Q&A

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What would you tell a young woman looking at the long hours and intense pressure of M&A and thinking, "I don't know if I can do this"?

The long hours are real, the pressure is real. The real question is not whether you can do it today, but whether you are willing to learn, adapt and grow through the experience. Most successful people in M&A weren't born thriving under pressure – they grew with it.

M&A is demanding, but it is also one of the fastest ways to develop commercial judgement, resilience, and problem-solving skills. Focus on building capability one deal at a time, rather than worrying about the entire journey ahead. Confidence is usually the result of competence, not the other way around. Most importantly, do not confuse challenge with inability.

Finally, ask yourself a different question. Instead of "Can I do this?", ask "Is this the kind of challenge that will help me become the person I want to be?". If the answer is yes, then give yourself the chance. You will surprise yourself.

What are the non-negotiable soft skills, beyond financial modelling and sharp excel skills, that a woman needs to cultivate to excel in capital markets?

Technical skills may get you into the room, but soft skills determine how far you progress.

The most important ones are:

Executive presence: Remain calm and composed under pressure, communicate with confidence, and speak with clarity.

Judgement: Judgement determines the right decision. Develop the ability to balance risk, opportunity and timing when information is incomplete.

Influence without authority, and relationship building: Capital markets is a team sport and a people business, which is built on trust. The ability to persuade, build consensus and align stakeholders is invaluable.

Communication: Develop the ability to explain complex concepts clearly and succinctly.

Commercial acumen: Understand what drives a client's business and strategic decisions. Go beyond your product. The best Capital Markets professionals connect macro trends with client needs.

Integrity: Your reputation is your most valuable asset. Never sacrifice credibility for a short-term win.

Finally, I would say, don't aspire to be the smartest person in the room. Aspire to be the person clients trust, colleagues seek out, and leaders rely on when the stakes are highest. Technical expertise may open the doors, but judgement, character and influence determine how far you will go.

How should young women handle microaggressions or being spoken over in a boardroom setting? What is your personal strategy for reclaiming the floor?

Lead with your conclusion. Boardrooms move quickly. Start with your recommendation before explaining the analysis.

Reclaim the floor respectfully, but directly, and if someone speaks over you repeatedly, I would tactically respond by saying, "I'd like to come back to the point I was making".

Use strategic silence and build allies.

Don't match interruption with emotion, match it with composure. The first instinct is often to either retreat or become defensive. Neither is usually effective. A calm, measured response often carries more authority. As an example, I would say, "If I could complete my thought, I think it addresses exactly what you've raised."

When negotiating your own compensation, promotions or seat at the partnership table, what is your golden rule?

My golden rule is: advocate for yourself with data, not emotion.

Know your value, understand the market, and clearly articulate your impact. Walk into the conversation with evidence of results, revenue generated, clients won, strategic contributions, and leadership demonstrated.

Do not assume that hard work will automatically be noticed. Visibility and advocacy are important parts of career progression. Negotiation should not be viewed as confrontation. It is a professional discussion about value creation and appropriate recognition.

How do you advise young professionals to build a visible personal brand in an industry that often prioritises behind-the-scenes execution?

Your personal brand isn't what you say about yourself. It's what people consistently say about you when you are not in the room. Start by being known for something specific, whether it is FX markets, Debt Capital markets or client strategy, develop a clear area of expertise that people associate with your name.

Speak up with insight, not frequency, in meetings; don't contribute just to be heard. Make your comments thoughtful, concise and evidence-based.

Find sponsors, not just mentors. Sponsors advocate for you when you're not in the room. Cultivate relationships with leaders who know your work and are willing to back your potential.

Consistency matters more than self-promotion. A strong reputation is built through repeated delivery of quality work.

The traditional 'rite of passage' was grinding through hours of manual financial modelling and data room sorting – tasks AI now handles in seconds. How must the training and expectations for young women entering corporate finance right now evolve in this new landscape?

Young women in corporate finance need to be both technically proficient and strategically minded. AI can generate a model, but it cannot replace human judgement, relationship management, negotiation, or the ability to understand behaviour and navigate complex transactions.

The individuals who thrive will be those who combine technological fluency with critical thinking, curiosity and commercial insight. Those skills will become the true differentiators in the next generation of capital markets professionals.