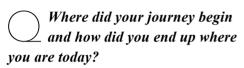


Wilmari Strachan

Executive | Technology, Media & Telecoms





I had to work to pay for my studies, so I studied part-time through UNISA and worked full time in the accounts department of a law firm (Hofmeyr Herbstein, today CDH). I knew I had to find a job, any job, in a law firm if I wanted to get articles at a good firm. I also knew that if I got my foot in the door, I would be able to work myself up. I started as a debt collector, calling clients for payments, but luckily quickly moved on to more interesting booking work; I've always liked working with figures. I completed my degree in four years, did my articles at the same firm and was appointed as an associate in the commercial department, doing mostly M&A work.

After having my son, I continued to do consulting work and eventually ended up at then Naspers company, MWEB, in their legal department. A few years later I was Head of Legal, managing the legal, regulatory and compliance departments of the company. I learned some very important lessons in business. Mostly, to look at the law from a business perspective, to weigh risk and to make decisions! The first time the CEO asked me for an opinion on something, I crafted a well drafted document, setting out the law and the options available to the company. I worked really hard on the opinion; I wanted to impress our CEO. He never read it...he looked at the document, looked at me and said: "Wilmari, can we do this, or not?". I was expected to consider the law, make a decision and guide the business. This was a scary, but priceless lesson, that I still try to apply today in legal practice.

While at MWEB I did a course at UCT Business School, finance for non-financial managers and I did various management courses through Naspers programmes. This, together with the practical business experience I gained, provided me with invaluable business acumen. After selling all MWEB's divisions to Dimension Data, I went back to legal practice, this time equipped with all that business experience.

Today I understand the importance of looking at transactions or agreements not just from a strictly legal perspective, but also understanding the importance of practical and operational impact.

What, if any, hurdles did you have to face in an industry that has traditionally been maledominated?

I can honestly say that I never felt undervalued, less important, or not heard in my profession, even though it may be male-dominated. I think if you value your own worth, others will too. If you approach co-workers, male or female with kindness, confidence, knowledge and speak with authority (never arrogance), your gender should

not matter. It never did for me, maybe I was just lucky.

What is the biggest / most complex transaction you have worked on so far in your career?

Advising on the current proposed acquisition of Telkom by MTN

What advice would you give to other women thinking of entering the M&A and Financial Markets industry?

Work hard, but also learn balance. Your health (physical and mental) is most important. It took me some time to get better at it. I'm still a work in progress myself!

Do you have any unusual hobbies?

I do mixed-media art; maybe unusual in an industry where we are mostly left brain dominant.

What is your favourite quote?

"Beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing, there is a field; I'll meet you there" – Rumi

What is your most effective time saving tip?

Being organised, whatever that means for you.

What is at the top of your bucket list?



