

LifeStories

I GREW UP ON A DAIRY FARM IN GREEN BAY, WIS.,

where I helped my father milk the cows. I was awarded an academic scholarship to attend the University of Nebraska at Omaha and majored in business and finance. My courses about the stock market piqued my interest and I liked the people I was meeting.

I graduated from college in December 1991, and shortly afterward a friend introduced me to someone at Smith Barney in Omaha. I interviewed along with two other students but I was the only one who got a second interview. I was given a test that partly involved cold calling people from the New York office who role-played as potential clients. I failed miserably. They said I was too nice. But I got a call from the branch manager, who said, "Either the test is wrong, or I am. And I don't think it's me." He had me return to the office and interview with the 17 people on his team. I got a thumbs-up and was hired as a financial advisor.

Not long afterward, I was ranked in the top quintile of the group of all the advisors hired in the same month across the U.S. It turned out I was a great cold caller. That's how I built my business, with bonds and preferred stocks. When I started, the branch manager told me if I worked hard I had an opportunity to not only change my life, but the lives of my kids and their kids as well. That has stayed with me.

I became national training officer at Smith Barney and then held several executive positions in branch and sales management and recruiting and operations, finishing at Morgan Stanley Smith Barney. My family had moved back to Chicago after assignments around the country when the company asked me to move to Los Angeles. My 17 years with there had meant four moves for my children. I decided not to move again and risked a lot by leaving to search for a new opportunity, but I believed in myself.

I joined Baird last November. It's been a great experience. The people and culture were a big draw for me. Strong Midwestern values are very evident, and the majority of the associates are shareholders in the company who take a lot of pride in its success. It's very different than working for a publicly traded company. I also joined the firm because of CEO Paul Purcell, who's an advocate for the associates, the company and the industry.

I would tell someone starting out in this industry to walk in the door with passion and motivation. You can learn the technical information, but if you don't have a strong desire to succeed, you won't. We hear rejection every day in this business. I like to say you have to rain sunshine on people every day and not let it affect you.

In my free time I enjoy running and I cherish time with my family. My husband is a stay-at-home dad. My daughter is active in gymnastics and my son is on traveling baseball and football teams. So when I'm not at work we're often at one of their sporting events. **OWS**

AS TOLD TO PAT OLSEN



Denise Wypiszewski

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of the Private Wealth Management Group
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YEARS IN SECURITIES BUSINESS: 17