

Do Investment Bankers have social lives?

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Investment banking is often perceived as being synonym with long working hours, weekend work, and very little sleep. A natural question therefore often follows: do bankers have a social life?

Based on our experience, of course they do. London-based investment bankers tend to have much better hours than bankers in Hong Kong and New York, and more holidays; in general, Europeans are much more concerned about junior bankers' personal lives. However, do not expect to be home by 7 p.m. every day, and do not plan to enroll in Saturday yoga lessons. This is a view of what your life as a junior investment banker will be like:

Your social circle will quickly start to revolve around other junior bankers

It is a fact that most bankers' friends are themselves bankers. Your friends will often consist of other junior bankers in other teams (i.e. different industry groups, or departments) and junior bankers in other banks.

First, other bankers will be the only ones who can understand your hardworking lifestyle (working very long hours, weekend work, emergency calls to the office) and the only ones who can share with you "war stories" and rough experiences. If you start to talk about the pitchbook you had to re-print at 5 a.m. last night because another analyst messed up the minority interest calculation in the comps, you will only receive blank stares from non-banking friends. Since this job can be hard emotionally at times, you will need to share your experiences with people who understand you.

Second, they will be the only available ones. The social life of investment bankers consists of weekday dinners at the office, 15-minute coffee chats, weekend dinners that are always organised at the last minute because you can never plan in advance. If you cancel a dinner at the last minute, your banker friend will understand. If you have to rush back to your desk while having coffee, they will also understand. The harsh reality is that you will only be able to organise events at the last minute. And because banking is a fast-paced environment, you will most likely only have time to spend with people that are immediately next to you (ie. a few desks away).

But this is not as bad as it sounds. Making friends with other bankers is part of the experience, and this strong network will help you tremendously in your career going forward. You will also make some of your best friends during banking training and while on the job, because you will be able to share tough times together, and good times together (i.e. when you close a deal!). Also, for most bankers, when not on deals, you may have extensive "quiet" periods, and free weekends that will allow you to catch up with "non-banking" friends. The question is, are your non-banking friends nice enough to accept not seeing you several months in a row?

You can have a social life, but it will be well-organised and planned at the last minute

Bankers do have social lives, take holidays, go to museums, go to nice restaurants, etc. The main difference is that you will not be able to plan ahead very often, and you will not be able to take part in regular activities such as yoga classes, tennis classes, etc.

Dinners will be planned a few hours beforehand. Trips and holidays will be booked a week in advance at best, if you are lucky (except for Christmas and August holidays, which are typically very predictable). Be ready to be very flexible!

If you have a boyfriend/girlfriend, you will need to plan your time carefully and make him/her accept that you may have to cancel your plans at the last minute, and may not see each other much during the week, only on weekends, but sometimes not at all.

Quality of your social life will depend on your bank

In general, the higher-profile the bank, the less time you will have for social activities. Working at a Goldman Sachs or a Morgan Stanley means good experience and very good pay, but very little time to yourself. If you work for a BNP Paribas or a Commerzbank, you will have much more free time and much less weekend work, but you will probably not work on many deals and be paid (sometimes substantially) below the market rate.

Also, some banks have a better reputation than others in terms of work-life balance, and some teams within banks also have different lifestyles. Usually, this is mostly driven by the team size, the deal flow (success of the team), and the style of your team head.

It's not all bad: the UK is one of the most work-life balance friendly city

In the UK, you will typically get about 25 days' holidays per year, and it is unlikely that you will be working every weekend, every week. Generally, people are more respectful of your personal life, and periods such as Christmas and the month of August are very quiet.

Therefore, compared to your Hong Kong or New York-based counterparts, you will be very lucky. They only get two weeks of holidays, and most of them are not able to take all of those days. In general, they also work much harder for much longer working hours. This is not related to the business itself, it is more related to the local culture.

There is hope: banking gets better every year

The more senior you are, the better the hours.

As a junior analyst, you will be slower with more things to learn. Also, because you are the most junior, you will be assigned the most tedious and time-consuming tasks. When you become more senior, you will be much faster, and you will "know the ropes", and will be able to manage your time much better.

As an associate, work become easier generally as you will have analysts to support you with your work, and you will typically start to leave earlier (though still not at 7 p.m.!). By the time you get to VP, things start to really slow down (getting closer to that 7 p.m., almost there). Finally, by the time you make it to Director and Managing Director, going home by 6 or 7 p.m. becomes the norm. The pressure for them is not on completing 100 tasks anymore, it is on generating deals and bringing in new clients.

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