



WOMEN who lead

“we strive to
give women
meaningful
opportunities to
lead high-impact
matters”

WEBBER WENTZEL

in alliance with > [Linklaters](#)

WOMEN who lead

Contents:

-
2. **Leading with agility, clarity, and courage:** an interview with Managing Partner Safiyya Patel;
 4. **Giving clients and lawyers more time to do what matters most:** an interview with Head of Webber Wentzel Fusion, Aalia Manie
 6. **Justice, for all:** an interview with Ayanda Khumalo, Head of Pro Bono Practice
 8. **Integrity, mentoring, and continuing to learn:** a Q&A with newly promoted salaried partners Bianca Kuhn, Prianka Soni, Marissa Wessels, and Chevon Marupen-Shkaidy
 13. **Building teams and empowering others:** podcast interview with newly promoted equity partners Carryn Alexander, Kirsten Wolmarans, and Lumen Moolman

WEBBER WENTZEL

in alliance with > Linklaters

Leading with agility, clarity, and courage

On 1 March 2025, Safiyya Patel became the first black female Managing Partner in Webber Wentzel's prestigious 150+ year history. She talks with Craig Sisterson about navigating modern times of rapid change and what differentiates a great leader from a great lawyer.

While technical excellence is 'the entry ticket' for rising to the top in the legal profession, what differentiates a great lawyer from a great leader is the ability to inspire, influence, and connect with people, says Safiyya Patel.

"In today's environment, soft skills like emotional intelligence, resilience, and adaptability are not 'nice-to-haves', they are strategic assets. The best leaders in law can bridge the two: they bring deep legal expertise while building trust, motivating teams, and creating an environment where people can do their best work."

Safiyya herself brings plenty of both to her role as Managing Partner of Webber Wentzel, a leading African firm that traces its roots back to 1869 in the Eastern Cape.

and humility. For me, leadership is about creating stability for your teams while navigating uncertainty, ensuring people remain focused, supported, and inspired even when the ground is shifting."

Listening is key, says Safiyya, and often overlooked as an important leadership skill.

"Listening builds trust, uncovers blind spots, and allows you to make better decisions," she shares. "Leadership isn't just about having the loudest voice in the room - it's about creating a space where other voices can be heard."

As one of a small but growing number of women to lead major African law firms, Safiyya is proud of the pioneering work Webber Wentzel has done, and continues to do, to create pathways

"In today's environment, soft skills like emotional intelligence, resilience, and adaptability are not 'nice-to-haves', they are strategic assets."

After growing up in a single-parent household during Apartheid, Safiyya excelled academically and has built an outstanding career, becoming a globally recognised commercial, M&A and BEE transactions expert, and leader in the legal profession.

In late 2024, the firm's new Senior Partner, Gareth Driver, called Safiyya's appointment to the Managing Partner role "a significant milestone" in the transformation of not only Webber Wentzel, but the broader legal sector. He praised her "purpose-driven and people centred approach" to law and leadership.

For Safiyya, being a modern leader in rapidly changing times means leading with agility, clarity, and courage. "You need to anticipate the future, adapt quickly, and make decisions with both conviction

for women to lead, not just in legal practice but in all areas across the firm. This includes the firm's Fusion team, led by Aalia Manie, which brings together lawyers, engineers, project managers, operations and design specialists and others to drive innovation, and deliver integrated, client-focused solutions that push the boundaries of what is possible in the legal industry.

"We are intentional about sponsorship and mentorship; we strive to give women meaningful opportunities to lead high-impact matters, drive client relationships, and take on senior leadership roles," says Safiyya, who took the baton from Sally Hutton, who served for a decade as the first female Managing Partner of a major South African law firm. "We also invest in flexible working arrangements



and an inclusive culture where different leadership styles are valued. Representation matters, and we work to ensure that women see themselves reflected at every level of the firm."

Safiyya believes the modern generation of women leaders in law want to see a profession that measures success beyond billable hours, and values impact, innovation, and inclusion. That offers flexibility without penalty, diverse leadership that reflects wider society, and a culture that supports ambition and wellbeing.

And for the young African women taking their first steps into an evolving legal profession, whether as law students or candidate attorneys, Safiyya says they should look to build technical skills, but also cultivate their network, voice, and confidence.

