

THE SECURED Lender

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Putting Capital To Work

INTERVIEW WITH

Valerie Mason & Nneoma Maduike

IN FEBRUARY, OTTERBOURG P.C. ANNOUNCED THAT VALERIE S. MASON AND NNEOMA A. MADUIKE HAD BEEN NAMED CO-CHAIRS OF THE FIRM'S LENDER FINANCE PRACTICE GROUP. HERE, THEY DISCUSS THEIR GOALS FOR THE NEW GROUP.

Rising Together: Women in Secured Finance Profiles

On the following pages, you will meet nearly 70 inspiring women who exemplify excellence and have distinguished themselves within the secured finance industry.



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *The Secured Lender's* Sixth Women in Secured Finance issue.

Rising Together. This concept serves as both the theme for this month's issue and SFNet's upcoming online conference *Women in Secured Finance: Where Women Rise*.

During this challenging time, it's more important than ever to highlight and celebrate the contributions and accomplishments of women in our industry. Statistics show that the pandemic has had serious effects on women in the workplace, as we struggle with added pressures on the job, increased unemployment and increasingly challenging caregiving responsibilities.

In the following pages of our biggest issue yet, you will meet over 70 inspiring women who exemplify excellence and have distinguished themselves within the secured finance industry. They represent the various sectors of SFNet's member organizations including banks, law firms, appraisal and consulting firms, fintech companies and institutional capital providers. I found their profiles to be inspirational and thought provoking, as each woman featured is "rising" in her own way. I hope you take the time to read about them and the perspectives and advice they offer. I'm sure many of their stories will resonate with you.

This issue also includes interviews and articles featuring other fascinating women, some of whom you certainly will recognize. The cover features Nneoma Maduiké and Valerie Mason, recently named co-chairs of Otterbourg's newly established lender finance practice group, with an article that follows on page 116. You'll find Nneoma's interview with several women in the industry who discuss how the pandemic has affected them as working mothers on page 132.

Other highlights include a check-in with 12 women who were featured in past WISF issues. The changes in their careers are a testament to how being profiled in this issue of *The Secured Lender* can elevate your profile in the industry. Don't miss an

interview on page 120 with Bobbi Acord Noland of Parker Hudson Rainer & Dobbs, who was named SFNet's first female co-general counsel in October.

SFNet's Women in Secured Finance Conference, as referenced above, will be held live online on consecutive Wednesdays, June 16 and June 23. This year's format will be reimagined in response to the feedback we received about past conferences. We are partnering with Corporate Class, Inc. to offer attendees a high-quality, interactive, customized workshop using the SFNet Connect platform. We'll focus on the importance of developing an executive presence, a career progression and leadership skills. This workshop will cover:

- Understanding of how our actions can diminish our confidence and how we show up
- Addressing self-doubt and the imposter syndrome
- Gaining strategies for greater confidence and self-advocacy
- Making your work visible
- Mentorship, sponsorship and allyship
- Developing a roadmap for individual success

I look forward to connecting with you during the conference. Be sure to visit www.sfnet.com for details and registration, or reach out to Michele Ocejo at mocejo@sfnet.com.



■ **PAULA CURRIE**
Senior Vice President
PNC Business Credit



■ **LUCY CSIZMAS**
SLR Business Credit

Lucy Csizmas, a 25+ year veteran of asset-based lending, has been a managing director at SLR Business Credit for over three years and is based in Southern California. As part of Solar Capital Partners, with over \$7.5BB of investable capital, SLR Business Credit provides asset-based and factoring facilities secured by accounts receivable, inventory and equipment, ranging from \$500,000 to \$50MM.

Prior to joining SLR Business Credit, Lucy spent 10 years at a national bank-owned asset-based lender. Lucy was responsible for West Coast origination for asset-based lending transactions and factoring transactions for sister company. In addition, Lucy has held senior positions with investment banking firms as well as asset/business valuation and turnaround firms. Lucy's expertise is in providing value-added financing solutions to lower/middle-market companies that are in the manufacturing, distribution and service industries. Lucy is a member of the Turnaround Management Association (TMA), Association for Corporate Growth (ACG), The Secured Finance Network (SFNet), and the Opus Connect.

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

I would advise them to be flexible and willing to learn and find a mentor(s) who is aligned with their personal and professional goals whether they are male or female. I believe that the wider and more diverse the support system when first starting out in our industry, the more knowledge and opportunities will present themselves and oftentimes, from the least expected people/resources.

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

Please see above! Along with "negotiate like a man" when asking for a promotion, which I believe should now be termed "negotiate like an empowered woman."

What role has mentoring played in your career?

