

# Seama Govender

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*Seama Govender, nominated by Riaz Haffejee, is the group director for corporate services at Sumitomo Dunlop.*



Seama Govender

Seama is an admitted advocate, who has garnered approximately 20 years of experience within the legal and corporate environment. She commenced her career, after graduating with an LLB degree in 1999, as an articled clerk in a small law firm in Pinetown. She went on to join the National Prosecuting Authority where she served as a regional court public prosecutor until June 2007.

Seama subsequently joined KPMG's forensic unit in Durban, KwaZulu Natal, where she rose in the ranks from forensic investigator to senior forensic manager. In 2013, she joined Sumitomo Rubber, Dunlop as Group Manager: Legal. In 2015, she became the Company Secretary and Divisional Head: Legal, Risk and Internal Audit. She currently holds the position of Group Director: Corporate Services where she oversees a number of service departments, namely: Human Resources, Procurement, IT, Legal, Security and Governance.

She has been married for 15 years and has two children, a 12-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter. Seama is passionate about the law and enjoys the challenges that her current work brings. She lives by the age-old adage that failure is not an option but simply an opportunity to learn to do things better.

## Advice Seama would give her younger self:

They say hindsight is always perfect. Of course, in hindsight, it is easier to look back and see all the paths not taken. To do that would be to invite regret and frankly, I am wise enough to know that I do not have time to spare for living in regret. The woman that I am proudly today has been shaped by the choices I have made, good or bad, and I would not have it any other way.

So, if looking back means not changing any profound thing that I have done in life, then you have to wonder what do I have left to say?

Much to my surprise as I write this, I find that I actually have a lot to say. One major secret to share, in fact. Mind you, it's no answer to the questions of the universe but for me, it is life changing. You see, the secret I have learnt in the last four decades centres around the question of time. Time is the most precious treasure life could give you, but for all its obviousness, we often lose sight of this fact.

However, do not be too quick to blame me for being too naive not to have realised it sooner. You see, I was busy... extremely busy being everything to everyone. I spent my teens and my twenties being an excellent student, graduated law, was admitted as an advocate and became one of the youngest prosecutors to go straight to the regional court in my local jurisdiction. I fought every day, not to be good but to the very best that I could be. Do I regret it? Absolutely not! I am who I am today because I worked so hard.

In my 30's I turned my mind to getting married, running a household, having two children and growing my career all at the

same time. I changed jobs during my first pregnancy and that began the steady climb to the career success I have today. Again, I have no regrets. I went from being a senior forensic investigator to being a senior forensic manager in the space of five years. That's a total of four promotions, three of them in consecutive years.

Now in my 40's, I serve as one of three group directors, the only female one, by the way, in a tyre company - truly a man's world, if there was ever one. It has not been an easy ride but again, I have no regrets. I love this company and its people that I serve. They have made me the formidable force I am today (if I do say so myself) and have taught me about adaptability and resiliency.

I am also extremely grateful to the executive team that I work with for all of their support and encouragement. More especially, I am eternally grateful to my CEO, for taking a chance on a young lawyer six years ago, who didn't necessarily have all of the experience he needed at the time, but thankfully he saw something more. With his support and that of the amazing men and women that I work with, they have been the helping hands that contributed to my growth and success.

So, coming back to this profound secret of time, and given that I regret nothing, my advice to my younger self would simply be this:

