



## Nthabiseng Thema

Partner & PE Deal Lead

# Q&A

### Q What led you to pursue a career in Private Equity?

**A** I come from an entrepreneurial family; in fact, I am the only person in my immediate family who has a corporate job. Before I started my career in private equity, 10 years ago, I had gained significant experience in the fields of Investment Banking and Management Consulting, working across various sectors and countries. Through my interactions with various entrepreneurs and business owners, I observed a common limitation in how fast or far a business can grow beyond a certain point. This ceiling is often due to the entrepreneur's own knowledge limitations, challenges in securing funding, or difficulty finding the right partners to introduce fresh thinking and innovation from how the business has traditionally been managed. I honestly believe that Private Equity is the answer to most of these challenges.

I firmly believe that private equity has the potential to drive significant economic growth across the African continent by providing essential capital and non-financial support to business owners, enabling them to scale their enterprises. This includes developing and implementing growth strategies, exploring avenues for increasing revenue, and implementing cost optimisation initiatives. By working closely with management, private equity can add substantial value to investments.

I chose a career in private equity because I am passionate about making a meaningful impact and fostering growth in African businesses. While not all deals will unfold as anticipated, I value the commitment to enhancing value and creating positive impacts through every investment.

### Q What is your favourite sector to do a deal in and why?

**A** The ICT/Technology sector because it has the ability to enhance operations across various sectors. Technology serves as a catalyst for growth and efficiency in numerous fields.

Recently, companies have begun leveraging technology to deliver essential products and services to underserved communities. These sectors include financial services, education, agriculture/food security, transport, logistics, manufacturing healthcare and many more. The truth is, technology influences every aspect of human life and has the potential to have a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of many people, which is why I enjoy working in this sector.

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

**A** If I'm being honest, there's nothing I would change about the path that has led me to where I am today. While I wish it hadn't taken as long as it did, I wouldn't alter any decision I've made along my journey. I've gleaned valuable lessons from every company I've worked for, each contributing skills and experiences to my 'toolbox', which I leverage in every deal I'm involved with. That being said, I do wish I had invested more time in finding and building relationships with the right mentors – it feels like a significant missed opportunity for me. I believe I might have made different decisions regarding certain aspects of my career path if I had taken the time to find the right mentors and guides.

### Q What, in your opinion, is the worst thing an entrepreneur could do when pitching for funding?

**A** Finding the right equity partner is one of the most important decisions you will ever make as an entrepreneur. The worst thing you can do when pitching for funding is not taking the time to really understand how your potential funding partner works, and not making sure that your values and vision for the future of your business are aligned.

Additionally, it is crucial to:

- (a) clearly demonstrate your track record, experience and your business's unique value proposition;

- (b) clearly articulate your business strategy, growth potential, and what you require from an equity partner to realise your vision; and

- (c) understand that a private equity partner will eventually want to exit, so you and your equity partner should begin planning for that exit as early as possible. As a business owner, it's important to be comfortable with the potential trade-offs that may need to be addressed upfront to facilitate an easier exit for your equity partners.

Nothing can make a potential equity partner reconsider an investment quicker than a business owner who does not seem to truly understand their business and what is needed for it to grow.

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

**A** I spend an inordinate amount of time on TikTok, watching meaningless, mind-numbing videos. It helps me relax, and as a bonus, it makes me look forward to having proper, grown-up conversations when I go back to work. I also paint and use colouring books.

## FUN FACTS

**Favourite Colour:** Black

**Dog or cat person:** Definitely a dog person. I have a Rottweiler and a Labrador ... I know ... it is not a very usual combination.

**Words your colleagues would use to describe you:** Direct, passionate, ambitious, strategic, and results-orientated.

**Item not yet completed on your bucket list:** I would really like to go skydiving. I am not sure I have the stomach for it, but I would like to try.

**Your worst trait:** I can be too direct sometimes. I am working on it... not consistently, but I am working on it. 🐾