SEAN HU



Investment Banking Associate at BDA Partners &
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Bachelor of Business Administration (Accountancy) (2018)

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Sean was a distinguished member of the NUS Business School undergraduate population who developed a keen passion for the investment banking industry. Apart from his outstanding performances in his course of accounting, he also involved himself heavily in a plethora of extra-curricular activities, including acoustic band, table tennis and basketball. More than that, he has given back to the community as the fundraising in-charge of Kent Ridge Hall FLAG Committee. Given his impressive work ethic and proficient grades, he secured analyst roles in reputable companies including the likes of Keppel Capital, Standard Chartered as well as BNP Paribas.

Today, he is an Investment Lead at Endowus having previously plied his trade as an Investment Banking Associate at BDA Partners.

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INTERVIEW

Could you run us through a realistic and unfiltered day in the life of an investment banker?

Depending on whether there is a meeting in the morning, I will usually reach the office at around 9am. The day commences with me replying to urgent emails and updating my respective deal teams for the live deals I am working on. I would say the schedule for the rest of the day is usually pretty fluid. There might be pitches where I will have to discuss with senior bankers on the deliverables and deadlines. There might be live deals in various phases that I have to work on. There might also be multiple back-to-back meetings on some days. I would say it is imperative to be able to prioritise tasks well and know how to deconflict whilst managing relationships with various stakeholders.

What are some of the programmes or extracurricular activities that you have participated in that you feel has helped you in pursuing a role in investment banking?

It is important to plan your time strategically. To be frank, I didn't even know the term investment banking back in Year 1 and 2. I had most of my extracurricular activities then which were all non-IB related. I would say though that these programmes and activities honed my interpersonal skills and leadership capabilities which are definitely useful. Nonetheless, joining CCAs that provide you with the opportunity to build a professional network is very important. Personally, I would recommend the Investment Banking Club and Pathfinders Network.

What are some important traits that would help an investment banker and what made you realise that it is a good fit in terms of personality, interests and values for you? What are some of the things that are enjoyable or challenging in the role?

Attention to detail and good time management are the common traits that are usually mentioned. But something that I think is good to mention is to not go into Investment Banking with the expectation that you will just hustle for a couple of years and transition to the buy-side. If you are looking to join Investment Banking, you have to possess the interest and passion for the industry and what the job entails and also account for all the downsides commonly associated with the industry, including the highly stressful environment and the less-than-optimal work-life balance. Ultimately, it is good to have that long-term mentality and view Investment Banking as a lifetime career. That way, you will feel comfortable and continue to excel at your job even when you fail to execute your "exit option".

The challenges are precisely the things I like about the industry – the job requires both quantitative analysis and qualitative strategic thinking. I won't deny that there are a lot of mind-numbing tasks, but that won't change the nature of the job. If you like a challenging career, can function under high pressure and long working hours, and derive a sense of satisfaction when you deliver solutions backed by numbers and well-supported assumptions, Investment Banking is the right career for you.

What are some important traits that would help an investment banker and what made you realise that it is a good fit in terms of personality, interests and values for you? What are some of the things that are enjoyable or challenging in the role?

I interned with the M&A team at Standard Chartered and was a full-time investment banking analyst with the TMT investment banking sector team at BNP Paribas. I then moved on to BDA Partners where I was most recently an investment banking associate. The qualities and traits these companies look out for are pretty similar. The candidates have to first possess the required technical capabilities. The first filter will always be what's on your resume. You will need to at least look relevant to be selected. Your technical capabilities will be tested repeatedly either through face-to-face interview or modelling test/case studies. Once you pass that stage, your attitude will be a key factor. Your commitment, passion and willingness to give it your all are traits these companies look out for. Thirdly, it would be your personality. You should not fake it, but it is good to be able to get along with people from different backgrounds and with different personalities.

What advice do you have for undergraduates seeking a career in Investment Banking? What didn't you know before you got into this industry that you wish someone had told you? What would be a good way to start?

I would say that it is definitely important to possess a long-term view as I previously mentioned. If you don't and recklessly enter the industry thinking you can "exit" to the buy-side after a couple of years, you may feel really trapped and depressed after spending some time in this job. Investment Banking is an attractive career for its perceived prestige and monetary reward. However, this job is much more than that. Personally, I feel that the training and level of intensity of work offered in Investment Banking are unparalleled to other professions and these are valuable experiences to have for both personal and professional career development. It is definitely an amazing profession to enter, but it would be best for one to adopt a holistic mindset and take into account all factors before making that jump into Investment Banking.

Speaking to friends and seniors who have already had investment banking experience would be a good way to start. Being a self-starter to find resources and understand more about the industry online is essential.