

MAKING THE MOST OF WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES

# A love for finance and helping others

*Sharizah Shariff's job lets her combine her interest in working with numbers and people*

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As a senior corporate insolvency executive with the Ministry of Law's (MinLaw) Corporate Insolvency Division (CID), Ms Sharizah Shariff, 37, has seen former millionaires break down in front of her.

"As part of my job, I have to explain to a company's directors or an organisation's office bearers why we need to liquidate their company or organisation, and why they need to surrender all the assets and documents to the Official Receiver," she explained.

"They can be rather emotional, as it means that all their hard work in building up the company or organisation was for naught. In times like these, I just need to lend them a listening ear as they grieve over the loss."

She remains calm and professional even when company directors or office bearers become upset or defensive — a valuable skill acquired in her 18 years with MinLaw, where she started as a companies liquidation officer. Ms Shariff was recruited only two weeks after sitting for the final exams of her Diploma in Banking and Finance Services from Singapore Polytechnic in 1997.

"I've always been interested in numbers, and I initially had a desire to work in a bank. But I became interested in liquidation work in school, as it is considered part of banking services. When MinLaw offered me the job, I was up for it as it combines my professional interests with helping people."

## COMPLEX CASES

A typical day at work for Ms Shariff involves reviewing complex liquidation cases and looking into how outstanding issues can be resolved. While she still discusses especially complicated problems with her bosses, she enjoys being empowered to make decisions on the cases she works on.

"MinLaw provides a supportive work environment where officers' views are valued. We can make recommendations to management and play a vital role in shaping the outcome of cases."

On top of her caseload, she works on the regulation of activities of private liquidators, and mentors new officers.

"Whatever I've learnt about the law and liquidation, I pass it down to the new officers through on-the-job training, or when they approach me for help."

"I find mentoring others very fulfilling as I am learning at the same



Ms Shariff has tailored her learning path to equip her with crucial work-related skills. PHOTOS: KOH MUI FONG

time, too. After all, the law and its processes are continuously evolving."

While Ms Shariff mainly carries out her work in the CID office, on occasion, she has to be present at a company or organisation's office when documents, records or assets are being seized.

"It may sound cliched, but every day is different for me. I get to meet various people and learn how and why they set up these companies or organisations. I also get to know why these businesses failed, and learn from the directors about the pitfalls to look out for. I've gained really good insights into the business world from them."

A happier part of her job scope involves assisting employees in recovering their unpaid wages or Central Provident Fund (CPF) contributions from the wound-up organisations or companies.

"It's very fulfilling and satisfying when we are able to do this. We've had grateful members of the public try to send thank-you gifts, but of course, we can't accept them — I believe in staying professional. I tell myself that helping others is part of my job."

## A TAILORED LEARNING PATH

Ms Shariff chose to embark on a customised learning path, picking courses and qualifications that would come into good use in her job. For example, in 2009 she completed a Specialist

Diploma in Accounting and Finance from Temasek Polytechnic (TP). Her choice of diploma was borne out of her desire to learn more about liquidation.

"I felt it was the right time for me to learn more about the different aspects of accounting because my education was in banking and finance, but accounting is a key part of liquidation work. I felt that I really benefited from one-to-one learning opportunities with the lecturers at TP, as they were experts in the field."

Last year, she and a colleague were nominated to attend a three-month-long Insolvency Law course at Singapore Management University (SMU), with the course fees sponsored by CID.

"The course covered the legal aspects of liquidation. I was happy to be nominated for it — I felt that I was closing the loop and completing my skill-set. The course was only a few hours a week, so we could still manage our workloads."

"But whenever I took time off to study and sit for exams during my specialist diploma course, my supervisors and colleagues were always willing to pitch in to cover my work. I also had a supportive boss who allowed me to change my working hours and leave the office earlier, so that I could make it to my classes on time."

Currently, she is researching degree programmes and hoping to get sponsorship for her future studies from MinLaw. "Getting a degree

would be a form of self-fulfillment, to better myself and keep current with the trends in the legal and business worlds."

## OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

To relax, Ms Shariff enjoys reading, playing games on her mobile phone and watching movies and plays: "I read all genres, and I'll watch anything in the cinema — though my favourite movies are animated. When it comes to the theatre, I have a soft spot for local plays, especially those from directors Glen Goei and Ivan Heng."

She often takes her nephews on cartoon movie outings over the weekends. The doting aunt is the third child and only daughter in a family of four. Her three brothers are also in the civil service. "I guess you could say it's a family trait," she said.

Her advice to other non-degree holders who are heading out into the working world is to be patient.

"You don't have to rush. Learn what the world has to offer. Learn what your company has to offer, work together with them and you'll get to where you want to be eventually. When you have the time, go ahead and study, because it's important to upgrade yourself. Above all, you should have passion for your job."

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**Ms Sharizah Shariff**  
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