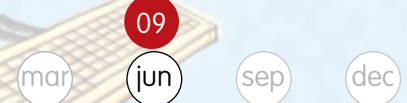


# Peer to Peer

## Doing More With Less

Peer to Peer June 2009



# When I Grow Up . . .

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In today's economy, many of us are wondering what we can do to make ourselves more marketable. Or, maybe you just want to grow in your profession. No matter where you are in your career, continued learning is a necessary survival step.

In early 2007, I was considering what I wanted to be when I grew up. After all, I was getting close to 50 and it was time. I decided to pursue new areas of law firm management.

Did I need a graduate degree to do this? I recognized that law firms are filled with highly educated people. I felt that a graduate school education would significantly help me establish credibility in this academically biased business.

Once I decided to return to school, I had to decide what to study and where. In selecting a program, I considered: 1) the course content, 2) the reputation of the school, 3) brick and mortar vs. online, 4) length of time required, and 5) cost. For me, the course content was the most critical. I looked at MBA programs initially. Then a string of messages on ILTA's E-Groups directed my interests toward a leadership program. After all, almost all organizations can benefit when staff members develop stronger leadership skills, and law firms are no exception. I selected the Master of Arts in Strategic Communication and Leadership program at Seton Hall University.

On September 7, 2007, I flew to New Jersey to meet my new classmates. I was nervous — terrified actually, and began to question my decision: Did I pick the right program? Am I really smart enough to handle it? Will I have the time? Will I have a life outside of school or work? What if I fail?

The program required three onsite, long-weekend residencies. During the first one we had time to meet and bond with our new "cohort" or class. I was thrilled that my class was so diverse. It consisted of people from all over the world and in all types of organizations. They were all

interesting, professional and friendly people. On my way home that weekend, I explained it to a friend, "It was a lot like an ILTA event: great people, great learning, great fun!"

Over the next 18 months, we logged in nearly every day and shared ideas, feelings, research, questions and more in our discussion threads. Our instructors were people with real world experience and very supportive. In short order, the cohort was working as a team; no one was going to fail. After all, it was a leadership program, and we were there to lead the team to a successful conclusion.

There were others who helped along the way too. During the 18 months, members of the cohort experienced deaths, births, sick kids, layoffs, new jobs, divorces and health challenges. In other words, life happened to all of us. To get through, we had to reach out for help from family, friends, classmates, instructors and employers. This was actually another good lesson in leadership — you can't do it alone. To get through a Master's program such as this one, it's a good idea to line up your support system. I was continually encouraged by how supportive everyone in my life was during this time.

On March 8, 2009, I returned to SHU for the hooding ceremony celebrating the completion of a Master of Arts in Strategic Communication and Leadership. The emotions were quite different from just 18 months before! I had gained all that I was hoping for — and more. Even before graduation, I was using the practical skills I learned. As author Jim Collins says in *Good to Great*, the flywheel is turning! I have an outstanding education, credibility in the form of a degree, a much improved view of the workplace and a new group of friends for life. Best of all, I look at my work with a renewed level of energy, and I've been given new responsibilities to broaden my impact.

If you are considering furthering your education, start taking steps to make it happen. One of my high school teachers used to say, "If you want it, work for it. Don't wish for it." Start planning today for what you want to be when you grow up. **ILTA**