

Thought Leadership

Why Michelle turned her back on the world's leading private wealth firms – and what it says about the industry

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We chose to feature Michelle because her experience as an investor is one many women quietly share. Her decision to turn frustration into action, founding The Beam Network, reflects the kind of resilience we admire in the families and founders we work with.

This is a rare chance to hear from someone who has been courted by the world's top advisors and left unimpressed. In this eye-opening Q&A, Michelle Yue, Investor, Philanthropist and Co-Founder of The Beam Network, spells out where advisors went wrong, what she was really looking for, and why helping more female investors take charge of their capital could be the key to reshaping the world.

Can you take us back to the moment this all began, when you found yourself newly divorced and facing significant financial decisions? What was going through your mind at that point?

Almost a decade ago, as I was signing my divorce papers, I wasn't just ending my marriage, I was beginning the most transformational financial journey of my life.

On one hand, I was very fortunate to find myself in a position with a significant amount of assets to manage. On the other hand, I suddenly found myself in unfamiliar territory. I hadn't studied finance, and I hadn't worked in the industry, yet I was now responsible for overseeing wealth which would be imperative to my future and, potentially, that of my children.

I had come out of a single-family office structure, and, although I still co-invest some of my assets with my ex-husband's family, I also wanted to do things differently. I felt a need to carve out my own approach – one that reflected my values more directly.

What kind of support or guidance were you hoping to find as you began interviewing advisors?

My twenty years in the non-profit world focused squarely on advancing gender equality, and it felt only natural to want my investments to align with that. So, I set out to find advisors who could help me on my journey.

The obvious solution, I was told, was to go with one of the big firms – the global investment banks. For many people, that’s exactly the right fit: these institutions offer scale, access and a broad range of services. But after meeting with several of them, moving from the intimacy of a single-family office to a behemoth of global finance just didn’t seem like the right model for me.

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Well-meaning friends then steered me towards some smaller outfits. Although I was ready to move some of my money into impact investing, it soon became apparent that there was a chasm between traditional investment advisory and the future I wanted to help shape. While impact investing still isn’t mainstream today, ten years ago, it was barely on the radar. I would mention “gender-lens” investing in meetings and be met with blank stares, as if I were speaking a foreign language. It surprised me that, with my limited financial know-how, I was referencing a concept which was relatively new to the industry.

You met with many of the industry’s top names. What was that experience like, and what did you find most frustrating?

I was in a period of transition and, not surprisingly, I felt vulnerable and found the whole experience daunting.

I didn’t feel heard, and many of the conversations felt transactional or product-driven. There was a lot of focus on investment returns, which is obviously important, but no discussion on aligning money with values, security or life goals. I was looking for a trusty pair of hands that I could rely on for partnership – an experienced firm or individual that could guide me, not talk at me. And someone who

could work with me to help build a portfolio that was meaningful, encourage me to learn from the process, and help instil confidence as time went on.

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I came away from these meetings disillusioned. In my discussions with potential advisors, I was given either not enough information (‘Don’t worry, we’ll take care of everything’) or I was snowed under with too much information (endless chatter about alpha, NAV, benchmarks and indices – see appendix at the end). I was eager to learn about finance, so I was searching for something in the middle. I didn’t want to be running my portfolio on a day-to-day basis, but I wanted to know enough to unravel the jargon, understand the key concepts, and have meaningful conversations with my advisors. But Investopedia and Khan Academy videos could only take me so far!

“I felt ‘lumped together’ – treated as just another risk-adverse female investor”

Another challenge was that I felt ‘lumped together’ – treated as just another risk-adverse female investor, rather than seen as an individual with my own priorities and ambitions. The assumption seemed to be that all women are cautious. Women aren’t necessarily more conservative; we just want clear, thoughtful information before making decisions.

In hindsight, although I didn’t know how to articulate it at the time, what I really wanted was to find a smaller, boutique advisory partner who offered deep expertise, transparency, and respect. It had to be someone with whom I could feel heard and who would be willing to evolve with me. That, I discovered, was much harder than it should be.

What did you want to hear in those meetings but didn’t?

I wish someone had told me how fun – and empowering – investing had the potential to be.

Investing has been much more interesting and fulfilling when I'm able to align it with my values; for me, it isn't just about growing wealth, it's about creating a positive impact. Investing gives me the chance to champion a diverse ecosystem of entrepreneurs, from female-led businesses to women fund managers who are changing the face of finance. It's deeply rewarding to know that my capital can help fuel innovation alongside equity and opportunity. When an attractive opportunity comes across my desk, I get genuinely excited - because I see not just potential returns, but the chance to be part of building the kind of world I want to live in.

How did the idea for building a solution for women first take shape?

I knew I wanted to be actively involved in my wealth. While I didn't want to be overwhelmed with administration, I also didn't want to hand everything over and disengage. The wall of acronyms, insider terms, and investment theories that came between me and my wealth demonstrated that the finance industry had no interest in rolling out the welcome mat. That realisation was pivotal.

