

FIRST CAREER: GRADUATE ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

By Mallory Maggiacomo, Marist College

Just after turning 22 years of age, I received my first full-time position working in Graduate and Adult Enrollment at Marist College. I was ecstatic and petrified all at the same time. I remember my biggest fear being – am I ready for this? Am I ready to work with students, the majority of whom are older than me? Am I ready to work in an office where I will be the youngest employee? Will I be intimidated? Will my age give way to assumed inexperience by the student workers in our office? After all, it was only last semester that I too was a student worker in our office. How is this going to work?!

Confidence is the first thing I had to gain and build on, an issue which I continue to learn as my experience grows at my job. My Dean and my Director obviously saw something in me that indicated to them that a young 22-year-old woman would be terrific in this position. It took me a while to comprehend that my Dean and Director looked beyond my age and focused on something more important: my intellect, my skills, and my education. They had the vision to see that I had the ability to grow and gain what I needed to succeed. I had the foundation. As I began this position, I would find myself sitting in those first few meetings and not saying a word. I was so afraid of sounding stupid that I just sat there in silence. Eventually, I came to understand that I was not going to get anywhere by doing that. I had to push beyond my comfort zone.

Time and experience has definitely built my confidence, however what has added to my confidence and what I believe is one of the greatest assets to me is a great program here at Marist – the Marist Professional Women’s Mentor Program. I was assigned a mentor based on my personality traits as well as traits I was looking for in a mentor. The program could not have matched me with a better person. The mentor program conducts events once a month or once every other month, where they usually provide lunch and have a speaker. In the past few months we have had speakers come in and discuss topics such as, Developing Your Leadership Voice: How to Be an Effective Communicator Who Gets Results, Managing Your Own Career and the Concept of Personal Branding and Financial Planning. We also recently had a speaker come in and discuss the work/life balance that women face. This was extremely helpful to me, especially since I’m due with my first baby in early July!

In addition to the great events that the mentor program conducts, I also meet with my personal mentor once a month for lunch. She is currently the Director of Corporate Outreach with our Institute for Data Professionals and has an extensive experience in both the corporate and non-corporate world. Having her as a resource, and now as a very good friend, to discuss work, how to handle problems with work and that work/life balance has been extremely beneficial to me and has helped me to build my voice here at Marist. Even if you do not have this type of program at your institution, try to find someone in a different office who you look up to and might want to create that mentor/mentee relationship. In addition to helping you grow as an individual and as a professional, it will get you out of your own environment and push you to get to know different people around campus!

One of the hardest parts of starting my job was understanding that I was expected to be the “expert” in the graduate programs for which I was responsible. Prospective students were calling to talk to me and get my expertise about the programs. This was extremely terrifying. My Director had given me a training binder and in it was everything there was to know about every graduate program. To this day, that binder still sits next to me and I use it constantly. I update it as much as possible and use it

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as a frequent resource. My advice for a new graduate recruiter is to make yourself a version of this binder and study it constantly. Try to have it accessible to you at all times. I am always adding new updates to programs into my binder and it has become my most valuable resource.

Taking advantage of the benefits offered at your institution is also extremely important. Marist has a very generous policy on employees taking graduate programs and I quickly enrolled in our Master's in Public Administration program. I completed the program two years ago and I was extremely proud of myself, not only for completing the program but for taking full advantage of a valuable benefit offered by my employer to improve my skill-set. This motivation, which also leads me to volunteer for more opportunities throughout the office, landed me a promotion two years ago.

Change is another concept that has taken me a while to adapt to during four short years at Marist. We have gone through several changes – employee changes, organizational changes, new office locations, administrative changes and – all of them have been difficult to handle. In a recent article, *Managing the Cycle of Change*, Kevin Craine says, "This innate resistance to change occurs because most people like things to be comfortable and familiar. They like to feel capable and confident in their work. Change affects people's ability to feel comfortable, capable, and confident because it means that they must learn new systems, work in new ways, and accept new responsibilities (Craine, 2007, p. 44). It is completely normal to resist anything changing at your job. However, as a young professional, I have only reached the beginning of work and life changes. Change is constant in our world, especially today, and it is something that we have to adapt to. According to Shoham and Perry (2009), the twenty-first century is characterized by many, rapid changes. In an organizational environment, these changes affect the need for the organization to adapt to the demands of the environment and make internal, structural and cultural changes (p. 228).

At Marist, we receive yearly reviews to see what we have accomplished over the past year, if we can make any improvements, what our goals are for the year, etc. I found it extremely important to write down my accomplishments at the time they happen in preparation for this each year. It is so easy to forget what you have done a year ago and it is important to show your employer all that you have done. Make sure you take the time to sell yourself again, like you did in your interview. It not only shows your boss that you prepared for your review but that you worked hard for them over the past year, and it's never a bad thing to remind them of that every once in a while.

Being a young professional in your first job, you should always remember that no one is perfect. You will make mistakes along the way. Hold yourself accountable and be honest about them. Be sure to work hard at what you do, and demonstrate that motivation that you had when you first interviewed for your job. Always create new goals for yourself and work hard to achieve them. Take the time to be proud of yourself for what you have accomplished! ■

References

- Craine, K. (2007). *Managing the cycle of change*. *Information Management Journal*, 41(5), 44-50.
- Shoham, S., & Perry, M. (2009). Knowledge management as a mechanism for technological and organizational change management in Israeli universities. *Higher Education*, 57(2), 227-246.