

Women in leadership leaving a legacy

Issued by [Capital Legacy](#)

28 Aug 2020

Interview with Deenisha Nadesan, director at Capital Legacy Fiduciary Services - South Africa's leading provider of wills

Leaving a legacy is more than the likes on your Instagram page or the number of shares you get on Facebook. It's about what you contribute to this world and **the journey you travel** to get there. This year for Women's Day, we celebrate women in leadership. We have interviewed Deenisha Nadesan on her journey to date, and what it has been like travelling on it. At only 35 years old, she is one of the directors of Capital Legacy Fiduciary Services and a leader in her own right.

1. Tell us about your history and how you became a director?

Many people have asked me what my life was like growing up and whether my parents pushed me like the societal norms we all read about. My father was a hardworking building contractor, and my mother a housewife. **No fancy degrees and titles** there. I am blessed to have been born in the '80s, and growing up in an Indian home in Durban, your career options were: attorney, accountant, doctor – there was no debate in my home. All the artistic, energetic, fun stuff was apparently not for us.



So, I studied an LLB degree at UKZN while still living in the comforts (and restrictions) of my parents' home in Durban. I served a year of articles with many visits to court, in my first car that was older than me (I also remember being towed away!). I also spent many days in practical legal training which gave me insight into the various practical aspects of law. I achieved a distinction in my attorney admissions board exams, in the administration of deceased estates. I went on to practice for an attorney firm in Durban CBD.

Fortunately, my parents knew that the city of gold is where I could **take full advantage of opportunities** and become something other than 'just another lawyer'. I still remember the day I had my 6pm interview, armed with a presentation on "Why is a will important?", with the now CEO, CIO and director of legal and risk.

Suffice it to say, I got a job at Capital Legacy with the votes being two to one, in my favour. And in retrospect, that one no has contributed to my growth the most. Receiving a 'no' is not necessarily a negative thing, but an opportunity for growth.

2. Has this been a difficult/challenging journey?

If something is not challenging, then we shouldn't be doing it, right? I have worn many hats at Capital Legacy – wills drafter, applications processor, Masters Office runner, estate and trust administrator, relationship manager and nominee executrix. When I joined Capital Legacy, there was no fiduciary department and unbeknown to me then, this is where my career really took off.

Every document drafted and advice collated has been as a result of trying (and oh boy there were some failures). There were no precedents, there was no one free phone call scenario. It was the estate, the Master's office and me head-on. Seven years later, there are four divisions in fiduciary services – estates, trusts, wills, and succession planning. And each

of these are a **separate set of building blocks without instructions**.

3. What is your vision of the legacy you want to leave, be it for your children or as director of Capital Legacy Fiduciary Services?

When I think about leaving a legacy, I sometimes wish that I could box the advice and put on a pretty bow and give it to every daughter, not just mine.

Don't do things like everyone's done it before!

It's easy to copy something and add your name to it but you need to do things in a way that you will always **be remembered as that person or company that always left someone else awestruck** because you went the extra mile. Every person's journey with you, irrespective of the duration, must be memorable. The simplest way to do this is by **always being kind**, even though you may not agree with someone. **Be honest** so that if you need to walk away, you do it with **integrity**; **always have good manners**, which shows that you are considerate and that you **respect** the other person; and always **show humility** in achievement and success. Legacy and trust carry value that influences beyond your lifetime.

4. What are some hard lessons you've learnt along the way that have been character building – share an example.

Character building starts with life lessons – learning to share, being dumped by your first love, being behind on work targets – and it is something that is **constantly evolving**. Each action and choice that we make either adds or detracts from our character.

A hard lesson that I have learnt that I will share with everyone is that **you need to own your career**. If you leave it in someone else's hands, you have lost control – nobody cares about it as much as you do. While it is great to have an army of mentors with different skills and experiences to assist you, your biggest cheerleader is you – if you don't push yourself, no one will.

5. As a woman, what is the one relational concept you would share with others, when it comes to interacting and being influential with your male colleagues?

Being influential with people around you requires you to first **develop a certain style**. Afterall, being influential is essentially a relationship skill. How you represent yourself, whether you have a title of a leader or not, affects your reputation. You always have to be aware of how you behave whether in the office, as a mother, wife, sister, or daughter.

There's much truth in the saying that perception is reality. Taking account of how your body language, your words, and your tone of voice represents you. You must **demonstrate a range of qualities if you want to influence others** and the important ones for me are **having integrity, being genuine and being reliable**. You have to devote time and energy if you want to be perceived as having certain qualities.

6. List some of the women, whether infamous or not, that influence the decisions you make and challenge the way you think.

Throughout history we have seen some **feisty and intelligent women** who have advocated women's rights in many areas including science, literature and business. They were perceived as being the 'rule breakers' as they challenged their male counterparts on what it actually means to be a role model.

Some of the most inspirational quotes are:

Anne Frank – "How wonderful is it that nobody needs to wait a single day before starting to improve the world."

Maya Angelou – "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Catherine Cook – "If you are not making mistakes, then you're not making decisions."

Serena Williams – “Don’t let anyone work harder than you.”

7. As director of Capital Legacy Fiduciary Services, what advice would you give to other women when it comes to the practical decisions impacting their legacy?

Life is unexpected but if you have a plan it’s much easier to steer through the surprises. You can leave a legacy in many ways, not only financially with good estate planning. Us mere mortals may not necessarily leave a legacy that will change the world, but all you can do is leave a footprint for those around you.

The simple way to do this is to **contribute beyond yourself** to the people who surround you. Make changes when you need to and, simply, live your legacy. Our children listen to us most intently through our actions. Raise your children well as they are your ultimate legacy of whether you have done your job well.

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