I needed to crack the system - what I needed was financial education that was engaging and relevant.

But it wasn't only about education. I realised how important it was to have a community. In so many areas of life - whether it's at the school gates, at dinner with friends - we're comfortable talking about where to go on holiday, or what schools and doctors to recommend. But there are few, if any, conversations about investing. I wanted to help normalise those discussions and create a safe space where we could ask questions, share experiences, and support one another.

To my dismay, I couldn't find anything out there that fit the bill. In the end, my co-founders and I built the solution we had been searching for: something independent, values-driven, and created to meet the specific needs of women navigating their own unique financial journeys.

We named it **The Beam Network** - not only is it an acronym of the founders' first names, but it also represents a 'beam of light' that demystifies finance and a 'support beam' for every woman ready to take charge of their wealth on their terms.

Our members typically have at least \$10 million in investable assets, and they range in age from their early 20s to their mid-70s. They're based in 17 different countries across North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. Many are relatively low-key and private - a mix of inheritors, divorcees, and entrepreneurs - but they share a common goal: to engage thoughtfully with their wealth and use it in a way that aligns with their values.

What is the main issue your members are facing?

Oddly enough, it's confidence.

Our members are smart, highly educated, and accomplished individuals in their fields. They are holders of PhDs in Aeronautical Engineering, founders and CEOs of successful multi-national businesses, or notable philanthropists and Giving Pledge signatories. Yet when they join The Beam, they invariably mention that they would like to gain more confidence around investing.

But really, investing is not rocket science – everyone can learn if given the right opportunity. Granted, the jargon can be intimidating – I think some advisors relish using it to demonstrate how much they know – but once you're familiar with the basic principles, the key is taking incremental steps to boost your confidence. And our members surprise themselves, they often know more than they think they do.

Personalised financial education, a safe space to ask questions, regular exposure to investment activities, and supportive women-focused communities are critical to paving the way to greater investment confidence.

What are the top three questions you counsel your members to ask any potential advisor?

1. Before even asking questions of a financial advisor, we counsel members to ask themselves questions around what values they want to see reflected in their investments, their goals and timeline, as well as how much they want to participate in the investment decision process
2. Secondly, we encourage members to seek clarity around fee structure. Fees are always negotiable and impact overall returns, so we counsel members to keep probing until they understand the total fees charged, not just ongoing management fees.
3. Finally, we remind our members that the reports that they get are for their benefit: if the content and format are difficult to interpret, ask your advisors to present them in a different way. There are no 'stupid' questions, so keep asking for clarification until you understand.

Does the impact of what you are doing with The Beam Network go beyond coaching women in finance?

Absolutely. I have always believed in the extraordinary potential and strength of women and girls to change the world. In my non-profit work, my mission is to ensure that young women have the knowledge and agency to shape decisions over their own lives. Along the way, I began to see a surprising parallel. Even highly resourced, accomplished women – educated, motivated, and engaged – often lack true agency over their own financial lives. It isn't necessarily about ability; it's about accessibility, confidence, and the way financial systems have evolved without a lot of women at the table.

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And that gap creates a loss, not only for individuals but for society. With the “Great Wealth Transfer” happening over the next 25 years, more and more women will be in positions of financial power. When individuals aren't actively participating in their financial lives, we are missing out on a historic opportunity. Philanthropic giving amounts to a small fraction of what is needed for systemic, sustainable change; while vital, it's simply not enough to change the world – we need to harness the immense power of private capital. This may be blue sky thinking, but I genuinely believe that if more women were involved in their investments and exercised more control over their financial futures, we have the potential to reshape economies to serve more people, more effectively ... and more fairly.

At The Beam Network, we are helping to build both a community and a movement where individuals are taking control of their finances. If we are not making informed investment decisions or are not being intentional with how that money is managed and used, not much is going to change. But if more women step into their financial power, I am convinced that the future could look very, very different.

Conclusion

Michelle's experience highlights a disconnect many women face when investing their wealth: being highly accomplished in life yet underserved and underestimated in finance. When women have the right tools, confidence, and agency, they can fully own the financial power they already hold. And at a time when more women than ever are poised to inherit and control capital, the need for clear, collaborative and respectful financial advice has never been greater.

If you are looking for professional support from someone who understands both the technical and emotional sides of wealth, keeping you firmly in the driving seat, we would be happy to help you take your next step with confidence.



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Jargon Buster

- **Alpha:** The amount of return an investment earns above (or below) its benchmark, showing how much value a manager has added.
- **NAV (Net Asset Value):** The total value of a fund's assets minus its liabilities, divided by the number of shares—essentially, the price per share.
- **Benchmark:** A standard, such as a stock market index, used to measure the performance of an investment or portfolio.
- **Index (plural: indices):** A collection of securities used to represent the performance of a specific market or sector, like the FTSE 100 or S&P 500.



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