"Own your space unapologetically... Seek out mentors and sponsors who will open doors for you. Most importantly, remember that you belong in every room you step into, even if you are the only woman, the only African, or the youngest person there."

Giving clients and lawyers more time to do what matters most

Webber Wentzel Fusion blends legal expertise with advanced technology and modern operations to deliver integrated, innovative, and impactful solutions. Aalia Manie discusses how technology is a tool, but people are the core of what they do.

While AI is the current buzzword and technology is driving rapid change in society and legal practice, Aalia Manie says the most important thing for lawyers to succeed in a new era isn't to become a tech whizz, but to ensure they are agile and lean into their distinctly human capabilities.

"If you're a legal information provider as opposed to a strategist, if you're only processing information and taking routine actions when delivering on instructions, you're going to be less valuable than the person who's thinking about the business, being more insightful and practical, and enabling better outcomes," says Manie, who heads Webber Wentzel Fusion. "While this has arguably always been the case, AI is making this reality more acute. I like to say to people, 'be the real human in the room', and truly engage, because that's the hardest thing for technology to replace. Our humanness, and all the experience and nuances associated with that."



“Be the real human in the room — that’s the hardest thing for technology to replace.”

A former IP and technology law partner who returned to Webber Wentzel after a few years as COO of a technology scale-up, Aalia now leads a client-facing Fusion team that includes lawyers, engineers, project managers, operations and design specialists, among others. They embrace and harness cutting-edge technology and alternative delivery models to drive innovation, delivering integrated, client-focused solutions that push the boundaries of what is possible in the legal industry.

Yet despite technology becoming increasingly ubiquitous, Aalia herself sees AI and other legaltech as merely a key ingredient, not the whole recipe for success. And practicing what

she preaches, she looks for agility and the human factor in her own team, too.

"We think of ourselves as a human-centric team, because I actually think the soft skills are more important," says Manie, referencing things like resilience, flexibility, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. "There's a lot of change management associated with all these AI things, and people are fearful, initially. Things become obsolete sooner rather than later. Some of our top technology tools 18 months ago are no longer our top tools, or ways of working. You need to adapt. So those soft skills of understanding people's wants, needs, incentives, and ambitions, is critical."

As Head of Fusion, Aalia is looking beyond legal, technological, or 'new law' skills, for a willingness to "get in the trenches", be entrepreneurial, and care about outcomes whether it's a strategic or administrative task, or anything in between.

"It's really about the outcome for the client, at the end of the day. So we're looking for people who care about growth and opportunity for others. General curiosity and creativity. Almost everyone in our team has other hobbies and interests and desires for themselves, and they're always looking around the corners, attracted to things that are changing, and willing to bring others along with excitement and energy."

“Soft skills like adaptability and emotional intelligence are more important than ever.”

Aalia is thrilled to get to lead in a role that blends her passions for human-centred innovation and her experience in law, technology, entrepreneurship, and design.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to do it at Webber Wentzel, a law firm whose culture and ways of working I understand deeply, where I have the relationships and institutional knowledge to enable change in a meaningful way."

While anyone can use the buzz words about innovation or thinking differently, Webber Wentzel invests its money, time, and support in a very real way, she says. With 300% growth over the past 18 months, it's not just about AI or efficiency, but new thinking, support from partners, and understanding their clients as humans.

Fusion is phase two of the firm's long-term innovation journey, says Aalia, and at its core - among the technology, innovation, and new thinking - is really about helping lawyers and clients have more time, so they can focus on what matters most.

WOMEN who lead

What is the one quality you admire most about Aalia's leadership style?

Empathetic: She listens actively, understands team dynamics, and responds with emotional intelligence and compassion. She always sees her colleagues as people first.

Lucia Quy, Delivery Lead, Webber Wentzel Fusion

Innovative: I love how she will always find a way to make things work. She doesn't quickly dismiss what many would look at as an impossible situation. She will find a workaround for the problem and think of a solution that is completely out of the box. This is in relation to both people problems and work problems. You can count on Aalia to figure out a way through and out of sticky situations elegantly and fairly.

Ruth Gondwe, Manager, Webber Wentzel Fusion

People-focused leadership: She leads with empathy and accessibility, ensuring that despite her demanding role, her team feels heard, guided, and empowered. Her willingness to share her expertise and maintain open lines of communication creates a positive environment that fosters both personal and professional growth. Her leadership cultivates a culture of respect, development, and collaboration, making her not just a head of department but a true leader in every sense.

