

Get Smart About Money

By Rohit Koshy | Bangalore | Published: 10th August 2015 06:00 AM |

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Bhargavi Sridharan loved reading finance and business magazines even in her school days, which led her to win several business competitions at school and college. She was the editor of the college newsletter at St Joseph's College of Commerce, Bangalore, and won the prestigious Ratan Tata scholarship at SP Jain Institute of Management And Research, Mumbai, where she did her MBA. After working for Tata Administrative Services (TAS) for almost 10 years, she decided to start FinMitra in late 2014, born out of her conviction that finance is a life-skill that needs to be taught.



“It’s very difficult to live life on one’s terms, if we are always worried about EMI payments, financing the kids’ education or working with a bad boss. Money is essential to life, yet no one is taught how to manage their money. Most people make one or two bad financial decisions, and get caught in a vicious circle that they are unable to get out of,” says Bhargavi explaining the need for financial education.

FinMitra attempts to simplify financial matters to help clients live a life of financial independence. It offers a four-step financial planning process that merges needs analysis with financial literacy for the client. Clients first list their top two or three goals and how much money they can save every month. An individual investment plan is generated by FinMitra using its proprietary algorithm, for every client based on their goals, investment horizon and risk profile. FinMitra facilitates the investments, taking care of all the necessary paper work to ensure clients do not have to take time out of their busy schedule for this. FinMitra then monitors each client's investments, and keeps them up to date on the financial environment.

FinMitra's second product is loan advisory; it guides customers to RBI approved lenders who can meet their requirements of home loans, vehicle loans, business loans and personal loans at a low rate of interest. Their proprietary tools allow FinMitra to give their services free to retail customers, because Bhargavi believes that high quality financial advice should be accessible to all. Only high- net worth clients and institutional partners are charged for FinMitra's services.

"I have been helping friends and family with their financial planning and investments for a while now. Our first client was a single mother, who found us from an online listing much before we were officially open for business. I was surprised and delighted at the opportunity to make a difference. We gave her a road map to financial security and made her feel confident about life," adds Bhargavi about her first client. FinMitra already serves a few thousand retail clients. Being part of TAS, the leadership fast-track programme of the Tata Group allowed Bhargavi to work on marquee deals across treasury, corporate and project finance, Mergers and Acquisitions, insurance, borrowing and investments. Her team raised over \$6 billion of debt and \$63 m of equity for various Tata Group companies. "The biggest take-away from corporate life was recognising my strengths in taking ownership of the task at hand, and orientation around outcomes, both of which are necessary for me today as an entrepreneur," says Bhargavi.

FinMitra works with schools and colleges to impart financial literacy to the students. Not only are young students interested, they also have an open mind. Catching them young also ensures that they do not make expensive money mistakes which they are otherwise prone to, such as spending the full salary from their first job, or buying a car or a bike, thinking it would be an asset. Even worse, young people borrow money to fund holidays, and then default on their personal loans, being unaware of personal credit scores.

Apart from this, FinMitra regularly conducts workshops in several top corporations to help build more effective personal finance habits amongst well-earning employees. Corporates use our workshops to build employee engagement, and often it is driven by their observations that in this consumption- driven culture employees would meaningfully benefit from valuable personal finance workshops. "At the end of all our sessions, several corporate employees walk up to us and say they did not even realise what mistake they had been making. Some of them continue to stay in touch with FinMitra, discussing their triumphs of how they are changing their spending, saving and investing habits. Conversations with these FinMitra 'alumni', strengthen our conviction that we are doing meaningful work," says Bhargavi. Learn more at www.finmitra.com

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