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ENS africa



Q *Where did your journey begin and how did you end up where you are today?*

A 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 Herbststein, 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.

Q *What, if any, hurdles did you have to face in an industry that has traditionally been male-dominated?*

A 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.

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

A Advising on the current proposed acquisition of Telkom by MTN

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

A 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!

Q *Do you have any unusual hobbies?*

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

Q *What is your favourite quote?*

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

Q *What is your most effective time saving tip?*

A Being organised, whatever that means for you.

Q *What is at the top of your bucket list?*

A Climbing Kilimanjaro. 🇰🇪