

# A CONTINUOUS LEARNING JOURNEY TO BUILD STRONG FOUNDATION AND DEEP EXPERTISE



We often hear of people with careers they did not originally studied for, or ended up specialising in something quite different from where they first started. We also come across young professionals making frequent lateral moves, chasing after higher pay or prestige, but not necessarily acquiring new or deep expertise.

As with the tech bubble days in early 2000s, the current consolidation in the banking industry and the emergence of financial technology (FinTech) are drawing professionals away from traditional banking to FinTech start-ups. Some may strike gold but others could find themselves displaced amid the shakeout and at a loss how to adapt to the rapidly changing environment.

In the economy of the future, deep expertise is the enabler of innovation, to identify and trigger critical changes that can create new businesses and new ways of doing things.

This is especially so for the banking and financial services industry where globalization and technology advancement have increased

the complexity and interconnectivity across markets and businesses. Major shifts in business landscape often lead to changing fortunes amongst players, with opportunities favouring those that are well-positioned and ready.

Planning for a successful and sustainable career should not be incidental or left to chance. It is a continuous journey to acquire core competencies that build a strong foundation, and specialist competencies to go deep.

Depending on the starting point and the next goal, it is important to identify the learning pathway that adds new and different dimensions to existing competencies.

The Financial Training Institute (FTI) embodies this principle in our training pathway and programme design. Among our panel of affiliated faculties, many of them exemplify the same principle in charting their career and learning pathways.

One of our affiliated faculty, a treasury market specialist, graduated with an engineering degree. He pursued a Master in Applied Finance that enabled him to move into banking. He was headhunted to be the chief financial officer (CFO) of a corporate, for the valuable experience in banking and finance from more than 10 years in treasury sales.

But the learning did not stop. Driven by the desire to deepen his accounting knowledge, he continued on to pursue and obtain the certified public accountant qualification. He also puts his insights to good use by facilitating specialist training for treasury professionals, and designing competency-based programmes for accounting professionals aspiring to become corporate treasurers and CFOs.

Another of our affiliated faculty was a teacher turned banker. He credited his deep specialist knowledge to the years spent working closely with the operations team. A keen learner who believes in lifelong learning, he searched out specialist training to plug gaps in banking, law, insurance, oil trading etc. The wealth of knowledge provided the solid foundation for a distinguished career in the highly specialized structured commodity trade financing industry.

The learning continues even after his retirement, as he rallies other senior practitioners to share different fields of expertise in specialist programmes that help hone the skills of younger bankers keen to learn the tricks of the trade.

FTI's participants also demonstrated strong work ethics and commitment towards raising their professional competencies. In recognition

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of their commitments in continuous learning and professional development, two of FTI's participants were conferred the IBF Aspire Award 2015 by The Institute of Banking & Finance (IBF). Koh Fu Khai, Relationship Manager from United Overseas Bank, and Ow Wee Leong, Senior Relationship Manager from Maybank Singapore were participants of the SMU Executive Certificate in Commercial Banking (IBF Level 1) programme.

Trained in accounting, Wee Leong began his career as an auditor before he took on the role of risk management and operations control for structured trade. Armed with three years of hands-on experience, he seized the opportunity to become a relationship manager handling structured trade and commodity financing.

Wee Leong enrolled in the certification programme, designed to equip participants with credit evaluation and structuring skills, to develop in-depth competencies in credit decision making for his current front office role.

Fu Khai graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Double Bachelor's Degree in Accounting and Business Administration (Finance) and started his career as a management associate with United Overseas Bank. He was placed on job rotation across various business units and geographical locations both locally and regionally, before assuming his current role as a corporate banking relationship manager. Fu Khai has gained new perspectives from the formal training in industry best practices, which have enhanced his credit evaluation and other financial competencies.

Both awardees have different starting points but benefited from the structured certification programme to acquire a strong foundation in core credit skills.

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Photos from IBF