

Ramnath Subramanian, MBA '07

FROM WALL STREET BANKER TO **Hindu Monk**

In the 18 months Ramnath Subramanian worked as an associate at Bank of America, he would leave his office on Wall Street at the end of each day, arrive home at a monastery in the East Village, eat a simple meal, and then retire on a yoga mat in a room he shared with 13 other Hindu monks. The next morning, he would awaken at 4 a.m. to meditate for two hours before starting another 15-hour day as an investment banker.

His dual life finally came to an end in the fall of 2008, when Subramanian decided he could not reconcile his banking career with his monastic life. His last project at Bank of America, ironically, was to create a merger and acquisition strategy for *Playboy* magazine,



and his three-part recommendation had earned him praise from his boss. Yet at the same time, Subramanian, a native of Mumbai, was being pulled in another direction that led him to quit his job.

“There was a calling that was very strong in terms of what I wanted to do with my life,” he says. “I wanted to dedicate myself to doing good work. It was not that I wanted to quit society and give up all the skills I had learned in

consulting and the Johnson School. I wanted to engage them in a place where I truly felt connected to my heart.”

Subramanian, whose monastic name is Rasanath Dasa, is now executive director of a nonprofit organization that is transforming the six-story building housing the monastery into a cultural center with a vegetarian café planned for the first floor. While devoting himself to meditating, praying, and teaching classes on Hindu scripture, Subramanian has remained connected to the financial world as a regular speaker on mindfulness and decision-making at retreats for business executives.

Last October, he was featured in *The Wall Street Journal* after he led protesters at Occupy Wall Street in a meditation session in Zuccotti Park. “It was not to support the protesters,” he says. “It was to raise the consciousness of the way that we live. Wall Street is just one symptom of a broader problem. It disconnects us from our true essence of who we are.”

— SHERRIE NEGREA

INVESTING IN THE INTERNET

and a New Book

When Peter Atkins decided to leave his job as a general manager at Microsoft and launch an investment fund in the midst of the Internet bust, his local newspaper, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, speculated he was “a little crazy” and “a little nuts.” It was August 2001, and Atkins had just spent six years helping Microsoft start several successful consumer-oriented websites, including Sidewalk and Expedia — both of which the computer giant later sold.

“My idea was that these Internet businesses would grow and there were attractive investment opportunities for people who were willing to put capital to work at low prices,” Atkins recalls. He was right, and 11 years later, Permian Partners — named after the geologic period that brought the largest mass extinction on Earth — has proven its detractors wrong. The fund now manages about 20 times its original investment and has compounded capital at rates much higher than the market averages.

Last year, Atkins reached a different milestone when he published his first book, *Life is Short and So Is This Book: Brief Thoughts on Making the Most of Your Life*. Originally published as a 55-

page Kindle book, it has already sold thousands of copies and recently ranked among the top ten on Amazon’s best seller list in the Psychology of Creativity and Genius category.

In a world of two-income households and little time for reading, Atkins thought a short book would appeal to consumers who wanted a quick summary on how to lead a fulfilling life. The 12 mini-chapters cover finding a career you love, setting goals, creating space in your life, and learning from experience.

“It’s a combination of lessons I’ve learned from my experience and reading,” Atkins explains. One example: “While it may sound simple,” he writes in the book, “if you have close friendships and love your work, the odds are quite high that you’ll be happy most of the time.”

Atkins follows his own advice to “do what you love:” He loves his job (“that’s my main passion, and the place I spend most of my time, outside of my family”), and he makes time for other passions including skiing, tennis, and, now, writing too. With his first book now out in paperback, he began to write a second focusing on stories from his life over the winter holidays.



Peter Atkins on the ski slopes at Whistler

— SHERRIE NEGREA

Andy Dijkerman, MBA '85

REBUILDING AFRICA, ONE COUNTRY

at a time

Cameroon by the firm's international lending unit to establish an accounting and pricing system for a seed company. Ever since then, her career has been focused on Africa — whether it's transforming state enterprises in Rwanda, studying infrastructure needs in Sierra Leone, or advising a children's publishing company in Kenya.

Dijkerman, a native of Wilmington, Del., traces her interest in Africa to her grade school years spent at an international school in Geneva, Switzerland. "I had a lot of African peers in my classes," she says, "and I was always interested in what it would be like to explore beyond my own country." Her chance came after graduating from Tufts University, when she became a volunteer for Catholic Relief Services in Rwanda and ended up working at the agency in Africa for five more years before enrolling at Johnson.

After 15 years with Deloitte, Dijkerman was working in South Africa, where her husband, Dirk Dijkerman, MS '79, PhD '91, was head of the United States Agency for International Development, when the firm decided to spin off the business unit to which Dijkerman was assigned. In 2004, Dijkerman and five colleagues organized a management buyout of the development consulting business, and she was named CEO of the new company, Emerging Markets Group, based in Washington, D.C. Over the next six years, the company doubled both its revenues and number of employees.

In 2007, EMG attracted a buyout from Cardno, an engineering consulting firm headquartered in Australia. After three years at the merged company, Dijkerman became an independent consultant and now spends her time working with the African Development Bank on rebuilding countries in West Africa, and as a BOP (Base of the Pyramid) investor in Jacaranda Designs Ltd., the Kenyan-based publisher of *Young African Express*, an African scholastic magazine for youth.

"My 30 years of involvement in the industry have gotten me to a point where people come to me," she says. "If the type of work is interesting and worthwhile, then I take it. If I want to take a month off, I can do that. I like the balance I have now."

Two days after starting her first job as an MBA graduate at Deloitte, Haskins & Sells, Andy (Margaret) Dennison Dijkerman was sent to



— SHERRIE NEGREA

services firm specializing in real estate, in Tianjin, China for less than two years, but she is already involved in one of the most ambitious developments in the country: a global financial center proposed for a peninsula in the heart of Tianjin's business district, Binhai. Acting as a project manager, Chen is representing an American private equity fund that



is investing in a 39-floor office tower, one of 120 buildings planned for the peninsula of Yujiapu. "They're building the Manhattan of China — literally," Chen says.

After earning an architecture degree from Cornell, Chen worked for Gensler and Howard Spivak Architects in New York City while launching her own company with another Cornell graduate, Sally Park '03, MBA '10. But Chen, a Taiwanese native who moved to Texas at the age of 10, wanted to return to Asia after completing her MBA because that corner of the world was where real estate was booming. In early 2010, she moved to Beijing and worked

for an architecture office until she was hired by Jones Lang LaSalle in October.

Tianjin, a second-tier city with a population of 12.9 million, has a rapidly developing office sector, which made it attractive to Chen. "If you're in Beijing or Shanghai — they're pretty much developed," she says. "There's not that much opportunity to have an influence. Here, I get to be involved in a project from its initial stages and meet real estate professionals from around the world."

As the company's head of strategic consulting and research, Chen and her team help developers determine where, when, and how to build a project and evaluate their strategic entrance into the Tianjin market. When she arrived in Tianjin, Chen pledged to quadruple her unit's revenue and team size within two years. After her first year, both revenue and the team more than doubled. "I have one more year to complete my goal," she says.

— SHERRIE NEGREA