

# RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE



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**K**elley Gass is a partner in the Commercial Finance practice group at Parker, Hudson, Rainer & Dobbs LLP and a past recipient of the SFNet 40 Under 40 awards (2020). She primarily represents national and regional banks and other financial institutions in a broad spectrum of secured lending transactions. Kelley works closely with clients to document, negotiate and close single-lender, club and widely syndicated credit facilities with a particular emphasis on senior secured asset-based loans and healthcare finance transactions. Her practice also includes cross-border deals, acquisition financings, and debtor-in-possession financings.

As chair of Parker Hudson's recruiting committee and a member of the firm's diversity committee, Kelley is responsible for helping to identify and attract top legal talent while also contributing to a hiring process that promotes diversity and inclusivity in the workplace.

Kelley earned her J.D. from Wake Forest University School of Law in 2013 where she served as executive editor of the *Wake Forest Law Review* and associate chief justice of the Moot Court Board. Kelley received her B.A. from Emory University in 2009. She resides in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and their two young children.

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

Embrace learning. One of the best things about being a secured finance lawyer is that no two deals are alike, which means there is always something new to learn and to keep you on your toes. As a law student, you learn by reading and studying what others have done. As a practitioner, you learn by doing. Yes, there are still plenty of materials to read and study, but I truly believe there is no better way to hone your craft than by rolling up your sleeves and digging into an issue or a project with the goal of mastery and being able to add a new skill or piece of knowledge to your toolbox.

## What is the best advice you ever received?

Work hard; be kind.

## What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

The importance of investing in relationships. As a junior associate, I equated being a good lawyer with being smart and professional – full stop. This meant I was singularly focused on learning the substantive nuts and bolts behind secured lending work and had (incorrectly) assumed it was “unprofessional” to ask after a client's personal life or share details about my own because, to me, the work was most important. As I have advanced in my career, I have found that being able to relate to a client on a personal level – following along with their teenager's recent college application process or bonding over a mutual love of an obscure local restaurant – is heavily valued in being a good attorney and counselor, in addition to getting the work “right.” The additional personal connection not only enriches what could easily be an ordinary attorney-client relationship, but also makes my practice more fulfilling.

## What role has mentorship/sponsorship played in your career?

It is not an exaggeration to say that I would not be where I am today without the excellent mentors and sponsors I have had during my career. I am fortunate to have received (and continue to receive!) mentorship from some of the smartest, most well-respected finance lawyers in the industry and could not have asked for better role models, both professionally and personally. As a woman, it is particularly inspiring to see other women excel in what has historically been a male-dominated field. At Parker Hudson, the women partners and counsel on our commercial finance team are powerhouses – not only because of their deep legal knowledge and sharp advocacy skills but because they set an example of how women can define their own meaning of “success” in their careers, and in doing so have helped me shape my own career path and find my definition of “success”. Each of these women has mentored me in some way, whether she knows it or not!

## How can secured finance organizations attract and retain more women?

I think the unfortunate reality is that the traditional “path to success” is more conducive to promoting men than women because of its static nature. By recognizing that a woman's path and very definition of success is much more fluid and dependent on her stage of life, organizations can better adapt their policies and programs to facilitate arrangements that are attractive to women who may desire something different from the path their male counterparts have always taken in order to remain in the field long-term.