



Q&A



Guinevere Blignaut

Executive | Corporate Commercial

Guinevere Blignaut is an Executive in the Corporate Commercial practice at ENS. She specialises in general corporate matters, corporate restructures and M&A.

Guinevere's experience includes, amongst other things:

M&A, including local and cross-border transactions for private and public companies, sale processes (buy-side and sell-side), B-BBEE transactions, corporate restructures and establishing start-up enterprises

managing legal due diligence investigations (both buy-side and sell-side) across jurisdictions

drafting and negotiating a variety of commercial documents, including company constitutional documents, service level agreements, commercial supply agreements and distribution agreements, franchise agreements and lease agreements

providing legal opinions and advice on South African legislation such as the Companies Act, 2008, the Consumer Protection Act, 2008, and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 2003.

She has acted for a variety of clients, including family offices, private equity funds and African and international listed and unlisted companies, in a number of industries, including property, telecommunications, petrochemicals, financial services, healthcare and mining.

QUALIFICATIONS

- > BCom LLB (Stellenbosch University)
- > Admitted as an attorney of the High Court of South Africa

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

A The concept of professional training of a student by a more experienced peer is said to have originated from Homer's poem, The Odyssey, in 800 BC. 'Mentor' was the name of the character that acted as guardian, advisor, teacher, and friend to Odysseus' son during his absence, and it is now the term we use to describe the individuals in whose footsteps we aspire to follow, in whose shadows we stand protected, and on whose shoulders we climb (and sometimes cry).

The old adage which says, 'it's not what you know, but who you know' was always a particularly distasteful one for me. It implied the opposite of meritocracy, and when it came to starting a career in big law, it shone a spotlight on the ever-glaring absence in my life of any familiarity with the legal fraternity. So, I stepped out of the elevator into the polished reception of ENS on my first day at the office, arrogantly adamant that all I needed to push my way up the corporate commercial law ladder was my BCom LLB, a steady supply of caffeine, and a little chutzpah.

After a couple of months of battling through new instructions and spending hours poring over iterations of corrections and red-pen pockmarked agreements, I sat in my principal's office one night at 11pm with the second (or third, or possibly fourth) turn

of manuscript changes to a document, and internally resigned myself to the fact that I would never make it in law. Expecting my exasperated principal to politely ask me to exit his office and kindly not return, yet another turn of the agreement with the familiar red-pen etched all over it was placed before me. All I could see was another iteration of the evidence of my perceived failure. I could not hold back the tears of frustration any longer, and I profusely apologised for failing to get it right yet again. "But are you learning?" he said. "Because you are not failing if you keep learning – everything else comes with time, and you have time."

I realised that no matter how much I knew (or thought I knew), I needed someone who believed in my potential. My then-principal has become one of my greatest mentors. He has taught me that the key to success is resilience and a commitment to continuous improvement. It is not about how quickly I can climb the ladder, but about how much I can learn and adapt along the way, all the while making space for others to climb the ladder with me.

This lesson has stayed with me throughout my career, reminding me that true growth often comes from our most difficult experiences. And so, whenever I face a new challenge, I remember that I am learning, and that it is just another red pen mark-up paving the way in my professional development. 📌