Reeshay Ramnath, Associate, Webber Wentzel Fusion

WEBBER WENTZEL

in alliance with > Linklaters

Justice, for all

Ayanda Khumalo recently became the Head of Webber Wentzel's public interest practice. She discusses the power and importance of pro bono, leading groundbreaking projects that have real impact, and helping ensure access to justice.

Doing pro bono work is extremely important for law firms, says Ayanda Khumalo, not only because as lawyers we have an obligation to give back to the communities we live in, particularly when they are unequal, but to help uphold the rule of law.

"The greater part of the work we did, just before the establishment of the Zondo Commission, was bringing or being involved in a number of cases that helped to uphold the rule of law in South Africa," says Ayanda, who first rotated through Webber Wentzel's pro bono team as a candidate attorney, more than 15 years ago.

"We did these cases on behalf of NGOs that would not ordinarily have money to pay big fees," she recalls. "As a pro bono department, those types of cases ensure the rule of law is upheld and strengthened. Pro bono can also be important for the development of our laws in South Africa. We've taken on quite an important case recently that changed the landscape of how maternity leave is interpreted."

"Pro bono can also be important for the development of our laws in South Africa."

Ayanda rose to partner during her first stint at Webber Wentzel, before serving as a legal counsel at the South African National AIDS Council, then leading the Director-General's Office at the Department of Health during the height of COVID.

Three years ago, Ayanda returned to Webber Wentzel as a partner in the team, and recently she became Head of the firm's industry-leading pro bono practice.

"I've had to step into big shoes, because the previous leaders who've occupied this role are very great and celebrated lawyers in the public interest space in general," she says. "But I think it was also important for me, because I was sort of involved in this team

and building this dream with the founder of pro bono within Webber Wentzel, so it completes the circle for me, in making sure that what we were building before I left the firm, I can now see to completion. To make sure we realise what we were envisioning many years ago, and making sure the team continues to do impactful work that covers the gaps in terms of access to justice in South Africa."

Nowadays, the Webber Wentzel pro bono team consists of several lawyers, and provides legal expertise and help to those in need across the land reform space, education, the gender-based violence space, truth and reconciliation, and health.

"Mainly we're trying to help the vulnerable and the people who really can't afford legal services in South Africa, which is a very unequal society," says Ayanda. "For one example, we represent communities to get back land they were dispossessed of during Apartheid, and assist in training them to understand governance of their communal property associations, over what can be very profitable land."

Before studying law, Ayanda considered training to be a doctor or psychologist. She always wanted a career that helped people; the reason she began her career at Webber Wentzel was because when she researched law firms, discovering they had a "very strong pro bono department" that already did "quite groundbreaking work that has real impact." Her rotations as a candidate attorney cemented things.

"Although in the other teams I felt I was learning a lot and doing good work, when I got to the public interest team, I felt like 'this is it, this is where I want to be, and this is the work I want to do,'" she recalls. Years later, she gets to lead that growing team.



"Mainly we're trying to help the vulnerable and the people who really can't afford legal services in South Africa, which is a very unequal society."

Harnessing the power of her people, to help vulnerable people, and society.

"For me, the most important thing is ensuring that as a leader you take on board the people you're leading, making sure that you develop them. There are a lot of juniors within the team, and it's important to always have check-ins, to understand their concerns, get their views on how they see the trajectory and growth of the team, and whether the type of work we do is still relevant, and still having an impact."

Working together to uphold the rule of law, and ensure access to justice, for all.

WOMEN who lead

What does working with Ayanda teach you every day?

Working with Ayanda reminds me of the power of unwavering dedication and the impact of caring leadership. Her ability to balance excellence with empathy teaches me how to lead with both strength and heart. I'm constantly inspired by the way she shows up - not just for the work, but for the people behind it.

*Lize Marie Doubell, Associate,
Webber Wentzel*

Ayanda is hardworking, always friendly, kind, respectful and sincere. These characteristics define the successful team that she leads.

*Jos Venter, Associate,
Webber Wentzel*

If I were to ascribe an honorific in extant to Ayanda, it would be Ayanda the Conciliator. Ayanda is a great collaborator and leads with inclusion, while at the same allowing you the space the learn and take charge of your space. She has a people centred approach and that sets her apart from others and makes her a leader you can trust and rely on at all times.

