ALVIS KOK

LINKEDIN



INTERVIEW DONE BY LIM JING EN

Alvis dedicates himself to the principle of giving his utmost effort in all endeavours. With 1 year and 3 months as a Finance Management Associate at Sea, his role encompasses Business Assurance, Group Financial Reporting, and Group Controllership. Alvis had amassed prior experience during internships at Deloitte, AT ADLER, Ernst & Young, and TAO Consulting Limited in Hong Kong, where he specialised in complex financial derivatives and private equity valuation. His steadfast commitment and diverse experiences position him as a promising asset in finance management.

COULD YOU SHARE WITH US YOUR CURRENT ROLE AND WHAT IS YOUR TYPICAL DAY LIKE IN SEA?

I am currently a finance management associate at Sea, which is the parent company of Shopee. For the financial side, Sea is a more unique firm compared to others since they have a 2 year programme with a job rotation every 6 months to allow employees to experience new things within their department/area of expertise. Sea has a start-up culture and employees are given autonomy to try new things.

I rotated across Business Assurance, Internal Audit, Process Enhancement and I am now in Financial Reporting which is consolidation. I am mainly responsible for maintaining financial reporting within Sea and I am required to consolidate financial statements, support audit processes as well as working with external financial auditors to file with relevant financial authorities. We also help with the drafting of financial statements as well as crafting of certain disclosures in financial statements. Due to the unique rotation style at Sea, I am able to learn new things in finance since there are many different roles available and also am able to see things from different perspectives.

On a daily basis, it is more of preparing monthly and quarterly finances, balance sheet analysis and investigating fluctuations in balance sheet items as well as additional reporting on the digital banking side.

WHAT IS THE WORK LIFE BALANCE IN FINANCE, AND HOW DOES ONE COPE WITH THE HIGH LEVELS OF COMMITMENT AND STRESS?

For work life balance, time management is very important. If you manage your time well, you will be able to become more productive and do more in less time.

For me there are peak and off-peak periods which are quite common in accounting and finance fields. Life is not just about work and time management is key in the long run in order not to burn out too quickly and too early on. Now there are a lot of technology available which you

can leverage on to use it to your advantage and help you schedule your day and your rest time so that you can get work done and also rest adequately. For example, a simple one is using Google Sheets for a simple task list. You should also come up with a timetable and set your work tasks as well as set aside time for wind-down routines that can help you destress such as going for a run, going to the gym or taking a short nap. When you have a schedule that you can refer to, you should review is regularly and update it if there are any changes so you will not forget anything and you will not be so stressed since you know at what time what task will be done.

FROM YOUR PAST WORK EXPERIENCE IT SEEMS LIKE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE IN A LOT OF ASPECTS WITHIN FINANCE, COULD YOU SHARE WITH US MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES IN YOUR VARIOUS INTERNSHIPS AND HOW IT LED YOU TO YOUR CURRENT JOB AT SEA TODAY?

I enjoyed school in NUS a lot and went out of my comfort zone to try a lot of new things. Even for my internship, I went for very different specialisations such as accountancy, HR, strategy, and finance related to try out what I like and what I don't like. There is no pressure to stick to only one specialisation for all your internships and in fact it is during internships where you should be experimenting to find out what you like. And even though I was from Accountancy, I landed my current job as it is a crossover between accounting and finance.

Soft skills are also very important as I needed to learn how to communicate with team mates, which requires interpersonal communication. For auditing, I also had to learn how to manage tight deadlines and technical skills such as knowing how to use the softwares for finance and accounting.

I NOTICED THAT YOUR INTERNSHIP AT TAO CONSULTING WAS IN HONG KONG, IN WHAT WAYS HAS THE GLOBAL IMMERSION EXPERIENCE BENEFITTED YOU?

I was on exchange for Student Exchange Programme and was called back early and thus I decided to try an overseas internship at TAO Consulting in Hong Kong. At TAO Consulting I had the opportunity to talk to C Suite executives and to people from foreign firms which allowed me to see things in a new and different perspective. In Hong Kong, the working pace is way faster than Singapore, which in a way prepared me well for work in Singapore. The fast working pace can be stressful at times so there is a need to find different ways to destress such as exercising or engaging in hobbies. Cultural wise, there were some cultural differences working in a foreign country as well as working with foreign firms. Sometimes communicating with colleagues can be a bit confusing since different words can mean different things in certain cultures. For example, I had the pleasure of working with LVMH and the Parisians during my time at TAO Consulting, who tend to be very direct with their words which took some time to get used to, but most of them mean no harm. Also, time differences can be a pain. A tip would be to find a mentor for yourself at the workplace so that the learning curve will not be too steep for you and learn to ask good questions and appropriate timings.

I NOTICED THAT YOU DID AN EXCHANGE IN NETHERLANDS IN MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY, WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE AND HOW THAT BENEFITTED YOU AS WELL?

It was one of the best times of my life and it was a very eye-opening experience. My partner university was in town and I was able to see people from all over the world. I made a lot of friends during my exchange and even made some of my closest friends through this exchange and we still keep in contact today. I did a lot of traveling, trying out new good food and enjoyed myself a lot. Obviously being in a foreign country comes with discrimination, and one example is Caucasians covering their mouths when they see me and my friends who look obviously Asian, and a storekeeper refusing to sell clothes to my Asian friend. These things are quite common and should be expected but it did not ruin the experience since my friends and I just laughed it off and did not take it too personally. Working with foreigners in firms may also expose you to such situations so it was a good thing to know how to deal with such situations for the future. You should learn to see things in a positive mindset to learn and experience new things.

HOW CAN ONE STAND OUT AMONGST OTHER FINANCE GRADUATES IN THE TECHNOLOGY SECTOR?

It is important to put yourself out there and outside of your comfort zone, as well as find a mentor who can develop your abilities. Definitely you should venture out and try different things and aspects of finance in order to build a strong foundation and be able to afford flexibility in your career in future. Go for more internships to meet more people and diversify your network.

WHAT SOFT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?

Soft skills that often stand out in interviews are conflict management and problem solving. Employers want to know if you are capable of solving issues on the spot and managing people in the team or clients. For those that know what they want to do specifically, a tip is to approach seniors that are in positions that you currently want and do not be afraid to ask them for tips or advice in general. Lastly, you should not be afraid to take Leave of Absence (LOA) as it is during your student days where you are in a position to try out the most things with very little repercussions. It is better to take LOA and intern rather than graduate then starting interning as it does not look very good on the resume and may be a red flag to future employers.

HOW CAN ONE FIND A MENTOR?

You can start from school and find seniors via school events or even networking events. You can then befriend seniors and network with them. You can also sign up for various mentoring programmes. At work, you can find someone who is more senior than you that you can befriend.

ANY ADVICE FOR ASPIRING STUDENTS WHO WANT TO WORK IN CORPORATE FINANCE?

You should find internships that are very broad and cover very large areas as it will value-add to your resume and portfolio if you know more things and have broader

experiences. For accounting, you can take the professional certifications and go for advance tax classes. Talk to professors who are often experts in their area of expertise and receive valuable advice from them. Of course, have fun along the way and learn things or skills that are transferable to finance. My current role has a lot of technical skills involved, which I have learn from past modules in NUS, so pay attention in class and focus on learning the content and skills that you can take away from the modules.