

## Discussing Financial Fearlessness with Alexa von Tobel

Marlena Brown, staff writer

Meredith College students had the opportunity on Feb. 24 to hear from Alexa von Tobel, personal finance expert and founder, CEO of LearnVest, an online financial planning company. Alexa von Tobel has been awarded with numerous honors, including the 2012 Fortune Most Powerful Women Entrepreneur and a 2012 Aspen Ideas Festival Scholar. She has also been included on Fortune's "40 Under 40: Ones to Watch," mentioned in Forbes as a "Woman to Watch" on their 30 Under 30 list, and considered "One of the Coolest Entrepreneurs" by Inc.'s 30 Under 30 publication. To add to her stellar list of accolades, she was also awarded the Meredith College Women of Achievement Award during her lecture.

Alexa von Tobel's lecture coincided with ideas mentioned in her 2013 publication of *Financially Fearless*, which emphasizes the importance of financial education and managing personal finances. In an interview, she elaborated on the idea of being "financially fearless," as well as her innovative ideas for establishing her company and what financial management really encompasses.

**Q: Where did you get the idea to begin your own finance company?**

A: So I got the idea, because I, myself, was graduating from college and I felt like I wanted to be able to learn about my own finances. And I felt like it was a

no-brainer when it came to personal finance because high schools, colleges and graduate schools across the country weren't teaching this. So I was customer number one...it was really about empowerment, so I could put myself in a customer's shoes and make it really powerful.

**Q: Finances apply to every demographic, but when you founded LearnVest, did you have a specific audience that you were targeting your product to?**

A: Yes. We were focusing on the Chief Household Officer, and its mostly women. They're making the spending decisions, the budgeting decisions, but as the company's gotten bigger and bigger, we now appeal to the masses. So households about in their twenties all the way to their sixties, men and women of all income ranges, whether their household makes \$50,000, \$100,000—they make a good LearnVest client.

**Q: How do you try to make to make handling finances "fearless" for those who may not be comfortable managing money?**

A: I think one of the things is reminding everyone we're really in the same boat together and we need to learn about it. It stresses us all out. Money tends to be the topic that is really surrounded by a sort of shame and anxiety...And so one thing I do to make people fearless is to say 'Listen, we all have to make progress and you're only going to make progress if you rip the band aid off and start dealing with the things that need to be dealt with.

**Q: What general advice do you have for current and future students in terms of maintaining finances?**

A: I think one thing is for students to be very thoughtful coming right out of school and make sure that you have a financial game plan. Understand what you can really afford in rent, understand how you're going to pay your loans back, make sure you're building a good credit score. Those are all things you can do early, and if you do them early and do them properly, your life's going to be a lot easier.

**Q: The cliché for certain college degrees is that they will pay for themselves over time. In regards to taking out loans and selecting specific degrees, do you think that the idea of selecting a degree that pays well from the start in order to repay loans quickly holds much water in comparison to taking out a loan and choosing a degree that may not pay as well in the long run?**

A: I think that it's really important in college that you study something you're really passionate about. I think that that the most important thing is to do something that really interests you...The more passionate you are about something, then the farther you're going to go, the harder you're going to work because you love it. So don't go study something because it has good economic return—that would be a misuse of your education. That said, I do think it's important that you are active and engaged in thinking about your career.

## Introducing the Meredith PEARLS

Rachel Pratl, editorial editor

PEARLS, Peer Educators Advocating Responsible Lifestyles, is a group of students on campus who are helping the Meredith community by educating their peers about health and wellness. The student-led initiative addresses health topics which affect college-aged students, such as sexual health, alcohol awareness, healthy relationships/friendships and much more.

Over the past month, the

PEARLS have hosted quite a few exciting events focusing on healthy relationships and sexual health education receiving great turnouts and rave reviews on campus. At the Valentine Sweetness event, "Condom Roses" were available to students in the Cate Center, each containing two condoms with instructions for effective use. Last week's "Create Your Ideal Partner" event in Cate Center allowed students to draw and describe their "ideal" partner, challenging incorrect attitudes and confronting unhealthy behaviors.

The final PEARLS event of the month took place yesterday afternoon. This event was a fun wellness buffet in the Cate Center. Educational brochures containing relevant health and wellness information were available to all students who stopped by.

Both the Director of the Health Center, Sherri Henderson, and the Director of Residence Life, Heidi LeCount, agree that PEARLS provides another way for students to access health information as well as condoms at certain events. Students may not

feel comfortable asking for condoms, even from their RA's. Ultimately, the Meredith PEARLS organization is here to address health and wellness issues for college students and provide available resources to our campus. An ongoing clinic offers free HIV/STD counseling and testing every second and fourth Wednesday from 12 – 3 pm for all students.

"I want sexual health not to be taboo; the Health Center is a safe place for our diverse community of students," said Sherri Henderson.

### Writer's Note...

Last semester, I set out to write an opinion piece about the lack of condoms supplied in both the bookstore and the Beehive. I was disappointed to find that resident Meredith students lack access to the most basic and easy to use form of pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease (STD) prevention in the student stores, but I later learned that students may access free condoms easily and discreetly in the Health Center in Carroll Hall. At first, I thought the little basket of condoms in the hallway of first floor Carroll solved the problem, until I learned that its hours, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., limit access during the times students may need it most. Coincidentally, Meredith PEARLS was formed last semester to become a resource for access to health education and events that offer educational information including condoms and their use.

You can contribute to the campus-wide discussion of these topics by responding to this week's Herald online survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/53CSPBX>. We will report on your responses in a future issue.

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