

CIO TODAY

AWARDS 2023



Marilyn Pinto



NOTHING MATCHES THE GOLDEN TASTE



UAE's
Best Empowering
FINANCIAL
LITERACY
EXPERT
of the Year
2023

This editorial note is to recognize and applaud the enormous contributions of Marilyn Pinto, UAE's financial education expert. The woman leader's dedication to improving financial literacy across the globe has made a huge difference in the industry, and her efforts have had a positive impact on countless individuals as well as families. Hence, we couldn't help but accolade her with **UAE's Best Empowering Financial Literacy Expert of the Year 2023** award.

Marilyn's innovative approach to financial education, as well as her commitment to ensuring that it is accessible to all, has truly set her apart as a leader in this field. Her initiatives, including KFI GLOBAL and Fin-ED UNITED 2023, have helped to bring financial education to thousands of students across the UAE, providing them with the tools and knowledge they need to make informed financial decisions throughout their lives.

Marilyn's work has not only had an impact on individuals and families but on the wider community as well. By promoting financial literacy, Marilyn has helped to create a more financially stable and secure society, with individuals who are better equipped to manage their finances, plan for the future, and contribute to the economy.

As we look to the future, it is clear that the work of individuals like Marilyn will continue to be critical in shaping the financial landscape of the UAE and beyond. We are grateful for her contributions and look forward to seeing the impact of her continued efforts.



Spectacular Accomplishments

Owing to Marilyn Pinto's thought leadership, KFI GLOBAL has garnered international recognition in a short period, receiving awards and recognition from prestigious institutions. Some noteworthy achievements include:

- Received Best Financial Education program for Schools by the Money Awareness & Inclusion Awards.
- Bagged The Most Innovative Customer Happiness Initiative.
- The venture has been recognized as a finalist in the Best CSR program for education at the GESS awards.
- Marilyn has released her book titled SMARTER RICHER BRAVER – Unleash the power of financial education to turbocharge your teen's future which has turned heads in the business fraternity.

Characters giving her an edge in the industry

• Communication



- Interpersonal skills
- Politeness
- Empathetic approach

• Authenticity



- Transparency
- Learner-specified programs
- High-quality offerings

• Passion



- Fervor for learning as well as teaching
- Demonstrating high enthusiasm in educating kids
- Inspiring the learners

• Reflection



- Tracking learner's growth
- Evaluating the impact
- Driving the change

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A Prominent Leader Empowering Kids
With Incredible Financial Education
Techniques



A new generation of businesspeople has emerged in the past years who are not only focused on creating prosperous enterprises but also on using the power of education to transform the world. These leaders have combined their passion for financial literacy with their experience and ability to develop ground-breaking educational initiatives that are altering how people view and handle money.

With their efforts, they are equipping the future generation—particularly the young people who presently need to learn financial management—with the information and abilities they need to make wise financial decisions and achieve their goals. These well-known edupreneurs are upending the established educational structure and pushing financial literacy forward. Their extraordinary influence is being felt all around the world as they work to build a society that is more financially savvy and affluent. They are motivating people to support their cause and improve their neighborhoods. The work of these 'chieftains' has never been more crucial as we continue to navigate a rapidly shifting economic landscape. One such edupreneur is Marilyn Pinto who is the Founder and CEO of KFI Global- a comprehensive education platform that offers amazing financial literacy programs. In a face-to-face Q&A session, she walked us through the length and breadth of her company as well as her entrepreneurial trajectory that helped her bag exponential success. This whole article confines her exemplary financial wisdom and insights into different topics that would equally amaze and inspire our readership. Let's delve into her success story and see how she is igniting the revolution of financial literacy-





Simple. Not easy.

KFI Global at A Glance

KFI Global is basically an integrated Financial Empowerment program composed of two main components. The first component is designed for children between the ages of nine and 12 and is called the Smart Money Management program. It is an online series of sessions that covers various topics related to financial empowerment, such as money mindsets, budgeting, and understanding wants versus needs. The second component is aimed at teens and young adults and includes three programs that cover a range of topics from money management, understanding credit cards and common money mistakes, to the fundamentals of investing, developing an investor's mindset, and even delving into cryptocurrency basics while avoiding financial scams. KFI Global also provides other programs, such as Supermind, which teaches effective learning techniques, memory skills, and study methods, and Entrepreneurship with a Twist, which focuses on developing an entrepreneurial mindset, critical thinking, self-directed learning, and self-awareness.

As a company, KFI Global's flagship offering is the highly praised Financial Empowerment program. Along with personal finance, the program integrates elements of psychology, neuroscience, decision-making, and emotional intelligence. Through this program, students gain the skills and self-assurance to make better financial decisions, which can potentially have a transformative impact on their lives.

A Gander at The Epiphanic Moment

The moment of realization that inspired every triumphant business leader is indeed unique in

many ways and for Marilyn, it resonates very well. She didn't start the company because she realized a gap in the market. Rather, she noticed a significant gap in her eight- and ten-year-old daughters' understanding of money. Despite their academic intelligence, the girls were clueless about financial matters, and this seemed to be a widespread problem among children. Marilyn didn't intend to dive into entrepreneurship, but she wanted to enroll her kids in a thoughtful, holistic, and intelligent financial education program, which she couldn't find. She realized that many half-hearted attempts had been made to address this issue, but they failed due to a lack of proper understanding of the underlying problem and an unimaginative approach to solving it.

