

Bowmans' Lebohang Ramokonopi - encouraging accountability and civic responsibility

From humble beginnings growing up in Johannesburg's Alexandra township, to becoming a candidate attorney at the prestigious Bowmans, Lebohang Ramokonopi says her path to the legal profession has been shaped by “a deep commitment to academic excellence, leadership, and service to my community”.

 By Shan Raddcliffe 24 Jun 2025



Image: Lebohang Ramokonopi, candidate attorney at Bowmans - source: [LinkedIn](#)

The South African Reserve Bank Scholarship fund recognised her academic excellence early on, and awarded Ramokonopi for her stellar matric results. This support assisted her in pursuing further education at the University of Witwatersrand. Not content with a Bachelor of Commerce degree (with a triple major in Law, Insurance and Finance), she followed this up with a Bachelor of Laws (LLB).

“Apart from the influence *How to Get Away with Murder's* Annalise Keating had on my path,” Ramokonopi quips, “my decision to pursue a career in law is rooted in my interest in South African history, particularly the role law has played in shaping the country’s political and social landscape.

“From an early age, I was interested in how the law was used during apartheid as a tool both to enforce injustice and to challenge it. Law has never been just about rules; it has been a means of shaping society, sometimes to oppress and sometimes to advance change. This understanding made it clear to me that the law is not only a technical field. It reflects the values, decisions and willingness of a society to face its problems.

“I’m interested in how legal frameworks can address inequality, promote justice and drive meaningful reform rooted in our history rather than disconnected from it. For me, practising law in South Africa here is both a profession and a way to engage with society critically and responsibly.”



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Giving back

However, it is not only through law that she has engaged society.

“Beyond academics, I have always believed in using my time and knowledge to uplift others,” Ramokonop continues. “I have dedicated years to tutoring high school learners in mathematics, physical sciences and geography at various schools in Alexandra, many of whom were preparing for their final exams under difficult circumstances. Each year, I also assist matriculants with their university applications.

“In the spirit of community care, during the more relaxed periods of the Covid-19 lockdown, I joined forces with friends to run small grassroots feeding scheme for homeless individuals in Braamfontein. While modest in scale, it was a practical way for us to contribute meaningfully during a period marked by widespread hardship.”

Here we chat to Ramokonopi further about the legacy of Youth Day, the fundamental impact of the Constitution, and the successes of the #FeesMustFall movement.

▣ ***What is the significance of Youth Day to you, as a young attorney?***

As a young attorney, Youth Day holds profound significance for me. Youth Day commemorates the courage of the students of 16 June 1976, who rose up against the oppressive apartheid regime’s education system. Their protest was not just about language policy, it was a stand against a broader system of injustice, inequality and systemic suppression of Black voices and futures.

As someone working in the legal profession, which historically served to enforce and later dismantle such oppression, I see Youth Day as a reminder of the power of youth-led resistance and the importance of using the law as a tool for justice.

It also reminds me that my position as a young Black legal professional is not accidental, it’s a hard-won opportunity, born from struggle and sacrifice.

Youth Day is also a call to accountability: to be brave in the face of injustice, to speak truth to power, and to ensure the spaces I occupy do not replicate the very exclusions that sparked the Soweto Uprising.



LAWPRACTICE

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▣ ***What do you feel is the most important piece of legislation impacting youth that has been passed in the last 40 years?***

While there are several important laws that have positively influenced youth development in South Africa, such as the National Youth Policy and the Skills Development Act, I believe the most significant piece of legislation in the past 40 years is the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

As a young and Black South African, I have experienced firsthand how the Constitution shapes every aspect of our lives. It protects our right to education, equality, freedom of expression and human dignity.

It laid the foundation for a democratic society where young people are not only safeguarded but also empowered to play an active role in building the future of our country.

■ ***What is one of the liberties you are grateful for today that weren't available to - or were hard-won by - earlier generations?***

One liberty I'm especially grateful for today is the freedom to openly express my views without fear of censorship or persecution, a freedom that many young people in other parts of the world are still courageously fighting to attain. Earlier generations in South Africa lived under oppressive systems, where speaking out against injustice could mean imprisonment, violence or worse.

Today, thanks to the hard work and sacrifices of those who came before us, I can participate in discussion, challenge ideas and advocate for change openly and safely. This freedom of expression not only allows me to have a voice but also empowers young people like me to actively shape our country's future.



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■ ***Why is it so important for the youth of today to get involved in societal change?***

It is crucial for the youth of today to get involved in societal change. Young people will inherit the societies we live in and bear the consequences of today's decisions. By engaging in societal change now, we encourage a culture of accountability, democracy, and civic responsibility.

A powerful example of the effectiveness of the youths' involvement in societal change is the #FeesMustFall movement that began in 2015. Young people across the country came together to demand affordable and accessible higher education.

Their collective voice and activism brought national attention to the barriers many students face, and it led to real policy changes, including a freeze on fee increases and increased government funding for education. This movement showed how youth activism can successfully influence government decisions and create positive change.

■ ***The Department of Justice recently announced it would be seeking to publicise the National Register for Sex Offenders. What do you think of this move in terms of child protection?***

In my view, the Department of Justice's decision to publicise the National Register for Sex Offenders represents a significant and necessary step forward in enhancing child protection. For years, the Sex Offenders Register has been a confidential tool, accessible only to certain employers such as schools and childcare facilities. However, with growing public concern about child safety and repeat offenders, the call for broader access has become louder.

Making this information more accessible to the public empowers parents, guardians and communities to be more vigilant and informed about potential risks in their environments. Transparency in such matters can act as a deterrent to offenders and reinforce society's condemnation of child sexual abuse.

▣ **Share one piece of advice given to you by an elder...**

'The world will try to tell you who to be, but your best guide is the person you are inside. Trust your instincts and remember that making mistakes is part of learning.'

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

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