change one thing on your career path to date, what would it be and why?*

A It is often said that you should live a life with no regrets, but I have always felt that I left the English restructuring market just a little too soon – July 2008 – just ahead of the largest global restructuring mandate in the market – Lehman Brothers. I was sitting in Cape Town, staring at beautiful Table Mountain, but wishing I was still in London and getting the experience of a lifetime, working on the Lehmans restructure.

Q *What advice would you give a young woman working on her first deal?*

A Remember that you are where you are for a reason, and that your voice has value. I still tell myself this today. If I want to feel heard, I need to speak up and contribute. So, my advice would be not to feel too nervous, intimidated or anxious to speak up in a meeting – your voice has value – and this is how you learn.

Q *Did you have a mentor and, if so, what was the most important thing you learnt from them?*

A I was fortunate to work for a strong, female restructuring partner very early in my career. She showed me that there was a space, in this very male-dominated industry, for me... and I didn't need to change who I was to succeed.

Q *What do you do to celebrate the closing of a big deal?*

A Firstly – sleep! We generally celebrate as a team, with a long lunch or dinner together. This is absolutely a team sport, and without an incredible team working together, the successes would be few and far between.

To the extent it is possible, I like to take a few days off to recharge – go to the spa, for a walk, and spend much-needed quality time with my family.

Q *What do you do to unwind and get away from the stress of work?*

A I love to cook – nothing gives me more satisfaction than entertaining family and friends and sharing a meal with a good bottle of wine. I have a Friday night ritual of cooking for my mom, my sister, and my husband. It is my favourite thing to do, and really does help me relax into the weekend.

FUN FACTS

Favourite colour: Teal

Current book on your nightstand:

The Girl from Simon's Bay by Barbara Mutch (loving it!).

Favourite restaurant: My family and I love Tryn @ Steenberg. It is fine dining with something for everyone.

Unusual hobbies: I have played the piano for almost 40 years. It is an absolute passion, and is another way to destress and unwind.

Item on your bucket list: To see the Northern Lights.

Preferred holiday destination: I enjoy nothing more than escaping to the Kruger National Park. It is my ultimate 'happy' place, and I am always planning my next trip.

Three words your colleagues would use to describe you: compassionate, self-assured, and empowering. 🙌