

WiS Week 2024

Leader Spotlight

**WOMEN IN
SECURITIZATION**

Renew. Reengage. Reimagine.



Andrea (Andi) Mandell
Partner
Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP

What advice would you give young women aspiring to pursue a career in finance?

The most important advice for a woman beginning a career in finance is to take control of your own career. You earned your seat at the table and always remember that. Don't let others dictate your path and don't worry about where you will be in five years.

Be thoughtful with the assignments you take on, and to the extent possible, thoughtful about the people that you work with. Don't get bogged down in administrative work. Take on tasks that highlight your skill sets and set you up for recognition by leadership instead of handling busy work just because you are good at it. Too often women take on non-promotable work that sidelines them from assignments that can further their development. Believe in yourself and others will believe in you.

How do you support WIS initiatives at your organization?

I have been an active participant of WiS since its inception. But more importantly, I invite and host young women from my firm at WiS events and show them how to network. Building one's network should start at the beginning of any career and continue for your entire career. It can be intimidating to walk into a room of unfamiliar people, but the best aspect of WiS is that every participant is looking for the same thing—new connections, mentorship and building a community of like-minded women. The more you attend, the more you will see other friendly faces in the room. WiS is a chance to help even the playing field in what has historically been a man's playground.

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

Companies should encourage and recruit more women into their companies. They should dissolve the existence of the boys' club and hold impactful workshops on unconscious bias. An annual workshop is not enough, this effort requires persistence and reinforcement on a very frequent basis. In addition, companies should allow for 360 reviews without retribution and be committed to listening to all voices and create change. Companies should be open to new ideas and be progressive in their actions, not simply doing things the same way it has always been done.

Companies need to recognize the evolution of parenting and that the way people parent, including the involvement of both parents, is very different than it was 20 years ago. They need to embrace this difference for all their employees.

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What inspires you to continue to grow in this industry?

My 27-year-old daughter is my inspiration and encourages me to be better and grow. When I ask her if she felt like she lost time or experiences with me because I was a working mom, she always replies that I was the best role model and I inspired her to reach for the stars. I wasn't fortunate to have many women mentors early in my career, but I did have men who were supportive and encouraged me to succeed.

I will always remember a particular male partner who oversaw the firm's associates hiring and retention committee when I was an associate. It was 2000, and I had just given birth to twin boys, making me a mom of three children under the age of three. Upon my return to work, I asked him if I could transition to part-time. He responded no, indicating that I was only one year away from partner, and that he wanted me to telecommute instead of reducing my role to part-time. This was pre-COVID, and telecommuting or hybrid work was not a common practice in law firms. His advice to change my perspective and approach to my work impacted the entire trajectory of my career. To this day, I doubt that he realizes the influence he had on my career by simply believing in me and encouraging me to try. I hope to pay that forward to other women in the industry.

What is a good way to give back to your community?

For me as a lawyer, my pro bono work is very important to me. I began working on small projects, but over time became more focused. I told each of my three children upon graduation from college to find a charity that is meaningful to them, become involved and to join a junior board. Through this experience, you will not only meet like-minded people, but also incredibly impressive people and build your network while giving back in an area that is important to you.

For myself, it is my work with The Gary Sinise Foundation (GSF), an organization that honors our nation's defenders, veterans, first responders, and their families. I feel fortunate to have a job where my children don't have to worry that I may not come home at night. Supporting those who put their lives on the line to protect our freedoms and keep us safe, deserves our support and gratitude. Last year, I was appointed a board member at GSF, and it is one of the proudest accomplishments of my career.

This interview has been edited for clarity.