

PERSPECTIVES

Taking Action to Advance Financial Literacy



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Millions of Americans are struggling to secure their financial futures: they carry too much debt, save too little for retirement and have no financial cushion to deal with life's twists and turns. Underlying this situation in many cases is a huge gap in their financial literacy. Many people have never been taught essential financial concepts to help them manage their money effectively so that they can achieve goals and minimize making major mistakes.

As a financial services professional and a staunch community supporter, I have placed the advancement of financial literacy squarely in the center of my life. I am proud to have helped Pershing launch a financial literacy program for elementary school students in downtown Jersey City, N.J. four years ago. Since then, Pershing's volunteers and I have learned many valuable lessons about cooperation, perseverance, and how to maximize our impact. Here are just four of these lessons.

1 IT HELPS TO HAVE STRONG ALLIES AND CHAMPIONS—AT EVERY STAGE.

Our ability to get a program started in Jersey City relied heavily on our partnership with the local chapter of Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Essex, Hudson and Union counties. They had already forged an excellent relationship with school administrators and teachers, and helped to facilitate a productive dialogue that led, ultimately, to our highly impactful financial literacy program.

Over time, we earned the trust of numerous stakeholders—from principals, to superintendents, to PTAs, to guardians and others—who helped us craft a program that would make the biggest impact. What was particularly exciting was to discover people in the school who absolutely *lit up* when they learned about our eagerness to volunteer to boost financial literacy. These individuals partnered with our volunteers and have become *true champions*, guiding the way and devoting their energies to build a program that will endure.

2 EVERYONE AT THE FIRM CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE, NOT JUST THE FINANCIAL PROS.

Pershing's Jersey City program has adopted the entire eighth-grade class of the local school with a curriculum that covers financial basics through several interactive sessions, spread out across the school year. For each session, we have six to eight Pershing volunteers engaging with the students. Some of these have been "front of the classroom" instructors with financial backgrounds, but that's only part of the picture.

Our program's success has been driven by an array of committed volunteers who are helping *in whatever ways they can*. Some individuals are creating the curriculum, while others are developing informational materials, slides or activity sheets. Some even act as coaches, working with small groups of students to drive home certain concepts. It's a true team effort—and everyone's contribution matters.

3 WE CAN DO MORE THAN TEACH—WE CAN OPEN UP A NEW WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY.

Many of us can recall in our childhoods seeing professional, well-dressed people walk in and out of impressive office buildings. It felt as if we might never enter—let alone work in—such an environment. Today’s inner city kids feel the same about *our offices*, which is why we made it a point to expose them to the inner workings of our businesses.

The students are primarily from families that live at, or in many cases, below the poverty line. Many have never experienced a modern workplace, and are very excited to visit our office. We bring them on a guided tour of many departments, including our trading desk, where they learn about the performance of brands they know like Apple, Nike and Google. We introduce them to professionals who show the students our technology capabilities and educate them on the solutions we deliver to the marketplace which help improve the financial lives of our investors. They are always amazed that so many different people—mathematicians, programmers, salespeople, writers, designers, trainers and others—all play important roles. It prompts an *Aha Moment*: “Yes, I *could* see myself working here.”

4 OUR WORK HAS THE POWER TO GENERATE POSITIVE MULTIGENERATIONAL IMPACT.

We have found that our financial literacy education efforts have unexpected and powerful effects that ripple across families and the community. Many of these students represent the first generation to be born in the U.S. As such, they are poised to become the “financial managers” for their guardians. They might be children, but they are equipping themselves, through the teachings of our volunteers, to help with credit applications, leases, bills, investing and saving methods and other financial complexities.

In similar fashion, I have seen how students in our program have become—as they are identified by their peers—“savvy” about money, saving and managing debt. Thus, when their friends become excited about getting “free” T-shirts or those “free” gadgets by applying for credit cards, our trained students become the voices of reason and fiscal responsibility.

It is not an overstatement to say our efforts to improve financial literacy today will have profound effects for the students, their families, their friends, their neighbors... and their respective networks....for generations to come. We are creating generational impact! By introducing knowledge and practical investing and savings concepts and techniques for minimizing common financial pitfalls, our team of volunteers is effectively raising the trajectories of many and preparing them for more financially secure futures.

Putting Insights Into Action

Meet with your relationship manager to discuss any questions you may have.

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