My mentor helped to form my career as a teacher and more importantly an inspirational advisor leading by example. As a woman entering the field of finance in the late '80s, he not only sponsored me for my Series 7,63 and 24 securities licenses, but instilled in me the confidence that there was no "glass ceiling" that I could not break through with the right amount of focus, knowledge, perseverance and tenacity. An interesting related story is that, when I was taking my securities exam in 1986, one of the questions was "Which two states still require a married woman to have her husband's signature in order to open a stock trading account?" and the answer was Texas and Utah! In 1986!

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I enjoy being a value-added resource to our borrowers and referral sources, making a difference to companies that might otherwise not be able to obtain sufficient working capital to sustain and grow their business. Least? The challenges associated with not being able to ultimately align our solution with the current market

environment, which is highly competitive and expectations at times unrealistic.

How do you balance work/personal time?

I have my personal senior office administrator – my adopted Chihuahua Terrier, to help me on both fronts!

What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I believe that everyone has had their own personal challenges/experiences with the dynamics around working remotely. I think that our industry has adapted very efficiently and creatively with virtual conferences, zoom meetings and even drone-facilitated inventory test counts! In my role as managing director for business development on the West Coast, it has been challenging not being able to meet in-person with my colleagues and referral sources, but I believe that most everyone has adapted for now. It is more difficult without meeting in-person with prospective borrowers, but we have thankfully been able to arrange management calls/Zoom meetings and companies recognize that we are all experiencing an extremely unusual dynamic (hopefully NEVER to be repeated). This dynamic has not created a negative impact with our ability to fund new borrowers. In fact, I had the unexpected benefit of funding a rapidly growing paper towel/products manufacturer and a hand sanitizing products company early last year so there were certainly opportunities created by rapid demand if the lending institution was nimble enough to react accordingly.

What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I believe it will be more individualistic than perhaps anticipated. Time will tell!



JENNIFER ROSS
 SLR Business Credit

Jennifer Ross is a senior vice president with SLR Business Credit and manages the operations team working out of the Utah office. Her current responsibilities also include management of a factoring portfolio and underwriting new business.

Jennifer began her career in consumer and mortgage lending and transitioned to commercial asset-based lending and factoring when she joined Summit Financial Resources in 2009. During her tenure with Summit, Jennifer held various positions in both operations and portfolio. In 2019 Summit was acquired by SLR Senior Investment Corp where Jennifer played an instrumental role in integrating the existing Summit portfolio and staff to the SLR Business Credit platform.

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

There are so many answers to this question. It is hard to know where to begin. My best advice would simply be to always take advantage of any opportunity that presents itself. Some opportunities are clear: take advantage of offered training, licensing, and participate in special projects and networking opportunities. Other opportunities are not as clear and can come disguised as problems. Do not be afraid to get involved! Some of my best “education” has come from working through and resolving issues with the help of a mentor.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I enjoy problem solving and finding solutions. It is extremely rewarding when you can assist a client through a difficult time in their business. I also enjoy collaborating with my team to find ways to improve upon processes and procedures within our organization.

How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

When I started my career, I had several small children. For me, work-life balance was often very difficult. In my opinion, flexibility is key when attracting women to our industry. I think offering family-friendly benefits and encouraging all employees to use them helps develop an organizational culture that can make work-life balance much easier. Actively developing women as leaders is also a great way to attract women to your organization.

What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Due to travel restrictions, securing new business has been a

challenge. As an organization, we have had to find creative ways to use technology in place of in-person meetings to originate prospects and communicate with networking contacts. Camaraderie and team building that comes when colleagues are in the same physical location is also something that has been missed and is something that I used to take for granted. Looking back, some of our best collective ideas have developed organically through casual workplace conversation that turned to business. While working remotely, SLR Business Credit has used virtual conferencing on a regular basis to try and keep in touch with each other. Some have been formal meetings, while others have been casual “virtual happy hours” that included other household members and even pets.

What do you think work will look like post-pandemic world?

Due to health concerns during the pandemic, remote work has become a necessity for many of us. As a result, many businesses that would not have considered this option in the past have found that working remotely can be successful. I think some businesses will opt to continue full time remote work permanently; while, others may offer more flexibility to work remote as necessary or will use a hybrid in-person/remote work week schedule while retaining an office space for meetings, training and team building. I also believe that business travel will be reduced but not eliminated. Because virtual conferencing has become a common practice over the last year, more consideration may be given to whether the travel is necessary, or if the same goal may be accomplished through the use of technology tools.

**SLR Business Credit congratulates
our colleagues Lucy Csizmas and Jennifer Ross
for their features in *The Secured Lender*.**



LUCY CSIZMAS



JENNIFER ROSS



**Thank you for your
vision and leadership.**

**SLR Business Credit moves quickly, with confidence,
to provide your financing. We lend on a custom mix of
assets, without regulatory restrictions, to meet your
cash flow needs today.**

SLR Business Credit stands ready to create a financing
structure that meets your unique financing needs, and
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