*Nkosinathi Thema, Senior Associate, Webber
Wentzel*

WEBBER WENTZEL

in alliance with > Linklaters

New Partner Q+A: Integrity, mentoring, and continuing to learn

New partners Bianca Kuhn, Prianka Soni, Marissa Wessels, and Chevon Marupen-Shkaidy share their journeys and insights while answering questions about leadership and law

Ten years ago, private equity expert Sally Hutton shattered a glass ceiling for women in South African law, becoming not only Managing Partner of Webber Wentzel, but the first woman appointed to a senior leadership position by any major South African firm.

Safiyya Patel, the firm's new Managing Partner who took the baton from Hutton in March 2025, is proud of the pioneering work Webber Wentzel has done, and continues to do, to create pathways for women to lead in all areas across the firm. That includes the promotion of several talented senior associates to partner in April 2025, including Bianca Kuhn, Prianka Soni, Marissa Wessels, and Chevon Marupen-Shkaidy.

Bianca joined Webber Wentzel as a Corporate Tax Manager in January 2019, after three years at Deloitte, and is now Director (Tax: Corporate and M&A). Prianka is a partner in the Dispute Resolution practice, having 'job shadowed' at Webber Wentzel as a law student in 2016, then joined as an associate in November 2019. Marissa first came to the firm as an associate in 2021, and is now a partner in the International Tax practice. Chevon is a partner in the market-leading Investment Funds practice at Webber Wentzel, having originally joined the firm as a candidate attorney in 2017.



Bianca Kuhn

Director (Tax: Corporate and M&A)
at Webber Wentzel

“Leadership is not just about expertise, but about empathy, vision, and integrity.”

Q: What does stepping into the Webber Wentzel partnership mean for you personally and professionally?

Bianca: It is both a personal milestone and a professional turning point. Personally, it represents the culmination of years of hard work, dedication, continuous learning, and perseverance in an ever-evolving and demanding field. It's a moment of reflection - a reminder that the investment of hours,

the pursuit of excellence, and the courage to step out of my comfort zone to work on challenging tasks have been worth it. It carries a deep sense of responsibility to represent, inspire, and show that becoming a partner in a law firm is an achievable goal for those who aspire to it and are willing to work hard to reach it. I am deeply grateful to the mentors, colleagues, and family who have supported my journey, and I see this moment as an opportunity to pay it forward.

Professionally, it means stepping into a role that demands not only technical excellence but also strategic thinking, leadership, and a commitment to safeguarding and enhancing the firm's culture. It's no longer solely about delivering excellent client work - it's about helping to build a sustainable practice, developing future talent, and contributing to the firm's positioning in the market while upholding our values of excellence, integrity, collaboration, transformation, and respect.

This transition also brings a heightened sense of responsibility. I recognise that my contributions to change may be incremental, but I also believe that small, consistent actions - when aligned with a shared vision - can make a meaningful difference. It's a challenge I embrace wholeheartedly, knowing that leadership is not just about expertise, but about empathy, vision, and integrity. I am excited to contribute to a partnership that is forward-looking, collaborative, and committed to excellence.

Stepping into this role is about embracing the responsibility to contribute where I can, to help build a stronger, more inclusive, and forward-thinking practice that will outlast me - one that clients trust, colleagues are proud to be part of, and future professionals aspire to join.



Prianka Soni

Partner, Webber Wentzel

“Supporting the next generation of lawyers is not about hierarchy. It is about collaboration. No one should feel like they are left to sink or struggle alone”

Q: Now that you are in a partnership role, how do you hope to support and grow the next generation of leaders?

Prianka: I have been incredibly fortunate to work with and be mentored by Nick Alp, who was generous with his time, guidance, wisdom, and trust. He played a huge role in shaping me into the lawyer I am today. I have also been supported by great people like Stuart McCafferty, Priyesh Daya, Sarah McKenzie, and the wider Dispute Resolution department and firm, who challenged me, invested in me, believed in me, and helped me grow. I know what that kind of mentorship and support has done for me, and I want to pay it forward.

Supporting the next generation of lawyers is not about hierarchy. It is about collaboration. No one should feel like they are left to sink or struggle alone. We succeed as a team, and that means stepping in wherever we are needed. I have learned there is no task too small when the focus is on delivering excellent work together and titles do not define value. What matters most is showing up, consistently and with respect.

