

Banking on women

Having achieved financial independence just five years after graduation, this SMU alumna is on a quest to empower more women through greater financial awareness.



► **Anna**, a force of nature who is inspiring women and transforming lives through financial literacy.

“I want to know how smart financial management can impact my life,” Anna Haotanto writes on her company website, The New Savvy. Not just her life but others’ as well, it turns out. As a mentor to other women for all matters financial, Anna has been recognised as one of FORTUNE’s Most Powerful Women (2017, 2016 and 2015).

“In my university years, I benefitted from having great mentors,” Anna explains. “They taught me about life, work and money.” Now, the Singapore Management University (SMU) alumna mentors up to five young people at any one time, guiding them over coffee. Her reward comes when she sees their self-esteem and confidence bloom.

A different game plan

Anna’s decade of experience working across different verticals in the finance industry and her voracious reading of finance books paid off early, as by age 28, she had earned enough not to have to worry about finances any more.

In 2015, she set up The New Savvy, believing that sound financial knowledge could help other women the way it had helped her. “I think it’s crucial for women to be active in managing their finances,” says Anna. “We are not competing for the most returns or to make the most money, but to be empowered.”

Her company is currently Asia’s leading online platform for financial and career issues for women, drawing 320,000 monthly page views and 30,000 subscribers. From being dismissed at its start as “just another blog” with a too-narrow focus, The New Savvy has since been featured on CNBC, Forbes, Reuters and Business Insider, among other publications.

“First love”

Anna traces her inspiration to her Junior College years, when she started volunteering with various welfare groups. “I noticed how many women were stuck in unhappy situations, incapable of earning enough to move on,” she shares. “That motivated me to protect myself financially.”

The 32-year-old considers SMU as the launch pad where her passion for Finance was ignited. At the time, her family was in financial straits, with debts from her parents’ textile business to clear. Anna took on various part-time jobs, from sales to waitressing and tutoring, while studying.

Money was a concern, but everything came into focus once her lessons started.



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Anna Haotanto,
The New Savvy Founder & CEO.



► **Anna** (bottom row, centre) at ‘The Future is Female’ conference, Asia’s largest women-only personal finance conference, organised by her company, The New Savvy.

From being fascinated by the intricacies behind the workings of money, she fell in love with the subject. Her enthusiasm stretched to the point that she would find ways and means to sit in on more lectures from different modules, even though she would not be awarded credits for them.

Did she already have a vision for the future, then? “Strangely, having my own business was the last thing I imagined,” she muses. “I wanted to work in the finance industry, but being at SMU made me certain that I wanted to make a bigger impact helping others, beyond developing myself.”

Transforming lives

Anna’s experiences at university also shaped her desire “to touch hearts”, and the entrepreneur now actively engages in her other passions—children’s issues, education and human rights. Studying in SMU had widened her perspective, and she felt enabled to pursue anything she wanted.

Promoting financial literacy remains Anna’s core pursuit, because she is



► **Anna** welcoming the crowd at the SMU Women Alumni launch as President.

convinced it can transform lives. “I’ve met many strangers at various events who tell me that they read and love The New Savvy,” she beams. “Such feedback is precious to me, and these women are my motivation.”

There’s no slowing down. The businesswoman also heads Women in FinTech for the Singapore FinTech Association, and last year founded the SMU Women Alumni, which she is President of. Anna states: “I’ve always wanted to help people and this is the best way I know how.”