



## COURTNEY LAZZARI Principal EY

Courtney is a Principal in EY's Structured Finance Advisory Services practice. She has over 15 years of experience in the financial services industry serving major commercial banks, investment banks, and government sponsored enterprise clients in the areas of real estate mortgage investment conduits (REMICs), collateralized loan obligations (CLO), asset-backed securities (ABS), residential mortgage-backed securities (RMBS), and commercial mortgage-backed securities (CMBS). Courtney is the location leader for the Houston Structured Finance Advisory Services (SFAS) practice where she leads a team of over 70 professionals.

### How are you personally supporting Gender Equality Today for Sustainable Tomorrow?

Personally, in raising two daughters, the concept of gender equality has become more important to me than ever. As important as it is to instill these values in my daughters, it is equally important to make sure my son is aware of and respectful of gender equality. To be sure I'm not just preaching – I try to be cognizant of my daily actions to be sure that I am practicing the words I preach. Professionally, it's not all that different to be honest. I do my best to lead by example. Fortunately, I have never and I mean never, felt diminished by my gender. In fact, I have been celebrated because of my gender and earned seats at the table because of my gender. That being said, it is up to me as an individual – not a woman – to keep my seat at the table.

### What inspired you to get into the finance industry?

This is so silly, but growing up, one woman that I looked up to wore suits to work every day. At the time, I thought that was very cool. So naturally, I asked her what she did in order to get to wear a suit every day. Well, she worked in finance and the rest is history for me!

### What can companies do to increase the representation of women in finance?

Providing mentorship programs, coaching sessions, networking opportunities – any way for women to connect with other women is vital to seeing how others "do it." I hear that all the time "I don't know how you do it." Answer is – I don't! One of the silver linings of COVID is that it created an opportunity to glimpse into the daily lives of others creating a sense of authenticity that didn't previously exist, or at least didn't exist very often. Recognizing and allowing for the fact that we have responsibilities outside of the workplace is critically important to increase or even maintain the representation of women in finance.

### How can companies invest in their women employees to prepare them for leadership roles?

I think having the courage to ask for help, whether that be with a subject matter you are not familiar with or coverage for a personal matter you need to deal with, is crucial for success. Having the confidence to be vulnerable is not something that is easy to teach – so I don't have an answer of how to invest to help create that – but creating an environment where that vulnerability is accepted or even encouraged would go very far in getting to a leadership role and being an empathetic leader.

### Where is your favorite vacation spot?

Any place that's an actual vacation! I just got back from a cruise with my family and for anyone who has "vacationed" with children, it's a trip, not a vacation. I love my children dearly, but it was exhausting!