As I take on this new role, I want to create the same environment that I was lucky enough to grow in. One where junior lawyers feel challenged but also safe, where they are given meaningful opportunities and trust, and where they know that someone has their back.

Q: Looking back, what do you think helped you build the trust and reputation needed to reach the milestone of becoming a Webber Wentzel partner?

Marissa: I've always made it a priority to deliver work that is not only technically sound but also thoughtful and strategic. Clients and colleagues alike come to rely on you when they know you'll approach each matter with care, clarity, and a genuine desire to find the best solution.

Equally important is the ability to listen. Whether it's understanding a client's business challenges and goals or supporting a junior colleague's growth, I've found that trust is earned in those moments of attentiveness and empathy. Building trust and strong relationships within the firm and with clients rarely comes from making headlines (although that surely doesn't hurt), but rather from showing up consistently, being dependable, and treating everyone with respect.

What I believe truly sets a legal advisor apart from their peers is a practical mindset combined with a deep understanding of a client's business. When you can translate legal advice into commercially relevant, practical guidance, you become more than just a legal advisor, you become a strategic partner.

I've also found that being accessible - both professionally and personally - goes a long way in building credibility. Whether it's making time for a quick call, being available to brainstorm, or simply being approachable, accessibility fosters stronger connections and reinforces reliability.



Marissa Wessels
Partner, Webber Wentzel

“Trust is earned in the everyday moments of attentiveness and empathy.”

“Everything else can be taught, but integrity cannot. Without that foundation, other leadership qualities are meaningless.”



Chevron Marupen
Partner, Webber Wentzel

Q: What leadership qualities do you think are essential for modern-day partners in leading African law firms like Webber Wentzel?

Chevron: A senior colleague once told me: “Everything else can be taught, but integrity cannot.” This isn't just theoretical, it's our daily reality. When advising clients, they trust us to tell them what we genuinely believe is right. Without this foundation, other leadership qualities are meaningless.

Partnership shifted my perspective from individual contributor to strategic thinker. I constantly ask:

“How does this decision serve both clients and our firm's long-term vision?” This ownership mentality means genuinely prioritising the firm's success over personal wins.

Furthermore, there's a difference between being heard and actually listening. I have always created spaces where team members feel safe to challenge ideas and yes, even make mistakes. We all do! This psychological safety drives the risk-taking essential for success and growth.

If there's one skill I wish university or law school had taught me, it's how to be comfortable with uncertainty. The legal landscape changes rapidly, and clients expect us to anticipate what's next. I've had to develop strategic foresight, which makes thinking ahead and positioning our practice and the firm ahead of emerging trends possible.

The biggest challenge isn't learning new technology. It's rethinking how we deliver value when technology handles routine tasks. We're not just implementing new tools, we're fundamentally changing our business model and helping teams see technology as a strategic advantage rather than a threat. Moreover, our role has evolved beyond traditional legal services. Clients want strategic partnership, not just legal advice. By using technology for efficiency, we can spend more time understanding their business objectives.

Partnership came with additional responsibility, including preventing burnout and focussing on creating environments where team members can be authentic, take smart risks, and grow without fear of failure. Empathy has become one of my most valuable leadership tools. Different perspectives also make us more creative and effective. A source of great pride for me is witnessing our diverse team successfully navigate and execute complex transactions.

Lastly, the most humbling aspect of partnership is recognising how much I still need to learn. I've developed learning agility, quickly adapting as our profession evolves while building a culture where continuous learning is essential.

The legal profession is changing rapidly, and leadership must evolve with it. But at its core, it still comes down to the fundamental principle that drew many of us to law, serving others with integrity, wisdom, and genuinely caring about their success.



Q: What advice would you give a junior lawyer who wants to follow a similar path to leadership at a large law firm?

Prianka: The first thing I would say is that it will all be okay. There will be late nights, disappointments, and moments of self-doubt, but if you keep showing up, working hard, and being kind, things have a way of falling into place.

Being technically good is important. But being someone others enjoy working with, both professionally and socially, is just as important. This work is intense, and what people will remember is not just your sharpness, but your steadiness, your attitude, and your ability to work as part of a team.

“There will be late nights and self-doubt — but if you keep showing up, things fall into place.”

