Alumna Saira Malik keeps a level head while navigating the sometimes volatile world of investments.

As the managing director of global equity investments at TIAA Global Asset Management in San Francisco, she uses the Learn by Doing philosophy honed at Cal Poly to face unprecedented market conditions with a nimble and collaborative attitude.

Learn how Malik charts her course for success.

Why did you choose a career in finance?
My parents emigrated from Pakistan and had a very strong work ethic, which they also instilled in me. When I was in high school, we often had the financial news channel on in our house. This sparked my interest in the stock market and prompted me to choose economics as my major at Cal Poly.

In such a competitive industry, how do you stand out?
In my junior year of college, I earned my stockbroker’s license and ran my own newsletter and brokerage business. I eventually turned that newsletter into my Learn by Doing senior project. I decided to learn investing on my own by rolling up my sleeves and taking a hands-on approach as a means of increasing my marketability.

Where do you look for inspiration?
My grandmother grew up in India and was one of the first women accepted into medical school. I have her diploma hanging in my daughter’s nursery as an inspiration for both of us. Like my grandmother, my goal is to set the right example for my children in both work and life by acting with integrity and working hard to achieve my goals.

What’s the most important thing you learned from the Great Recession?
The Great Recession taught me to remain flexible while maintaining a disciplined investment process. The global markets and economies are constantly changing, and we need to be able to filter the noise so that we aren’t constantly reacting to short-term data points.

How do you measure your own success?
In the investment industry, workplace success is measured in real time as the markets are always moving. This keeps the job interesting. I also value qualitative measures of success in terms of maintaining a satisfactory work-life balance.

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Saira Malik graduated from Cal Poly with a degree in economics and a concentration in finance in 1992.