- Every day when you wake up, do so to the realisation that today will not come again. We need to make the most of the time we have, ...today, not to do more or be more but to live more.
- To literally stop to smell the flowers and to savour the silly moments more with our kids. They grow so quickly that you sometimes have to consciously stop to enjoy the wonder of these amazing little creatures you created for they are never the same from day to day.
- I want you to remember to laugh more and argue less with your spouse or partner. You truly will not remember most of what the arguments were about anyway.
- Definitely travel, when the world is up to it again and read more, even if you have to move to audiobooks because it is quicker.
- Enjoy the rainy days instead of grumbling about the inconvenience of it all.
- Don't be so serious all the time. Take more photos and celebrate the good times.
- Remember to see your girlfriends more. The women in my life have been my saving grace.
- An amazing mother, a wonderful mother in law, sisters and sister in laws and of course, not forgetting, my girlfriends. I don't have many but the ones I do have, have walked with me through the darkest of times, lent me their strength when I had none of my own left and always remind me, of just how awesome and unconquerable we are.
- Always strive to be your best self. Do not fear growing older. With age comes the wisdom of knowing that the best is yet to come. All women have fat days, thin days and days in between. It's perfectly fine to have them. However, it is essential that you have at least one pair of high heels that makes you look and feel like you can conquer the world because feet stay the same size no matter what... (at least mine have so far... lol).
- There are also days when it's ok to not want to conquer anything. Love yourself enough to listen to your body and mind and take care of yourself. Unfortunately pushing yourself to the point of breaking serves no one and you will be the only one left to deal with the consequences of poor health. When you are young, it's easy to think that you can bounce back. Often as you get older, you find that the damage becomes irreparable.
- Perfection is a fallacy...rather find joy in a job done to the best of your ability.
- Don't spend time worrying about what you don't have control over. Easier said than done, I agree, but this is so important to know.
- Stop worrying about what others think about you and worry more about what you think of yourself. Validation of worth can only come from within and with it comes a sense of freedom from worrying so much about whether you conform to the expectations of others or not.

Finally, at the end of this rather long read, if you had to take away just one thing, then I would ask you to remember that you are and will always be, perfectly enough! A true D.I.V.A! The acronym "D.I.V.A." simply translates into the following: **D-Drive** to achieve what is required. **I-Intuition**, an ability harness and adopt a human centric approach to how we lead and live. **V-Vulnerability** is a strength which equips you to lead more effectively. And finally, the key to the success, **A-Authenticity** – the value of being true to yourself. Enjoy your journey!

## Seama's advice to women in the sector

I truly believe that women bring a different and vibrant dynamic to the workplace, so for me, the future most definitely lies equally within the hands of strong women as well as strong men, who are capable of recognizing and leveraging the value of their female counterparts.

I have been in my position for just a few short months and so my plans are still fairly new. However, I am very clear about my intention to continue the great efforts made by our CEO, to empower women within our organization. When I first joined the company, I recall being invited to a top 50 Senior Management meeting. At that meeting, all the women were asked to stand and literally just three of us stood up.

Today, I am happy to say that we have made great strides toward increasing the number of women in key positions within the management of the company. Transformation has largely been driven by our CEO. He has made no great noise about this nor sought out any huge accolade for the changes he has wrought but over the six years that I have been with the company, I have seen him carefully and methodically drive these changes.

Through his own behaviour, he has consistently demonstrated that neither gender, colour nor creed hold any value for him so long as you have integrity, the right attitude and are able to deliver on your obligations. It is a winning formula that I will actively seek to perpetuate across all our operations.

The CEO has personally driven the introduction of our customised Senior Leadership Development Programme. The experience allows leaders to understand and appreciate all the human dimensions to lead with authenticity from the inside-out. This coupled with the articulation of a clear purpose, enables employees to develop the capacity to stay focused on what matters to sustain high performance in the face of increasing demand and changing landscapes.

We also drive transformation through our Learning and Development programmes. To this end, we have a structured approach to the intake of our operator level with a pre-requisite to complete the Tyre Learnership at an NQF Level 3. We have ensured that we have an equal intake of males and females. Banishing the thought that women cannot make tyres. It has been extremely rewarding to see our aspiring female talent grow in these careers.

At Sumitomo Dunlop we strive to ensure that our talent management processes actively seek to transform our workforce. This is now formalised into a "Recruit for Attitude" strategy and conscientious succession planning in particular.

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