Also, do not discount where you are, even if it is not your “dream job”. Every experience is training. There is no wasted time if you are learning, growing, and giving your best. Be patient and trust the process.

It is important to find balance, whatever that looks like for you. You have to create space to rest and reset. This work is demanding, and it helps to have people and routines that ground you.

But more than balance, what has truly carried me through is inspiration. For me, that comes from the memory of my late mom, Anitha Soni. Her strength and the pride I know she would feel have guided me through the hardest moments. It is also what keeps me steady now. We all need something that reminds us why we do this work, something that gives it meaning beyond the next deadline. That deeper purpose is what sustains us and shapes who we become. My advice is: find yours.

Q: How has mentorship shaped your own journey to partnership?

Marissa: Mentorship has played a significant role in my journey to partnership in the context of both the advice and guidance that I have received and the opportunities that I've had to mentor and empower others.

Early in my career, I was fortunate enough to work with senior colleagues who not only invested time in developing my technical skills but also helped me navigate the nuances of leadership, client relationships, and strategic thinking. Their belief in my potential very often exceeded my own, and that encouragement and support gave me the confidence to take on challenges that ultimately shaped my path.

I was privileged to have role models who demonstrated that leadership can be authentic, empathetic, and inclusive, who didn't just offer advice but created space for me and others to grow, fail, and learn.

Equally transformative was the experience of mentoring others. Mentorship has shaped not only my career trajectory but also my leadership style. Supporting junior team members, especially women, reminded me of the importance of representation and the power of shared experience and reinforced the kind of leader I aspired to be — one who lifts others as she climbs.

Success is rarely a solo journey and creating a culture of support and collaboration is essential to sustaining growth and excellence in the legal profession.

“Success is rarely a solo journey — creating a culture of support and collaboration is essential.”

Podcast: Building teams and empowering others

What does it take to go from lawyer to leader in law? In a special podcast episode, new Webber Wentzel equity partners Carryn Alexander, Kirsten Wolmarans, and Lumen Moolman chatted about taking on new responsibilities, mentoring and ongoing learning, and their visions for the future of their legal practice.

With the benefit of hindsight, making the leap from salaried partner to equity partner was more significant than they'd anticipated, accompanied by a far greater feeling of responsibility for your team and from a business perspective, say Carryn Alexander, Kirsten Wolmarans, and Lumen Moolman, who were all promoted to ownership stakes in leading African law firm Webber Wentzel earlier this year.

needs, what your team needs, and what is required of you as being a part-owner of a big law firm.”

Lumen, who is “100% aligned” with Carryn and Kirsten when it comes to the leap from salaried partner to equity partner, says that the journey to partnership has been tough at times, very very hard work with plenty of sacrifices, but that “it makes it all worthwhile when you do feel passionate about what you do, you

“The step to equity brings a lot of responsibility — not just for clients and business, but for valuing and rewarding your people.”

Kirsten, who specialises in many aspects of corporate and commercial litigation and arbitrations, says she felt like she was acting as an equity partner even when a salaried partner in recent years, but having now been in the new role for a few months, she realises the change in leadership level. “I now feel responsible for my team, for my juniors. I feel like I need to bring in the work, feed the mouths, provide guidance and leadership. For me that's been the biggest jump as an equity partner.”

Carryn likewise was surprised by the degree of difference in the salaried and equity partner roles, having felt that the means of remuneration would be the key change.

“Kirsten is right. The step to equity brings a lot of responsibility from a business perspective, as well as being a leader within your team. It's daunting. There's a lot of admin trying to deal with clients, to keep relationships going, build new relationships so that there's a pipeline of work for your team. Then also making sure your people are valued and feel rewarded in an equitable and respectful manner. You take more of a value insight into what it is that the firm



find it really interesting, and you get to do it with people who are really great people."

Like Kirsten and Carryn, Lumen is a 'homegrown partner' at Webber Wentzel, having begun her legal career at the firm as a candidate attorney in September 2017. However her pathway was slightly different to her colleagues, having previously worked for three years in auditing at Ernst & Young, before switching to law. She's now a partner in the Partner in the Tax Business Unit at Webber Wentzel.

