



Almost 15 years ago, Sara Whitley “fell into” the mortgage profession, almost by chance. “I started as a temp receptionist,” she recalls. Fortunately, for so many people throughout Wisconsin, and particularly in Dane County, Sara also says that she immediately fell in love with the opportunity to be able to help people. Working her way up, she gained incredible experience in all aspects of real estate financing, as a loan processor, affordable housing specialist, and more, before becoming a loan officer more than four years ago.

Since that time, she’s been helping borrowers in need of loans of virtually any amount. “Last month I helped a customer with a \$30,000 loan and someone else who needed a \$1 million loan. I can work with everyone thanks to the company I work for and the products we offer. One of the reasons I really enjoy working at Old National is because we are a full-service bank and service our own loans,” she says.

Even better for Sara, and those she helps to obtain loans, is the team environment she is grateful to be a part of at Old National. “I’m thankful for my business partners that I work with both in our retail department and on the investment side of things. After building trust with my clients, I know I can maintain my relationship with them, and offer them more through life. If they want to buy a car for their children or get life insurance, for example, I have great resources for them,” she explains.

With a supportive team surrounding her, Sara is free to do what she does best, which is to help individuals and families through the mortgage process with honesty, integrity, and a focus on communication. “I will never give a client the run around, and I make sure that they are always in the loop on the status of their loan,” she says. “Buying a home

is a very big deal. It can seem overwhelming, especially if it is your first time. I never want a customer to feel intimidated, like I’m just this person in a suit waiting to crunch numbers. I do whatever I can to make them comfortable, because it is important to me to treat every client the way I would want to be treated.”

Not surprisingly, with such obvious enthusiasm and a clear passion for customer service, Sara has been recognized in her industry for continuing to raise the bar. She’s been honored as a Top 10 Loan Originator numerous times and has been recognized for her tireless efforts in helping home buyers to obtain down payment assistance. To date, Sara has helped buyers to secure more than \$400,000 in down payment assistance to buy a home.

Although Sara admits that receiving the awards does make her feel good, “helping people is honestly the most rewarding part of my work,” she says. To that end, she spends much of her free time trying to help others in additional ways. Whether she’s helping build homes for Habitat for Humanity, hosting customer education seminars, or actively working with the Waunakee Rotary, Sara is equally devoted to serving her community. She’s also committed to doing her part to ensure and promote diversity within the mortgage industry, and is currently working with organizations and associations to spearhead various diversity in lending initiatives. “My family is diverse, so making sure that we have diversity in mortgage lending is important to me,” she says.

Clearly, no matter what Sara decides to throw her heart and soul into, others benefit from her efforts. She has no intention of slowing down, either. “I feel very fortunate to be where I am. I’m very proud that Old National was recognized in 2017 as one of the World’s Most Ethical Companies by the prestigious Ethisphere Institute, for the 6th consecutive year. I’m glad to be a part of this team, and I’m excited to continue to be able to help people buy their own homes. I don’t want anyone to ever give up or think they can’t afford a house. I want everyone to know there are options available, and we can help.”

*Sara Whitley*

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