

# Banking exec reflects on her long road to professional success

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Antoinette van Ross, 41, did not grow up with plenty of opportunities for a bright future. She was raised in Westbury in Johannesburg, an area plagued by gang violence and low socio-economic living conditions. She remembers high school as a phase of her life that she wanted to get over and done with, so she could go out and get a job and start to earn money.



“You know back then, my parents didn’t have money so studying wasn’t even an option for me,” remembers Antoinette, who is now a senior management expert at one of the country’s leading banks. After graduation she completed a short course in accounting, which enabled her to get hired at a local bank. She worked there for six years, slowly moving up the ranks until she was finally appointed acting branch manager.

When she became pregnant with her first child, she left her job to stay home and look after her baby. A year later she was ready to go back again, this time finding work at another bank.

But it meant that she had to start at the bottom again. As with her previous job, however, Antoinette slowly worked her way up, becoming an account analyst, then doing credit assessments and becoming assistant to a team leader, which is what sparked her interest in further study. Her employer agreed to fund her studies and in 2006 she began working toward a banking certificate.

Not long after, she was promoted, creating an irrefutable link between education and professional growth. “It gave me great satisfaction to see others succeed but, one day, I decided I had seen enough people grow, it was now time for myself.”

She realised not only that she could achieve more in her career, but that she was more than capable of pushing herself in this direction. It was a dramatic transformation for a woman who had considered herself a determined and savvy worker, but never thought much of her academic abilities. “I mean, my marks were average in matric, I didn’t get a distinction or anything,” she recalls.

Now that Antoinette was in a more executive position – meeting CEOs, business owners and directors – she felt she needed to sharpen her business acumen to be confident.

“I also wanted to move forward in my thinking, to be more strategic and in touch with the latest technological advancements in the digital field as well as innovative ideas in the sector,” she says, which is what led her to the BCom degree, followed by a postgraduate degree in business administration, both at Milpark Education.

Fitting study into an already busy schedule of full-time work and family responsibilities was a challenge. Several times Antoinette had to put her studies on pause, but Milpark accommodated her by postponing tests and allowing her to rewrite exams. Her second pregnancy as well as the deaths of several close relatives over the span of a couple of years threatened to throw her off track entirely.

In the end, Antoinette managed to complete her BCom in three years and she’s proud that she got there. She hopes to one

day obtain an MBA and is driven by the desire to inspire the younger generation in her family. “I want to show them that you can achieve your dreams and continue studying, no matter what your age or what happens in your life. There is always room for learning and improving yourself.”

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