

by Rebecca Felton & Tori O'Shea



REBECCA FELTON
Senior Market Strategist



TORI O'SHEA
Regional Sales Consultant

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Mentoring Matters

At RiverFront, Mentoring Matters:

Since RiverFront launched the ENGAGE initiative in 2019, mentoring has been a core tenet of our group's mission. We believe that mentoring enriches our culture through personal and professional growth for both the mentee and the mentor. While women remain under-represented in the ranks of female financial advisors and management positions within our industry, our numbers are growing.

A study in the Harvard Business Review found that women tend to benefit more than their male counterparts by having a network of well-connected peers and an inner circle of close female contacts. However, one of the obstacles for women has been a lack of mentoring opportunities, which is why we are passionate about growing and highlighting this initiative - both internally and externally.

Inside of RiverFront, we began a mentoring program last year by pairing associates with one another - and we have even recruited some of our men to serve as mentors. Additionally, we have also begun an externship program through local universities to showcase our industry and help young women develop connections as they consider careers in financial services.

While some mentorships begin formally, others can be organic but just as meaningful. We didn't have to look very far to find just such an example than the partnership between our own Sierra Jones, Regional Director for the Southwest, and her aunt, Lana Hock, who is a Senior Vice President with Baird in Phoenix. Lana is also one of our valued Capital Partners.

Recently, we spent some time with the two of them to learn more about how Lana stepped up and has served as a mentor to Sierra since she began her career in the financial services industry.

How it all began: Due to their familial connection, this mentoring pair got started a little differently than many. Our discussion kicked off with each of them sharing a little about how it all began:

Lana: *My initial inspiration to bring Sierra into the business came about after attending the Barrons Women's Conference back in 2014. Two themes that resonated with me that year were centered on the importance of encouraging and empowering more women, especially the next generation, to enter the financial services industry and creating an authentic message for myself. I immediately thought of Sierra, as that supported both themes. I realized how creating an authentic message about what we do and how we do it is key. It feels so much better to be your true self, and I knew Sierra shared those same values. After returning from the conference, I ultimately reached out to her and asked if she had ever thought about a career in financial services.*

Sierra: *I had graduated from college with a degree totally unrelated to finance about 6 months before Lana called. I had always looked up to my 'Aunt Lana' growing up and knew that she was successful without truly knowing what she did for a living. When Lana initially reached out to me, I was skeptical, but several lengthy phone conversations got us to the next step. Given my background in Journalism & Communications and Lana's desire to ramp up her team's communication and social media efforts, we agreed that I might be a good fit for her team. A few months later I was on a plane moving from Nebraska to Arizona with really no idea of the opportunity and challenges that were ahead of me.*

Putting it in Perspective: It was great to hear from each of these dynamic women as they reflected on their respective paths that led them to where they are today.

Lana: *Growing up in a small town in Nebraska, I didn't have much exposure to women in financial services—all the bankers were men. Ultimately, I decided to pursue my college degree at Kansas State with the goal of becoming a veterinarian—I loved and still love animals and it was a job I could do and be the lead. My sophomore year, as I was struggling to get through biology and chemistry classes that didn't really interest me and wondering what the heck I was going to do, I took an opportunity to work part-time for a Certified Financial Planner. I may not have known it at the time, but he was, and still is, one of my great mentors. Something that immediately stood out to him and ultimately gave him reason to encourage my career in financial services was my communication skills. I was able to not only communicate with his clients clearly and effectively but also take complex scenarios and explain them in simplistic terms. I truly believe that the strengths many women have – strong communication skills, listening, empathy – are all advantages in our industry.*

One of my favorite stories is a client of mine expressed to me that I was his first female financial advisor. He seemed pleasantly surprised to share that he thought me being female is what made me better than any other advisor he'd worked with. Intrigued, I asked why, exactly, that was the case. He replied quite matter-of-factly, "Well it's simple—you're a better shopper. Men go to a store to get a pair of shoes and they have two choices: brown or black. Women have all kinds of options: pumps, flats, open-toes, sandals, satin, suede. You know what to look for and make the right decision no matter the situation." I'll never forget that analogy and it really is true. Women can evaluate a variety of options and identify which option best fulfills a need. Our trait of being "better shoppers" says a lot about how women approach not only our business, but life in general.

Sierra: *Having Lana as a role model and mentor as I started in this business was tremendously beneficial to me. I had my fair share of challenges at the beginning of my career, but they were more related to the intimidatingly steep learning curve than feeling that I maybe wasn't cut out for the job because of my gender. Lana led me into an environment where there were multiple top-producing female financial advisors. She works closely with other industry professionals who are female and exposed me to all the different opportunities this industry has to offer to women. I learned quickly that my perceived lack of financial knowledge played a far smaller role in my day-to-day responsibilities than communicating and empathizing with clients. My ability to identify and understand client needs and foster trusted relationships was far more valuable.*

I went into my job on Lana's team not really thinking I would end up with a career in finance, but I ultimately learned that this business was more about helping people than anything else. That's when I knew I was on the right track. With time, I got over the initial learning curve and started on the path that ultimately led me to RiverFront. Lana has certainly shown me how important it is to support and encourage other women in this industry. She came up in a different time where there was more competition amongst women to have a place at the table. She has always celebrated the successes of others and helped me to connect and network with other successful females in our business, not just financial advisors. The experience has certainly been different for me, but I have a long career ahead of me and my goal is to ultimately help more women see that financial services can be an impactful and fulfilling career.

Sierra and Lana bring different backgrounds and experiences to their current roles – truly too much to capture in just a few short pages. Their paths may have been different but their shared enthusiasm for what they do and passion to empower other women came through loud and clear. Sierra and Lana make it easy to see that engaging in a mentoring relationship is beneficial for both participants. It gives all of us an opportunity to learn and grow – no matter our stages in our careers.

In closing, we will share a powerful bit of advice from Lana:

"I think the best thing anyone can do as it relates to being a mentor is to keep showing up- you must be fully engaged and open to what's going on. Pay attention to that relationship!"

About ENGAGE

RiverFront founded Engage in 2019 with the goal of changing and improving the experience for women in financial services. The mission of Engage is to engage women in our Industry through mentorship, education, and support.

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