

Small Town to Big Apple: How Hannah Engberson Dares Mighty Things

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By some estimates, fewer than 2% of applicants will land a job at an investment bank. This makes Hannah Engberson, Finance, '24, extremely rare, especially considering that she grew up in rural Idaho with no expectation of pursuing a

college education, and her limited exposure to economics and finance included only two high school courses and a Dave Ramsey book.

Growing up in a small town, Engberson learned the value of hard work from a young age. Her parents and community respected hard work, and opportunities to work were always available. She was raised with horses and competed in high school rodeo. Calling herself "too competitive," she qualified for the state competition all four years. This constant competitive environment taught her a lot, including how to make small changes to improve herself.

"Even if it was February and there's three feet of snow, the horses still need to be ridden," she said. "I'm grateful I grew up with those values and expectation of hard work."

While she loved her community, in her teen years she started dreaming of bigger things. While she didn't know exactly what that bigger thing would be, she said she felt she owed herself the opportunity to explore something different.

"Home will always be there," she reasoned. "Why wouldn't I take that chance at 20 and explore something else? I see the value of enjoying a small-town life, and I also respect that desire to really want to make a name for yourself and push yourself to leave what's comfortable."

Hungry for adventure, Engberson taught English in Costa Rica post-high school and then nannied in New York City, where her social circle introduced her to recent college graduates working in various aspects of business. She was intrigued by their professional lives. During the Covid-19 pandemic she returned to Idaho, and then decided to study business at the Huntsman School.

Although Engberson loved the subject material and achieved top grades in her coursework, she struggled to feel like she belonged in business. Her first summer internship left her feeling frustrated and discouraged and doubting her decision to continue her business studies. In a finance class that fall, she met Paul Fjeldsted, retired managing director of Citigroup Global Markets Inc., and Senior Lecturer at the Huntsman School. Recognizing Engberson's aptitude for finance, he helped her focus her studies and build her resume in the profession. Under his guidance, she and a team of women students won the annual William & Mary Stock Pitch Competition, competing against leading schools worldwide. This competition is where Engberson said she felt the spark to enjoy the world of finance.



"It was the first time I did a project and found myself wanting to read more and wake up and look at what the stock was doing. I found myself having an opinion on what the stock should do and was genuinely interested in it," she explained.

The next year, she served as president of the Investment Club where she mentored the next women's team who also won the W&M Stock Pitch Competition.

"Whenever I doubted myself, [Paul] saw me as more than just a struggling student. He saw me as a real person. He reminded me of my potential and helped me believe that I was capable of greater things than I ever dreamed for myself," says Engberson, who credits his commitment to her success with giving her the confidence to approach Evercore, an investment bank in New York City, and ask for a job interview. Of the hundreds of candidates interviewed, Engberson was one of only two who were hired.

At the time of this article, Engberson has been in the Big Apple for four weeks and says the phrase Dare Mighty Things is taking on a whole new meaning.

"I think I use that phrase more now than I ever did in school," she said. "I constantly remind myself I have done hard things before, and I can continue to do hard things. I think that's what it means to dare mighty- when you push yourself and grow in the discomfort."

As in any new job, Engberson says it's like drinking from a firehose and often feels like she's in over her head. But she relies on her community of people she has found over the years to support her and encourage her. She hopes that as she continues to grow in her career and success that she'll be able to turn around and help the next wave of women realize their potential.

"When you get to where you're going, turn around and lift other people so they can have their own stories and opportunities. We can all give back and help others in different ways. We can continually be great students and great employees and pave the way for others joining the work force," she said.