

When I started my journey to my master's degree, I was living in a different home, had no children, and had a completely different career in a completely different industry. The first time I started my master's program over 8 years ago, I was fairly convinced that I knew what I wanted to do with my life. And then everything changed completely. I had two children and entirely changed careers from teaching to working in software. While I always knew I wanted to continue my education, I had my doubts as to if I would actually get through it. There always seemed to be an obstacle or challenge blocking the way. When I finally felt like I had more stability in my personal life and career, I knew it was time to go back to get my degree, only this time I needed to find a way to do it on my own schedule. Instead of attending in person courses, I opted for an online program. This way, any obstacles that came in the way could be handled in their own time rather than feeling like I immediately had to drop my schooling. About a year into my master's program, I was offered a wonderful opportunity to start a new job. I jumped on the opportunity not immediately thinking through all of the implications. This job required a lot more travel than I was used to, which certainly put a strain on my family and friends. The biggest problem with the job was that it was no longer in the field of education. I really struggled with whether or not I should continue with my master's program given that I was not currently working in education. Luckily, one of my good friends gave me some great advice: "you know that you will eventually want to get back to education. You can't give up on getting your degree now, because what will happen when that right opportunity comes along and you are kicking yourself for not finishing school?" I really took this advice to heart and started think more about the big picture. What did I want to be doing in five years... ten years... and beyond that? While I had asked myself these questions

before, I don't think I truly started to think about the answers until I was more than half way through my current degree program.

So where *do* I want to be in five years? I know that I want to be working in software. I know that I want to work in educational software. I know that I am really good at managing products. So where do I see myself through the rest of my career? I see myself running my own educational software product, and I am confident that the journey I have taken through my education with Michigan State University has prepared me for this career.

The beginning of my courses focused mainly on leadership. I have to say that my courses in leadership were probably my favorite. I learned so much about how to be a leader, not just a manager. I loved the concepts of servant leadership and putting others first in order to move your organization forward. Simon Sinek was possibly one of the most influential speakers that I got to learn more about over the course of my program and he completely changed the way that I looked at leadership. I feel that through his and other's teachings, I gained multiple insights on how to be a leader in whatever workplace I enter. Also, one of the best books that I read throughout my courses was *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance* by Atul Gawande within my course EAD 860 Concepts of a Learning Society. His thoughts on diligence, doing things right, and ingenuity strongly impacted the way that I do business currently and made me want to continue to grow throughout the rest of my working life.

Lastly within leadership, I really appreciated the time my professor for Leadership and Organizational Development (EAD 801) , took to focus on women in leadership. Working in technology, I often feel that I am part of a huge boy's club. It was incredibly encouraging to see

how women can lead in their own way and still have an impact. It was also reassuring to read about Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft's specific insights into educational leadership, not just general business leadership. Their perspectives helped me to understand that I don't always have to feel like I have to be one of the guys in technology, but can lead in the manner that is right for me. The amount of principles that I have taken into my own workplace already are beyond counting, and I have really valued the growth that these courses have allowed me to show in my professional career. Just a week ago, I was singled out as a strong leader by one of my supervisors and was asked to assist in mentoring the new employees in our team. As I continue to grow in my current position, or if I move to a new one, I know that these lessons in leadership will continue to be invaluable to me to have at the ready.

I believe that the second most impactful courses that I took were in relation to program planning and post-secondary education. While I began my career teaching in the early childhood setting, I know that this is probably not an arena that I will be returning to. I have found that while I love teaching younger ages, I feel I am much more effective in post-secondary settings. In fact, one of the strongest lessons of my master's degree program was within my course on planning in post-secondary education. During my course EAD 867, Case Studies in Educational Leadership, we read the book *Leading with Soul* by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal. In one of the first chapters, they spoke about needing to have a heart for teaching. When I took time to reflect on that statement, I realized that one of the reasons I had left the classroom was that I had lost the heart for what I had been doing. What was exciting to realize was that I had found my heart in a new arena. That arena was working to develop better technology for the field of education. Each of the courses that I took in program planning

directly related to my work in software product management. There were so many times that I felt that program management and product management were mirror images of each other in terms of addressing the needs of running a successful program or product. Even as I wrote a syllabus and analyzed why I had included different pieces into it, I realized that a syllabus is much like a project plan for working with an engineering team to deploy a software. Again, as I went through each of these courses I found more and more methodologies that I could put into practice within my own work environment. These methods have already helped to improve the training programs and organizational workshops within my own company and I am excited to carry on using the lessons from these classes as I continue to work in the corporate setting.

The final part of my learning journey focused on educational technology. As I previously stated, I know that I eventually want to manage an educational technology product, so taking classes that related directly to the field of educational technology seemed only to make sense to me. In the courses that I took within the technology arena, I learned more than I actually thought I would. I honestly assumed that since I had been a technology coordinator in my previous school, and because I currently work in software, that there would be little to learn in the courses on educational technology. I was pleased to discover that this was not the case. Through my course work, I began to see the importance of social media within the classroom. Previously, I had always assumed that social media needed to stay out of schools, but I really enjoyed seeing how teachers were making use of sites like Twitter, Instagram, and others in a positive and educationally appropriate way.

Additionally, I had not ever thought to put much effort into what I would do with my master's degree after I was finished with the program. The technology courses challenged me

to think through not only how technology could be used today, but how I would continue to build on my knowledge and understanding to create new ideas for the next generations of learners. They also challenged me to continue to learn even more after my program is complete. I think there was a part of me that had always believed that once I finished my master's degree program, I would be finished with school and could give my brain a break for a little while. It was actually exciting to have these courses present to me ways to continue learning beyond what was offered within my program. One thing I am especially excited to begin is *The Personal MBA* program by Josh Kaufman. When we read about Kaufman's program in CEP 815 Technology and Leadership, one of the assignments we had was to create our own personal manifesto. I wrote about all of the tools that one needed to be a successful product manager, and I ended up using this manifesto to present to my supervisor for my annual review and to help to formulate what areas I needed to continue to work on as my goals for the upcoming year. It was exciting to see the work I had done in my course be immediately used within my work setting. The lessons learned in my technology courses were used for even more than just my professional development, but for my personal development as well. I am currently using with my son one of the lessons that I developed for my course in teaching with technology as a rainy day afternoon activity. Seeing him enjoy writing because he is able to use technology in new and exciting ways is a great personal joy and I hope to continue to be able to use the lessons from this course in much the same way with my own children even though I may not ever use them in a traditional classroom.

Overall, I am very excited about all of the courses that I have taken over the last two years. These courses have helped me grow in my leadership, my planning, and my

understanding of educational technology. I feel confident that the knowledge that I gained from these courses will build me into a top-tier product manager and continue to shape how I lead in the workplace. When I started my courses at Michigan State University, I had an idea in my head of what I thought my life would look like at my graduation. However, life always has a way of sending people the unexpected, and where I am now is nowhere close to where I thought I would be when I first began. Nevertheless, I know that regardless of where my career takes me, the lessons that I have learned throughout my education with my master's program will serve me well in the path ahead. So, while it may be several years, two kids, a new house, and two dogs later, I am very excited about the overall journey that has brought me to this place. I know that through these courses, I have gained the tools to be successful at all of my career, learning, and personal goals.

References

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