



■ **SARAH PROCTOR**
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Sarah Proctor is a partner in the Commercial Finance practice group at Parker Hudson with over 16 years of experience leading private credit and bank lenders through asset-based, cash flow, cross-border, leveraged, and acquisition finance transactions. She has extensive experience representing lenders in the highly regulated healthcare sector, and her deals often involve private equity sponsors, multiple tranches of debt, and complex intercreditor arrangements. Sarah's interpersonal nature and practical, business-focused outlook help build the ideal atmosphere for her clients to structure and close their financing transactions. Sarah is licensed in Georgia and North Carolina.

What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

I would say to work hard, learn everything you can about the industry and how it fits together (and not just your position within it), and do not be afraid to be who you are. This does not mean you will not have to adapt in some ways to your work environment, but you will sleep better at night and stay energized to put your time and effort toward your job year after year if you can show your true personality at work. I am a first-generation college graduate from a blue collar, rural upbringing, so I came into the industry with very little business knowledge, but I have always been a critical thinker and eager to learn. I am able to break things down into easily understandable parts, which makes me a great teacher and ultimately benefits my workplace and those I am teaching. I can also be a pessimist (after all, my favorite poem growing up was *The Pessimist* by Benjamin Franklin King—look it up!), which I believe fosters my critical thinking skills and common sense and enables me to avoid the worst-case scenario and deliver practical solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems.

Studies have shown women are more reluctant to tout their accomplishments in the workplace. What advice would you give to help women be more comfortable with speaking up?

Sketch out your accomplishments and any related “asks” on paper and practice saying them out loud, even if you are sending them in an email. In doing this, you will land on the best way to phrase your message for your intended audience and will become more comfortable delivering it. For example, if you are a service provider pitching your services to a potential client, your sketch may include things you want to highlight, such as years of experience, approximate number of successfully completed transactions, specific examples of great results you have achieved, and a request to earn the potential client’s business.

If you are up for a promotion or discussing a raise with your employer, your sketch may include metrics demonstrating your work ethic, specific examples of great results you have achieved, your vision for the next 1-3 years to grow the business, and a request for the promotion or raise. We really should not be afraid to advocate for ourselves, and the more prepared we are when so advocating, the more smoothly it will go.

How did you approach making a big decision in your career, either moving onto a new organization or role?

Courage! I have made a few big career moves, and with each one of them, I created an extensive list of pros and cons, weighed them according to how I felt and how big of an effect they could have on my life, and determined what would happen if I chose poorly (worst case scenario—see pessimist comment above). Once I felt like I had considered every possible angle, I mustered up my courage and made the move. One of these moves involved quitting the workforce, relocating back home, getting married, and having our first daughter. After a year and a half, I changed my mind and began the process of getting back into the industry, and here I am over seven years later with a great and fulfilling career, an amazing husband, two beautiful girls, and my mom, sister, nieces, and cousins around the corner. Nothing is irreversible, and life is what you make it!

How can secured finance organizations attract and retain more women?

I believe secured finance organizations can attract and retain more women by not having a one-size-fits-all approach to success and by fostering a culture of open communication. Not everyone will have the same path and that is okay. If people are valued for their skills and what they contribute to the organization, then the organization’s culture will show it and people will feel valued and stick around.