

CASE STUDY

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Q: Tell us about your background. Where have you previously worked or studied?

A: "After doing so badly my A levels I didn't have much confidence in my academic abilities and there was too much going on in my life to consider going to university. I went to work for the Ambulance Service and spent five years in the Control Centre, taking calls and giving First Aid advice over the 'phone. After that I went to work for Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham as Nursing Services Co-ordinator for the British Nursing Association, running their agency staff bookings. This got me into recruitment consultancy, and then I did my HNC in Business and subsequently moved to Balfour Recruitment. They specialised in the medical market and I was given a start-up project recruiting Healthcare Assistants and grew the business from five Student Nurses and Healthcare Assistants on the books to about 150. Because of this success I won their Employee of the Year Award which had as a prize a trip anywhere in the world. I chose to go to Africa on an environmental project and when I came back from that I decided that I didn't want to work for them anymore because they'd just been bought out and the company culture had changed! So aged 31 I moved from Birmingham to Worcester, started a new full-time job to set up a project for Care Home Selection and came to the University of Worcester part-time to top up to a degree. I found that working full time and studying part-time was very difficult and was straining my relationship with my boyfriend. So after the first academic year I quit my job and took up a part-time job and went to university full time to allow more time for my partner. Just after doing this my relationship ended anyway. Devastating as this was at the time, as it turned out it enabled me more time to immerse myself in university life without these additional pressures so in hindsight things worked out well."

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Q: How did you get involved with enterprise at the University of Worcester?

A: "The success of the start-up project at Balfour and Care Home Selection gave me lots of confidence. When I came full-time to university I was starting to have business ideas that related to my studies and previous work experience, providing online care home services. I mentioned this to my employer and they rejected the idea. A couple of my friends had already joined Worcester Innovators Network, and had done Enterprise School and BizCom and they encouraged me to go to the next Enterprise School with some other friends where we used my idea and won first prize. Then I went and joined Worcester Innovators Network (WIN) and got heavily involved as Vice Chair. I went on to win BizCom in 2007 with a friend with the same idea. I then went onto the Student Placements for Entrepreneurs in Education (SPEED) programme in 2007."

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Q: Did your studies and enterprise activities complement each other?

A: "On my MSc I was allowed to specialise as much as possible in the Care Home sector and my dissertation was on my business idea which combined perfectly with SPEED. It was the business idea which led to me wanting to

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do a Masters degree. I was looking at doing my Masters elsewhere, other than at University of Worcester and I was considering doing a Masters in Entrepreneurship to get the support to get my idea off the ground. The other university I applied to was quite disorganised and this put me off. However, at the University of Worcester, although they couldn't offer a specialist enterprise degree, the flexibility of the course enabled me to do a health and social care Masters that could be combined with my enterprise ideas and activities."

Q: What were your greatest challenges and how did you deal with them?

A: "My dissertation supervisor was concerned that I'd been too ambitious with my project. There weren't enough hours in the day for the scale of my project. This meant very little sleep when I was doing my dissertation and in the last three weeks I could only allow myself four hours sleep each night! I could not have done all I've done without the interest in my business idea and this interest came from my personal desire to do something with my idea and quest to know if it would succeed."

Q: What's happened to you since graduation?

A: "When I finished my Masters degree an opportunity came up at Worcestershire County Council to cover a position at a much higher level that I might not have got if I hadn't specialised in the Care Home sector. My skills and experience have helped me to bring lots of ideas for improved working to the Council. However, I'm on a temporary contract as Contracts Officer for Older People until December 2008 and my business idea is bubbling away in the back of my head as lots of policy changes are going on in the sector at the moment. This might be a very good opportunity to launch my idea. In the meantime I'm waiting, watching and learning to see what's going to happen. The format of my idea will be shaped by whatever happens to policy in Adult and Community Services."

Q: What has been your impact on others?

A: "When I joined WIN they were at a little bit of a low point because there had been a few difficulties and changes of personnel. Everything didn't entirely click in the early days but we made it a success. I encouraged other friends of mine who had entrepreneurial ideas but had no exposure to an entrepreneurial environment to join WIN and enter BizCom. Their confidence has gone from strength to strength as a result. I've made so many great friends through WIN who will be friends for life."

Q: How do you measure your success?

A: "I got a 2:1 in my Bachelor's Degree and a Distinction for my Master's Degree. Considering I got two E grades at A level I'm delighted with these achievements. Also winning the award with Balfour and going to Africa. I do want to earn a comfortable living and I do want to finally get my business idea off the ground after lots of development work. It'll also be a measure of success if I don't end up in a care home when I'm 80!"

Q: On reflection is there anything you would have done differently?

A: "I should probably have gone to university earlier, or maybe quit my job earlier to study full-time. If I'd have done that though there probably wasn't a drive on entrepreneurialism at that point so it wouldn't have been the same experience, so I think everything happened at the right time. I would certainly have started my dissertation earlier so that I didn't have to lose so much sleep!"

Q: Where do you go from here (2-3 years)?

A: "I'd like to have a well paid full-time job that isn't that busy so that in my evenings I could be running my own online business with my Dad doing the bulk of the work during the day (because he's retired) and maybe have a family but I don't now where I'm going to have time to fit that in!"

Q: Who would you like to thank for their support and encouragement?

A: "Gerry Palmer in the Business School transformed my experience as an Undergraduate. Paul McDonald in Health and Social Care was my personal and MSc dissertation tutor and allowed my free reign to do what I wanted to do with my research project- he told me that I mentored him rather than the other way around because I told him what I was going to do!"

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