Merely telling teenagers what to do without helping them understand the importance of financial education and how it can significantly impact their lives made little difference. Many financial education programs were also flawed, particularly in garnering teenagers' interest. However, Marilyn was determined to tackle this issue head-on and founded KFI out of a labor of love not only for her children but for any kid who wishes to become financially empowered. Also, Marilyn clarified, "KFI is thus a labor of love, created not just for my kids, but for any kid who'd like to be financially empowered."

Overcoming The Pitfalls and Roadblocks

To reveal the challenges, she faced while entering the field, she divided these into two sections- personal challenges and business challenges.

- On a personal front- Marilyn often struggled with the question, "Who am I to try?" for a long time. She wondered if she was qualified





to question the education system and tell experts that the lack of financial education for teenagers severely handicapped their ability to reach their full potential. Marilyn also doubted if she could convince other parents and financial industry experts to prioritize teaching financial literacy earlier. Imposter syndrome, lack of experience and confidence, fear of failure, and excuses about time, money, kids, and life kept her pondering and self-debating for a long time. As an introvert who grew up with a stutter, Marilyn felt uncomfortable with public speaking and being in the spotlight, which seemed like requirements for addressing this issue. She felt that there were more qualified and experienced individuals in the education and financial services industries who could take on this task. Marilyn had a list of excuses to convince herself to abandon this idea, but an annoying voice inside her head kept asking, "If they are so experienced and knowledgeable, why is this issue still largely unaddressed in society?" Eventually, Marilyn realized that she had a keen sense of the lack of financial education from her personal experience, and she wanted to make sure her children did not repeat the same mistakes. She believed she could explain complex concepts simply and memorably and saw the potential for this issue to derail lives if not addressed early. She cared enough to obsess about the best approach to make a lasting change. Marilyn also realized that she did not need to be in the spotlight but could shine a light on this critical issue. Her children needed to see her stand up for what she believed in and strive for significance and impact, just like she hoped they would someday. Marilyn's delusional angel, her husband, provided her with unwavering support. She asked herself again, "Who am I not to try?" and found a reasonable answer.

- In face of business challenges- Marilyn's biggest challenge stemmed from her refusal to offer "cruel optimism," a simplistic solution to complex problems that fail to address the underlying causes. While the market was looking for quick and easy solutions, Marilyn offered authentic optimism, which involved a careful study of the root causes of financial illiteracy and a long-term plan to overcome them. Marilyn made it clear to financial institutions that they would not be allowed to advertise or sell products to the children in their care, which scuttled many potential deals. Despite this, Marilyn was able to partner with leading financial institutions in the UAE, such as Dubai Islamic Bank and Emirates NBD, who sponsored the program in schools and helped to scale the initiative. Marilyn is grateful for their support in furthering her vision.

When Marilyn started the financial education initiative five years ago, there was little awareness among parents about the importance of financial literacy. Many assumed that schools were adequately equipping their children with the necessary skills. However, Marilyn had to spend considerable time educating the public about the distinct nature of financial education as compared to economics or business classes.

Marilyn did not offer "cruel optimism" like many companies in the market who promised quick-fix solutions to the financial education problem. Instead, she insisted on enrolling students in the entire program that built a solid foundation and focused on changing attitudes, mindsets, and behaviors. This was in contrast to other companies that offered one-hour classes that promised to magically transform children into financial gurus.

Parents who enrolled their children in Marilyn's program were pleased with the results and noticed a marked difference in their kids' financial understandings. Marilyn extends her regards to those parents who trusted her with teaching their children, and their feedback and encouragement meant the world to her.

Sharing Insights Into The Impact Of Financial Education

Marilyn believes that financial education is an essential life skill that teenagers must possess. The knowledge of financial literacy plays a crucial role in various aspects of their lives, including their career choices, saving habits, investment decisions, and retirement plans. On the other hand, a lack of financial education leads to poor financial decisions and behaviors, such as overspending, credit card debt, insufficient savings, and being unprepared for retirement, which can negatively impact their lives both in the short and long term. Unfortunately, this vital skill is not included in the conventional education system, so teenagers must take the initiative to acquire this knowledge from a reliable and unbiased source. Marilyn suggests that a good financial education program should incorporate debating, questioning, and storytelling to help teenagers learn effectively.

The Ongoing Project

Marilyn is currently spearheading an initiative called Fin-Ed UNITED 2023, which is a nationwide campaign to promote financial literacy among the younger generation through a scalable, standardized, and sustainable approach. The collaborative effort of various stakeholders, including educational institutions, authorities, government bodies, financial institutions, and corporate entities invested in the future of the next generation, has made this initiative possible. KFI Global will partner with key corporate

entities to deliver its highly acclaimed financial education program to thousands of students in the UAE. This groundbreaking initiative aims to educate the youth in an innovative and scalable manner, ultimately driving social sustainability.

Acquiring Greater Feats

Within a short span, KFI Global has managed to draw Global attention and has bagged awards and accolades from eminent institutions. A few worthy mentions are as follows-

- Received Best Financial Education program for Schools by the Money Awareness & Inclusion Awards.
- Bagged The Most Innovative Customer Happiness Initiative.
- The venture has been recognized as a finalist in the Best CSR program for education at the GESS awards.
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Future Roadmap

Marilyn Pinto has envisioned conducting the Fin-Ed UNITED campaign consistently on a yearly basis. This multi-stakeholder approach will help scale the initiative and reach thousands of students and their families and bring about true social sustainability. Before signing off from the conversation, she shared the pearls of wisdom with the readers, “Don't expect the ride to be smooth or easy – it never is. Achieving success is going to take much longer than you expected, it's important to temper expectations and work on increasing one's perseverance and staying power.”



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