



Q&A

Cara Pardini

Transactor

Rand Merchant Bank

What initially drew you to a career in M&A or corporate finance?

During my articles, I found myself naturally drawn to understanding what “dealmaking” really meant. I remember reading about transactions and feeling genuinely excited at the thought of being part of a deal team.

I wanted a career that would challenge me, stretch my thinking, and accelerate my growth. Corporate finance offered all of that and more. This is a field that pushes you to constantly be on your game – technically, strategically and interpersonally.

The exposure you get early on is exceptional – you’re working on high-profile transactions, engaging directly with senior executives, and gaining insights into the inner workings of companies across different sectors. You’re required to think critically, creatively, and under pressure – and that’s where I thrive. I also knew the skill set I’d develop would be invaluable.

But beyond the technical side, it was the people that sealed it for me. The idea of learning from and working alongside some of the brightest minds in the industry was, and still is, incredibly motivating.

How have you built resilience in a high-pressure, male-dominated environment?

Resilience, for me, has come from knowing my value and learning not to be afraid to speak up. In environments where confidence is often equated with being the loudest voice in the room, it can be easy to feel like you’re being overlooked, especially as a woman. I’ve learnt to empower myself to push past that, to share my views, put my hand up for opportunities, and ask for what I want. Things won’t always go your way, but there’s strength in being bold enough to ask.

I’ve also found that staying calm, being honest, and developing strong self-awareness are key to maintaining resilience. It’s about not letting bad days define you, and knowing when to seek support if you need it.

Above all, I’ve learnt that you don’t have to lose your personal touch to succeed. Everyone brings something unique to the table, and real resilience lies in balancing self-advocacy with collaboration and empathy.

Did you have any mentors or role models? How did they influence your journey?

I’ve been fortunate to have a handful of mentors and role models who’ve played a meaningful role in my journey so far, and who have helped shape my mindset and approach.

They’ve helped me understand what really matters, what to focus on, what to let go of, and how to take a broader view. One piece of advice that’s stuck with me is that you have to take the long-term

view in this career. If you measure progress over just a year or two, it can feel uneven or frustrating. But if you zoom out to five to ten years, you’ll likely get all the exposure you hoped for, and even some you didn’t know you needed.

That advice helped reframe my perspective. It reminded me that growth in this industry is rarely linear, but if you stay committed and open, the right opportunities will come – often in ways you don’t expect.

What advice would you give to your younger self starting out in this field?

Be open to new experiences and say yes to as many opportunities as you can, especially early on. Learn about yourself, your working style, your limits. Don’t be afraid to ask for help, and be honest about your capacity. Patience is key. Give yourself grace, keep persevering, and remember, growth doesn’t always look like success.

One of the most valuable things you can do is talk to people. Network with peers, seek out mentors, and share your experiences. You’ll find others have gone through similar challenges, and that support is powerful. Just as important, be that support for someone else. Help those who are just starting out. A little guidance or reassurance can make a big difference.

And finally, don’t measure success only by closed deals or immediate wins. So much in this field is outside your control. Instead, measure your progress by how much you’re learning and how you’re developing professionally. The wins will come in time.

What would you say is a critical trait to have in this career?

It’s hard to choose just one, but for me, it’s a tie between resilience and patience.

Patience is essential – with transactions, with timelines, with people, and most importantly, with yourself. Deals stall, timelines shift, and outcomes can be uncertain despite months of work. Learning to remain calm, composed and committed, even when things don’t unfold as expected, is a key part of the job.

At the same time, resilience is what gets you through the tougher days. There are daily challenges – some weeks are rougher than others, some deals fall apart after months of effort, and sometimes you’re navigating difficult personalities or situations beyond your control. The ability to recover quickly, to bounce back and show up the next day, ready to tackle the next challenge, is a must.

Having these qualities not only helps you grow, it also allows you to stay motivated and remain excited. You begin to appreciate the process, the lessons, the small wins, and even the tough moments, because each one shapes you into a stronger, more capable professional. 