"I had a bit of a unique journey. I studied accounting and law, then went through the audit route and qualified as a Chartered Accountant, but I just didn't feel like I was waking up with passion each day. The people were nice, it was a good environment, but I just didn't feel passionate about the work. I decided to explore the law side that I'd studied, and my experience at Webber Wentzel really drives home that everything happens for a reason. I'd always imagined that if I were to go into law I would want to join Webber Wentzel - they just stood out to me as an incredible firm. So I

"It makes it all worthwhile when you're passionate about the work, find it interesting, and get to do it with really great people."

joined them, and by chance joined the tax team, and I have been there ever since. Every morning I wake up and feel challenged by what I do, and it's interesting."

Carryn, Lumen, and Kirsten are all proud to be part of a large law firm that is leading the way for empowering women and people of colour in the African legal profession.

"It's amazing that Safiyya Patel is a woman of colour and Managing Partner of our firm," says Carryn. "It makes that sort of position more realistic and attainable for the rest of us in the future." Seeing what is possible is hugely valuable, agrees Kirsten, who admits that earlier in her career the mentors she looked to were hard-charging litigators at the top of their field. Then she found out the week she was getting promoted to salaried partner that she was pregnant; "a spanner in the works".



"I wondered how I was going to be a partner and a Mom. It was difficult, and my views on work changed. I'd put so much time into this career, which I love. But how would I balance the two? I can't put motherhood on the backseat. So then I began to look up more towards the women who had made it, but are also authentic about it. Not pretending everything is okay, when you know it can't be, not in litigation where you have this boiling point, and deadlines. So I try to be an authentic role model and mentor for our juniors, letting them know it's difficult but they're not alone. It's not that you're not good at what you're doing, it's just life, and you have to talk to each other."

Becoming a mentor to juniors as a partner, while still continuing to learn from others yourself, is an interesting and rewarding transition, say Lumen, Carryn, and Kirsten.

"When I speak to people who may be more junior, I try to remind them that nobody knows everything," says Lumen. "Oftentimes people almost have imposter syndrome, feeling they don't know enough. I try to reassure people that we are all a work in progress. A lot of times I feel I don't know enough, but I think the important thing is everyone feels that way. We are all in these highly technical, time and deadline-driven roles, and even though we feel like maybe we don't know enough, you have to back yourself and build that confidence. I think that's what I try to do with my juniors, to try and build confidence and not to shy away from feedback."

"I try to be an authentic role model for juniors, letting them know it's difficult — but they're not alone."



Beyond high-level technical skills, to be successful in the fast-changing modern world, lawyers and leaders in law also need a variety of 'soft skills' such as emotional intelligence, resilience, adaptability, say Lumen, Kirsten, and Carryn.

"When I first became a salaried partner, I realised that none of us were actually trained to be managers of people," says Carryn. "We were trained to be legal professionals, and were good at that, but not everyone is good at managing people."

As a millennial group, Carryn believes her generation of leaders have a different way of managing junior staff than in the past, having internalised different ways in which they were mentored or taught themselves, skills and behavioural tactics, with a view to trying to change things for the better.

"We want to back our juniors, see them thrive and be successful... One day, I was walking in the mall with my daughter, and I saw this poster in a shop window that said, 'The strength of a leader lies not in their power, but in their ability to empower others'. That struck me, because that's the type of leader I would want and I hope that that's the type of leader that I have become for others."



This is a condensed version of part (less than a third) of the full podcast discussion with new Webber Wentzel equity partners Carryn Alexander, Kirsten Wolmarans, and Lumen Moolman. You can listen to the full 30-minute plus discussion on SoundCloud, Spotify, Amazon, or other podcast channels.



WEBBER WENTZEL

in alliance with > **Linklaters**

About Webber Wentzel

We are the leading full-service law firm on the African continent, providing clients with seamless, tailored and commercially minded business solutions within record times. Our alliance with Linklaters and our relationships with outstanding law firms across Africa ensure that our clients have the best expertise wherever they do business.

Cape Town

*15th Floor, Convention
Tower, Heerengracht, Foreshore
Cape Town, 8001*

+27 21 431 7000

Johannesburg

*90 Rivonia Road, Sandton,
Johannesburg, 2196*

+27 11 530 5000

Disclaimer: The information in this document is provided for general information only. It is not legal or other professional advice. While we have taken reasonable steps to ensure it is accurate, Webber Wentzel accepts no liability or responsibility, to the extent allowed by law, if any information is, for any reason, incorrect or corrupted; or for any loss or damage that may arise from reliance on information in this document.

In partnership with

