

From Dropout to Doctorate: A Personal Journey of Lifelong Learning

Veronica Bjorkman, Eastern Kentucky University

It is through my own personal experiences from being a college dropout to now being in the final weeks of completing my master's degree that I fully understand the significance of having (and using) transferable skills. "Student learning in postsecondary education involves more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it also includes developing a frame of mind that allows students to put their knowledge in perspective; to understand the sources of their beliefs and values; and to establish a sense of self that enables them to participate effectively in a variety of personal, occupational, and community contexts" (King & Baxter Magolda, 2011). It took me a long time to develop the leadership I needed to be successful, but now that I have it I feel like nothing can stop me. With that being said, I would to share my personal journey of lifelong learning.

I currently work for a housing department as a third year Residence Hall Coordinator for Greek Towers at Eastern Kentucky University. I also serve as a Panhellenic Advisor and a graduate student in the Student Personnel Services in Higher Education master's program. My journey to the field of student affairs was by no means traditional. In fact, college itself was difficult for me. I grew up in a rural farm town in central Illinois with a population of 1200 people. I graduated high school with less than 40 students. As a first generation college student I made many mistakes, both academically and personally, and unfortunately I did not have a strong mentor there to help guide me. Looking back, I can see I was not prepared to go to college, and I did not set myself up for success.

I eventually took a break from school in 2003 to get married. I told myself that I would finish my degree online, but then "life happened." Ironically, when I was a bride planning my wedding, I was recruited to work for a bridal store where I was shopping. I started out as a Wedding Consultant, and then I was quickly promoted to an Assistant Store Manager of a 1.6 million dollar store. I was making a great living and worked there for many years, but in the back of my mind I always knew I needed to finish my degree. With the support of my family and husband, I decided to leave my successful career in the bridal industry, and I went back to school to finish what I started.

While I was finishing up my degree I began to research jobs in student affairs. I kept thinking how my life and college career could have been different if I would have had a strong mentor or role model present. The closest thing I had back then to a mentor or role model was my Resident Director supervisor when I was a Resident Assistant. I decided to apply for Hall Director positions because I wanted to make a positive difference and help students who were struggling with the same issues I struggled with back then. This is how my life as a Residence Hall Coordinator at Eastern Kentucky University came to be. I can only hope I have made as great of an impression on my residents as my Resident Director did on me.

Now in the next chapter of my life I am going to continue my journey of lifelong learning by starting a doctoral degree. Brett and Kate McKay (2013) state in their article, "Not only can becoming a lifelong learner help you earn more money in traditional employment, autodidacticism can be the gateway to self-employment and starting your own business." Besides

starting my doctorate, I will be making a transition from student affairs back into the field of business by managing my parent's construction and maintenance company that will someday become mine.

I never thought in a million years that I would be a lifelong learner; however looking back at all of my diverse experiences, I realize I am. Baxter Magolda (1992) found that "situating learning in the students' own experience legitimizes their knowledge as a foundation for constructing new knowledge." I have used transferable skills through every element of my life. I get excited and reenergized about new opportunities, and as long as I am helping people, I receive fulfillment from that. "Helping others is one of the few professions where it's not only possible, but highly desirable, to apply the theories and concepts to your own life" (Kottler, 2000). I think that this transition back into the field of business will be an excellent opportunity to add more private sector experience to my resume, while at the same time conducting research for my dissertation. The doctoral program I have applied for focuses on adult learning and higher education. This type of program will help me continue to grow and will give me the opportunity to use what I learn in the classroom to help better my staff. I plan to mentor my parent's employees the same way I have mentored college students by applying theories of learning and development. Most of my parent's employees do not have a college education and some of them dropped out of high school. I think a program like this is ideal because it allows me to focus on adult continuing education as well as higher education and it helps me to blend practices and use things that I learned in student affairs to help the employees aspire to do great things.

As you can see, I am dedicated to using transferable skills and lifelong learning to not only better myself, but also to help others. I will end with a famous quote from Albert Einstein, "Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death." I sincerely hope that by sharing my personal story that I have motivated and encouraged others to be lifelong learners and to use transferable skills to their fullest potential.

References

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