
LISTEN TO YOUR INNER VOICE, AND TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

Monica Jalife – Senior Portfolio Manager at Pinnacle Associates, Ltd.
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Welcome back to our Women Advisor Blog Series, an ongoing discussion that spotlights the unique perspectives of successful female advisors in this traditionally male-centric industry. Today we speak with Monica Jalife, Senior Portfolio Manager at Pinnacle Associates.

WisdomTree: What's your greatest challenge today as your company grows?

Monica: Our team culture is very important to us. So, as we look to bring in the best new talent, we also gauge how each person will fit our culture. But you don't really know 100% until you hire that person. Our team is very diverse and includes women at all levels of the organization.

I'm always extremely happy when women join us and that includes when we promote from within. We are all hard workers, but we use every opportunity possible to have fun and continue building a great team culture. We look for people who can do both.

WisdomTree: What obstacles have you faced as a woman in the financial industry that you are most proud of overcoming?

Monica: I've faced many obstacles through the course of my career, and I'm very proud of getting to this point. One of the biggest obstacles was getting into the financial services industry as a woman—and on top of that, a foreign national woman with very little experience. I had an industrial engineering degree from a university in Mexico City and little to no experience.

I feel like I broke a huge barrier as I was able to communicate what a great addition to a team I would be. And here I am 23 years later. I also stressed my work ethic and desire to learn. My persistence and enthusiasm helped deliver the message that hiring me would be a long-term investment by the firm. And it was.

I have moved through the ranks and contributed to the growth of our team ever since. And I did continue learning. Within just a few years of entering the financial services world, I got my MBA at NYU Stern school of Business, completed the CFA charterholder program and got my CFP designation.

WisdomTree: How has working as a female advisor in a traditionally male world changed you?

Monica: I have learned to become more assertive and confident. As women, we sometimes doubt ourselves or are more conservative in how we approach things. Working in a male dominated industry has changed me in the sense that I "go for it" just as I have seen many of my male colleagues do.

I am not afraid to ask for what I want. The worst thing that could happen is that you get no for an answer. But nine times out of ten, you get what you're asking for.

WisdomTree: Investing is all about risk versus reward. What risks did you have to take to get where you are, and would you do anything differently if you could go back in time?

Monica: I grew up in Mexico City, completed my engineering degree in a prestigious university and had a great job lined up. During my college years, I visited New York

City and completely fell in love with it. During one of those trips, I also discovered there were so many opportunities in financial services.

I was always analytical and knew that I wanted to work in a field where I could apply my analytical skills while also helping people. Shortly after graduation, I gave up a promising job and moved to New York City with a dream: to make it there. This was a huge risk to take.

My first year was really tough, as I was relentlessly looking for a job and knew very few people there. I also needed my prospective employer to sponsor me for a work visa. I moved to New York in July of 2001, shortly before the 9/11 attack, which I remember like it was yesterday.

I fell even more in love with New York as I witnessed first-hand all the people coming together to help those in need and overcome such a tragedy. But it was a sad and lonely period for me. At times I considered going back to Mexico, but my determination and dream kept me going.

I ended up getting a job at Pinnacle in 2002, and what a journey that began. The first few years in New York helped me become who I am today, and I learned a lot about myself. So, if I could go back in time, I would do it exactly the same.

WisdomTree: why should clients choose a woman as their financial advisor?

Monica: Clients should work with an advisor they trust. One who understands their situation and listens to them. It should also be someone who makes them feel comfortable and always has their best interests in mind. I believe that listening to our clients to truly understand where they're coming from is one of the foundations of a successful long-term relationship.

I might be biased, but I feel that women in general are better listeners. I always make sure to understand where each spouse is coming from and give the attention required to make each participant comfortable. That might mean spending more time with one spouse and meeting them where they are.

One common complaint from women who have lost their spouse, is that their financial advisor used to talk mostly with their spouse but now doesn't take the time to understand them or deal with them the same way. When this happens, it's not uncommon for them to switch advisors.

Empathy and emotional connection are very important, and in many instances, a woman working with a female advisor can develop a deeper connection than she can with a male advisor.

WisdomTree: what advice would you give to a woman who is just starting in her career as a financial advisor?

Monica: Keep learning and feeding your curiosity. What I love about our profession is that it's always changing. You need to keep yourself current and relevant, and that means constantly learning and adapting to new information and different environments.

Build and foster genuine relationships as you network. Have fun along the way. Pay it forward and use any opportunity with your school or professional organizations to mentor other women and help them grow. This also applies to your place of work. Promote women from within. Always believe in yourself. Listen to your inner voice and trust your instincts. Do not be afraid to ask and keep moving forward. Every time you fall, you'll get back up stronger.

Find activities that help keep you balanced and help you re-focus. As women, we have too many things to balance out—our family, our jobs, our well-being. At times, this can seem daunting. But we just need to take a step back and re-center. Your well-being should be a priority, so take the time for yourself. It will pay off in the other areas of your life.

Follow your dreams and work towards achieving them. Don't let the day-to-day grind steer you away from them. The sky is the limit!

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