Q&A

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What led you to pursue a career in corporate finance?

I started my career in banking through the Standard Chartered International Graduate programme, which allowed me the opportunity to rotate through various products within the bank, and truly understand what a day-to-day role in Investment Banking entails. As a graduate, fresh out of university, it is sometimes challenging to determine exactly where your true interests may be, so getting some exposure early on was definitely useful. Though I did enjoy the work, I was initially a bit hesitant to pursue a full-time role in Corporate Finance, and it was partially on the back of encouragement by various senior colleagues, bosses and mentors that I started seeing a future in it. I would also find myself gravitating back to the product and type of work over time – the constant learning and underlying strategic elements were some of the factors that drove this for me. This did mean that I took some time to ultimately land in my current career path, having worked in a few organisations, with exposure to both debt and equity products. However, for me, the learnings and experience gained from each have been building blocks for my current role at RMB.

What is your favourite sector in which to do a deal and why?

I was lucky enough to gain exposure to the Telecom, Media and Technology (TMT) sector quite early on in my career. After a period of working in debt on a more general sector basis, I have now been solely focused on TMT advisory for close to seven years, and still find it as engaging as when I first started. The sector is actually extremely broad and, at RMB, we look at it holistically (i.e. from mobile operators, digital infrastructure providers to ICT players and fintechs), which provides me and my team with an opportunity to appreciate how these sub-verticals work together and in isolation. More generally, we all constantly engage in one or more elements of the TMT value chain throughout the day. Taking a step back to be able to understand how all of these come together for us to make a phone call or send a WhatsApp message, for example, is fascinating to me. I also appreciate the fact that technology is constantly evolving, meaning that you need to keep abreast of both local and international innovation in the space to be able to provide the optimal strategic advice to your clients. Finally, I believe that the sector can transform a population – take M-PESA in Kenya or the rapid deployment of fibre to the home in South Africa, for example – being at the forefront of this is something that I value about the sector.

When things go wrong, what advice would you give about moving on?

Resilience is a big component of a career in Corporate Finance, which is easy to say, but more challenging to have consistently. Firstly, when things do start going wrong, try not to take it personally. Again, that can be tricky in this line of work, given the level of personal accountability, time and effort put into producing the best quality of work for your client and your team. One piece of advice that has helped me in this regard is to take a step back and see it from the viewpoints of others working on the deal. Secondly, while something going wrong shouldn't set you back, it is important to try to use each and every deal as a learning experience. Carve out a little bit of time to ask yourself some questions – (i) what could have been done differently in certain situations, (ii) were there any 'unravelling' points in the deal, and/or (iii) could these have been approached or mitigated in another way to get to a different outcome? When I first started working in Corporate Finance, and even now, I noticed how the executives and senior transactors in my team would always be incredibly purposeful towards all of their engagements on a deal. Try to take a step back and use something going wrong deliberately as a learning experience, rather than holding onto it as a 'mistake'.

What advice would you give a young woman working on her first deal?

Hopefully without sounding too "preachy", there are five general pieces of advice that I was told in some form or another early on in both my career in Investment Banking, and in Corporate Finance when working on deals:

- Be conscious of how you show up and present yourself. I have seen small things like body language and tone of voice shift the dynamics in a meeting room,
- Acknowledge biases, but don't let them weigh you down. This can also extend to how you take feedback and advice – very often, something that worked for one person may not work for you. For me, the more helpful path has been not to disregard feedback, but rather to learn to incorporate it in a way that feels authentic to you,
- Being over prepared is never a bad thing, especially when you should be the person closest to the details,
- It's hard for everyone the first time, it gets easier over time. This goes back to how important resilience is for a role in Corporate Finance; and finally,
- Gaining experience doesn't happen automatically – you need to be purposeful in learning from your mistakes. The Corporate Finance environment can, unfortunately, be unforgiving to those that repeat their mistakes. Learning has to be a key element of your day-to-day, especially when working on a deal.