



Claire Carson

Corporate Broking Transactor



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

A It wasn't part of the plan in my early career. I took a long time to find my sweet spot; it wasn't a straight-line journey. From a family of accountants, I was determined to do anything but numbers. I did a general BCom degree at Stellenbosch, followed by a postgraduate in Advertising and Marketing Communications at Red and Yellow Advertising School. Then I moved to London, where I worked in various roles in media sales and marketing for seven years, but I remember being increasingly frustrated by how far-removed I felt from the core operations and commercial aspects of the companies that I worked for, and it started to become very clear to me that the numbers mattered, and I wanted to understand them.

I packed up my life in London and moved back home to do an MBA, which I hoped might help me uncover some of what I was looking for. 18-months of studying full-time as an adult gave me what I didn't know I was looking for; it barely scratched the surface on accounting and corporate finance, but it gave me a safe learning space to start over, and the confidence to try something entirely new.

And then came my lucky break; I'm a firm believer that everyone needs a stroke of luck at some point. I was working as a consultant for a fin-tech start-up, trying to get a foot in the door on a new career path, wondering how I would convince an investment bank that a "30-something marketing-experienced, book smart student with no experience in the world of Investment Banking" could cut it? It turns out that those were just the credentials that the RMB Class Of Programme was looking for. As a programme designed to attract talent from non-banking backgrounds, that was the foot in the door I needed. Five years later, as a Corporate Broker, a role which I didn't even know existed, I have the opportunity to work

with and build relationships with the CEOs and CFOs of some of the largest listed companies in South Africa, and to help them solve some of the challenges that keep them up at night. I get to work on M&A deals, help clients in crises, and craft investor communications. The role I find myself in now is the perfect intersection of marketing and communications from my past-life, and financial markets, equities and investor engagement from my latter years; all the things that make me tick.

I didn't imagine that Investment Banking would be a sustainable place to work whilst raising a family, but I am now a proud working mom and, as much as I spend my days forgetting things and dropping balls, it makes me happy that my daughter will grow up to see her mom excelling in a career that she loves, and knowing that she can do the same in whatever field she chooses.

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

A I have had many internal debates about this. Part of me wishes that I had found what I was looking for much earlier in my career; that I had started out in finance at university, done my CFA much earlier, found RMB, and become an expert in something sooner, instead of spending many years being a generalist. I have to remind myself though that, had I done that, I may not have lived overseas or had the opportunity to travel, both of which contributed to invaluable life experience. Had I not taken the route I did, I may not have ended up in my current team, working with brilliant women, and a boss who has been a mentor, coach and avid sponsor of my career journey.

But, on reflection, one thing I would change is my approach and attitude to career experiences along the way. I would have benefitted from being more 'present' at each career stage, rather than continuously focusing on what was the

next best thing. I robbed myself of learning from experiences because I thought I was in the wrong job or on the wrong career track at the time, and so I negated valuable lessons along the way.

Q *When things go wrong, what advice would you give about moving on?*

A A trouble shared is a trouble halved. That's not to say that you pass the buck, but more to say that good teams don't leave you to fix or solve things alone; they don't blame or shame, they shift into solution mode alongside you. Equally important is taking responsibility. If it's your wrongdoing, you need to be able to take accountability for it, but then move forward – don't live in the mistake. Lastly, perspective is so important when things go wrong. My husband is a great "perspective sense checker". He sees things differently to me and, when I'm in a spin, he reminds me that whatever has gone wrong can either be looked at differently, solved with decisive action, or is minor in the larger scheme of things.

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

A Have courage and be curious. Having courage doesn't mean having to speak first or even speak in every meeting; and it doesn't mean being the smartest – that will come with time. Having courage means putting your hand up first to hold the pen on the deal workstream that you have never done before, that you don't know how to do. Having courage means accepting that trying something for the first time means you will make mistakes, but still being willing to put your best attempt out there. Mistakes are a brilliant learning opportunity; they make you better – see them that way. Finally, curiosity: an inquiring mind and having a genuine interest in what you do and are working on will create a lasting impression on those you work with. 🐾