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"?

I would tell her that almost everyone who has built a serious career in M&A has had that thought at some point. The work is demanding, and it should not be romanticised. There are long days, difficult deadlines, and moments where the pressure feels very personal. But pressure is also where capability is built. You don't need to enter the profession with perfect confidence. Confidence usually comes later, after you've been tested a few times and realise that you can recover, learn and keep going. M&A also gives you exposure, very early, to CEOs, founders, investors, boards and major strategic decisions. That is an extraordinary training ground. My advice would be: Don't count yourself out too soon. Learn the technical foundations, ask good questions, find people who will sponsor you, and treat the career as a long game, rather than one intense season.

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 excellence matters, but it's only the entry ticket. The people who progress in corporate finance are those who combine technical ability with judgment, trust and influence. The first non-negotiable is communication: being able to explain complex financial information in a way that boards, investors and clients can actually use. The second is relationship-building. M&A is built on confidence, credibility and timing, often in uncertain conditions. The third is commercial judgment. A model can produce an answer, but judgment tells you whether the answer makes sense. Resilience is also critical because markets move, clients change their minds, and transactions can shift very quickly. Finally, you need curiosity. The best professionals understand industries, investor sentiment, strategy and human behaviour. They don't just process information; they interpret it and use it to guide better decisions.

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

My approach is calm, direct, and grounded in the substance of the discussion. If I am interrupted, I will usually say, "As I was saying…," and then continue. I don't apologise for taking the floor back, and I don't turn it into a performance. The tone is important: firm, but not defensive. Where the behaviour is more subtle, I bring the conversation back to the decision at hand: "The reason I raised this is because it affects the valuation risk" or "That's why I mentioned the point I made earlier." Preparation also helps. If your contributions are consistently thoughtful and commercially relevant, people start to associate your voice with value. I would also encourage young women to build allies. Good leaders notice when voices are being crowded out and can help create space, but you still need to learn how to hold your own space with composure and, importantly, without aggression.

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

My golden rule is to negotiate from impact, not effort. Hard work is important, but effort alone is not the strongest case for advancement. You need to be able to show the value you've created: revenue originated, clients retained, teams developed, complex situations resolved, or opportunities opened for the firm. Before any important conversation, I would write down the evidence and be clear on the ask. Do not make people guess what recognition should look like. I also think it's important to speak about future contribution, not only past performance. A promotion or partnership seat is not simply a reward; it is a decision about the role you can play in growing the business. Be factual, measured and confident. If you can't articulate your value, you make it easier for others to underestimate it.

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

Personal brand is not about noise; it's about reputation. Early in your career, your brand is built by being reliable: accurate work, good judgment, discretion, responsiveness and follow-through. Those basics matter more than people realise. As you become more experienced, you need to move from being known only for execution to being known for insight. Choose an area where you can build real depth, whether that's a sector, transaction type, buyer universe or market theme. Then contribute thoughtfully: ask good questions in meetings, write short market observations, mentor juniors, and volunteer for client-facing moments when you're ready. Visibility should be earned through usefulness. A strong professional brand is created when people associate you with competence, consistency and sound judgment.

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?

AI changes the mechanics of junior work, but it doesn't remove the need for judgment. In many ways, it raises the standard. Analysts still need to understand modelling, valuation, diligence and accounting fundamentals. If you don't understand the underlying work, you can't assess the solutions for correctness or infer meaningful conclusions. The difference is that training must now focus much earlier on interpretation, challenge and communication. A good analyst should be able to ask: Does this assumption make sense? What is missing? What does this mean for value, risk or negotiation strategy? I would also expect young professionals to become fluent in technology, data quality and confidentiality. The best analysts will not compete with AI on speed. They will use it to create space for better thinking, better questions and better advice.

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