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Temp job was golden chance for rising star

Childhood hardship and generous mentors gave asset firm COO the drive to achieve.

BY RONALD D. WHITE

Jeannine G. Vanian, 51, is chief operating officer of Kayne Anderson Rudnick, a boutique investment advisory firm in Los Angeles that manages nearly \$24 billion in assets for institutional, broker-dealer and high-net-worth clients. The 29-year-old company has 90 employees.

In 2017, Kayne Anderson Rudnick was ranked first on Barron's Top 100 Independent Advisors list. The annual ranking is based on a survey of more than 3,500 advisors. Virtus Investment Partners, based in Hartford, Conn., is the firm's parent company.



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Motivated

Vanian was born to an Armenian family living in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Her father, Ghazar, who was an accountant, died when Vanian was just 11. Watching her mother, Hasmig, struggle to support three children formed a lifelong determination.

"I decided I was going to be an independent woman that could take care of herself and whoever else I needed to take care of, including, obviously, my mother," Vanian said.

Early drive

The kind of long hours that Vanian would later devote to her career began early as she held various jobs while earning a degree in business and executive management at the American University in Cairo.

"I was working in the university

JEANNINE VANIAN, who watched her mother struggle to raise three children, formed a lifelong determination to succeed. She is chief operating officer at Kayne Anderson Rudnick, a top boutique investment firm.

administration office," Vanian said, "typing notes for teachers, organizing, filing, whatever needed to be done. It was not full time, but I was there as much as I could," while still studying and attending classes.

Finding mentors

By the time she earned her degree, some family members had moved to the U.S. Vanian decided to join them and wound up temping for Allan M. Rudnick while he was working as portfolio manager and chief investment officer for the Pilgrim Group. When he left to help start Kayne Anderson Rudnick, in 1984, he brought Vanian with him.

"I was there whenever needed," Vanian said. "I remember long hours, weekends, trying to help build a business. I was lucky to have a mentor, like Allan Rudnick, and the other two founders. They gave me the opportunity to try things out, to learn, to fail. Their positive encouragement was really important for me."

Climbing the rungs

Since coming on as an assistant, Vanian has been a portfolio administrator, director of portfolio administration and managing director. She has been chief operating officer since October 2005. When she took on more leadership responsibilities, her bosses

were encouraging.

Vanian said her superiors always said, "You can do this, you've got this. We know you can. We're confident in your abilities."

Secret sauce

Vanian said she has always shown that "I'm very passionate about the firm, and really believe in what we do here. Having the attitude of, we'll do whatever it takes as a team, and really look at new opportunities as a new challenge, something to really learn from."

Collaborative

As chief operating officer, Vanian

is responsible for “the operations department, trading, marketing, accounting, client services, human resources.” She’s part of a three-person executive team that reports to the parent company’s chief executive.

“I think it’s really powerful to have two partners,” she said. “We can bounce ideas off each other and collaborate. Because no matter what issue or decision we’re faced with, it’s nice to have two other opinions or points of view.”

Leadership style

“The key is really hiring the right

people that fit our culture and believe in what we’re doing. And then, it’s about keeping that talent” and not losing them to competitors. Vanian said she chooses people who are “team-oriented, believe in the mission and want to make a difference.”

Advice

Vanian said it’s important to have “an open-minded attitude. Be willing to listen to other viewpoints before you jump to conclusions. Be willing to change in your ways and evolve. And be open to feedback.”

Well rounded

Vanian has helped assemble a team unlike many in her industry. There are 22 languages represented by the company’s 92 employees. “We’re in finance, which is generally a male-dominated industry,” Vanian said, “and 41% of our employees are women, and 53% of our managers are women.”

“My hunch is that we might see more women come through here than many other firms in our industry primarily because when they go to the website, they see that there is a strong presence here. They are attracted to that.”

Personal

Vanian and her husband, Craig, have been married for about 20 years, she said. They have three children, a twin boy and girl who are nearly 16 and another daughter, 14. “And let’s not forget the dog,” she quipped. Traveling is a favored family activity. “We have been to, I think, 42 countries. The kids have been to between 20 and 25 countries. Exploring different cultures as much as we practically can is something that we love to do.”

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