Q&A

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Blueprint for the next generation

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"?

Feeling overwhelmed in the M&A environment is normal. The differentiator is how you step up to the challenge. Turn an "I don't know if I can do this" moment into a "let me find out" one. If you don't know the answer, ask. Be honest. Show curiosity. Seek the answers and you will learn more. Ask colleagues. Read literature. Continue with your foundational learning.

Long hours and fast-paced demands have been a perennial feature of investment banking. Weekend work is common. The intense training quickly builds your problem-solving and time management skills. That said, it's important to develop coping mechanisms. Take short breaks. Incorporate a 15-minute walk. Mindset is super important. Knowing that a particularly intense period is only temporary helps perspective. Remember, your first year will be about learning some unwritten rules. Chat to your peers. You are not alone in it. You are unlikely to avoid the long hours and pressure, but you can survive it, and it is most rewarding.

> Talk less, listen more. Allow your personality to shine through.

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?

Confidence, brevity and composure are essential for creating a presence in capital markets. Confidence is established through persistent learning and taking the time to ask questions. Listen intently to experienced peers.

Deliver insights with brevity. If you don't know the answer, own it. You will gain more respect by asking questions than by giving an over-qualifying, rambling and incorrect response.

Remain composed and graceful, even under the most intense questioning. Above all else, remain humble. Be proud of that promotion or perfect pitch at an important meeting, but don't let your ego get in the way.

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

Be prepared and confident. A lack of confidence, overexplaining or apologising are not beneficial in any setting. Talk less, listen more. Allow your personality to shine through. The role is more than a list of your qualifications and years of experience.

Come from a position of strength. Outline the measurable value that you have delivered to your organisation. However, confidence should not be confused with arrogance. Honesty and integrity above all else. Don't sell a skill that you don't have – that will destroy trust.

Following a potential promotion discussion, don't be afraid to walk away. Fully understand what the new role entails. Chat to individuals who are currently performing the role. Importantly, don't chase a job title, and don't rush into a role.

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 should complement your training, but certainly not replace it. Maintain deep foundational literacy. Take the time to manually build a financial model to truly understand the intricacies and workings. You need that experience to ask the pertinent questions on AI outputs. This will allow you to identify algorithmic oversights and cross-examine automated AI outputs. Read that lengthy document from beginning to end instead of asking AI to summarise it. The knowledge gained from a detailed read is what will differentiate you.

AI tools will certainly speed up numeric analysis, but other skills are hard to automate. These include communication, ethical reasoning, strategic thinking and empathy. Although AI offers you information through a few clicks on a keyboard, nothing replaces the ability to exercise judgement or apply critical thinking.

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