



Heather Carswell

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Q *What does your current role entail, and tell us about your journey to this position?*

A I am a partner in KPMG's Deal Advisory department, and lead the Valuations team for Southern Africa. I am also a member of the Policy Board for KPMG in South Africa.

I joined KPMG in January 2000 as a shy, quiet audit trainee. I knew that I didn't want to make a career of auditing. If you can believe it, I didn't know when I started studying that being a CA involved auditing. But I learnt as much as I possibly could and discovered a love of learning about businesses – what they did, how they did it, and what made one business successful and another not.

When I got the opportunity to join the corporate finance team at KPMG at the end of my audit articles, it was a dream come true. I started out doing both due diligences and valuations, but quickly found my passion in valuations and have been specialised in business valuations ever since. I have had the opportunity to work across an incredibly wide range of industries and sectors, and enjoyed learning about each and every one of them.

I was promoted to partner in 2015, head of Valuations in 2017, and elected to the Policy Board in 2023.

Q *What advice would you give a young woman starting out in corporate finance?*

A When you are starting out, you are not expected to know everything, so you shouldn't hold back on asking questions. We are all continually learning, and this is what has made my career interesting and has kept me challenged and engaged for two decades (and counting!). Too often, we put undue pressure on ourselves to be perfect and to appear to

have everything under control. But it takes strength, not weakness, to admit that you need help or don't know the answer. As long as you are learning from your mistakes and avoid repeating the same mistakes, you are growing.

I was always so impatient to progress upwards, but have learnt that it takes many years to truly master my chosen field, as each transaction and each business is unique. Add to that the curveballs that come from an ever-changing global and local economy, and the learning never stops.

There have been so many times in my career where the next promotion took months or years longer to come than I wanted it to. But when those promotions came, I realised that I hadn't been as ready as I thought I was, and had benefited from the wait. I see so many young colleagues who change companies because they are impatient, and miss out on opportunities that are just around the corner.

Q *What do you wish someone had told you earlier in your career?*

A For many years, I continued to progress in my career by letting my hard work speak for itself, trusting that my contribution was recognised. As I reached more senior levels, I came to realise that letting my work speak for itself was no longer enough – I also had to get out of my comfort zone and advocate for myself. I, like many women, prefer to be modest, and feel uncomfortable about appearing to be bragging about my achievements. However, in order to continue to make progress in my career at more senior levels, I have learnt the importance of speaking up for myself, and now put as much energy into advocating for myself as I do for others.

I could not do what I do without the Deal Advisory team at KPMG. In an industry which

was so male-dominated when I was starting out, I feel privileged to work in a diverse team which includes so many strong, smart and amazing women who support me and each other.

There are many men and women who have come before me, and from whom I have learnt. Similarly, I have played a part in the training and development of many who have come after me. I get such joy and fulfilment from contributing to the personal and professional development of my colleagues.

When I had a major health issue in 2022, the years that I had spent investing in my team meant that my team was capable of continuing without me. It is a continuous reminder that empowering others allows me to succeed and to achieve so much more than I ever could alone.

Q *What is one thing that makes your life easier and that you really wouldn't want to do without?*

A My Dyson Airwrap.

FUN FACTS

Current book on your nightstand:

Lessons From The Edge by Marie Yovanovitch, former US Ambassador to Ukraine.

Favourite restaurant:

Based on where I go most often, it has to be The Schwarma Company in Norwood.

Preferred holiday destination:

I love going back to France every time I get the opportunity. I have been studying French for many years, and relish every chance I get to practice speaking it. 🇫🇷