

**Education Creates Attractive Choices:  
From Learning to Climb the Career Ladder  
to Planning for a New Career as an Entrepreneur**

Donald W. Mitchell

Many people join large successful organizations because they are searching out opportunities for learning, promotions, and stability in a career . . . especially at organizations that cherish employees and help them develop. Even people who think they might later want to own and operate businesses often value the opportunity to first learn from working at a well-run company. Many such companies encourage their employees to take courses, earn degrees, and prepare for enhanced careers in a variety of other ways.

Such career development can provide an unexpected bonus: The education you gain can help you prepare for a new career if you no longer want to climb the old career ladder . . . or find something you like a lot better. Carlos O. Laya had both experiences while studying at Rushmore University.

Mr. Laya started his career by enjoying a wonderful job as a laboratory technician at one of the world's finest and most admired companies. But Mr. Laya longed to work instead with customers as a salesman for laboratory analytical instruments.

To prepare for that potential sales career, Mr. Laya took distance learning courses to master electronics. After that Mr. Laya received and accepted an offer to become a service engineer for a world-leading manufacturer of laboratory analytical instruments. During the next two years, he earned a degree in electro techniques that enabled him to be more effective in optimizing instrument performance for customers.

Mr. Laya was thrilled when his employer bought the international rights to sell, distribute, and maintain biotechnology instruments. He enthusiastically asked for and received the job of being the Swiss sales manager for these products. Now he was where he had aimed to be. Taking courses in selling and instrument applications, his confidence and effectiveness grew. Mr. Laya was thrilled to meet the many professors,

Ph.D.s, and physicians who were his customers. Eight happy years of work followed.

A new opportunity arose when Mr. Laya was offered a position selling biotech products in Argentina for his company. Mr. Laya eagerly stepped up to the challenge.

This time meaningful progress eluded him. The value of the Argentine currency plummeted and the office was unprofitable for his employer. Rather than take these losses as a failure, Mr. Laya proposed starting a company to represent his employer's products in Argentina. But that approach faltered when the economy grew worse in Argentina, and his employer pulled out of the country.

After that experience, Mr. Laya returned to Switzerland and worked as an international pharmaceutical products sales manager.

In 2003, he decided that the time had come to earn an MBA to complement his diplomas in international trade and marketing. He saw the MBA as the key to being promoted into senior management at his current employer.

Having enjoyed his distance learning experiences, Mr. Laya sought a university that could provide a flexible schedule for an MBA so he could study part time while continuing his sales management job. When he discovered Rushmore University, he knew he had found the ideal school for him: Rushmore would allow him to focus courses solely on his planned career development. He also liked the idea of working individually with professors using the Oxford tutorial method to study what he wanted to learn rather than a preset curriculum.

Here's what Mr. Laya has to say about his experiences with Rushmore:

“With my previous distance learning experience, accustomed to learning at my own pace, anywhere and anytime, I was searching for a university that could suit my continuing education needs. When I visited the Rushmore University Web site for the first time, I was convinced that Rushmore was the right choice.... The most important argument that caught my attention was the flexibility it offers you to

create your own program and to focus your learning on subjects that will add value to your own personal situation. The faculty consists of selected and well-recognized business people with substantial experience in writing business books, but what is most relevant for business professionals is that the professors have a broad knowledge of the real business world. The learning method — reading books and papers and writing a report or paper to apply your findings — is a highly effective way to learn and understand a course.”

While studying for his MBA in 2005, Mr. Laya lost his international sales management job. After a six-month search, he gained another international sales management job representing products used by environmental companies. This was a new experience for him and made him aware of the many important environmental problems for which solutions are needed.

This new job led Mr. Laya to take two courses related to environmental issues, and he developed a desire to become an environmental consultant. From there, he changed his curriculum to focus on how to establish such a consultancy.

Through those Rushmore courses, Mr. Laya was able to identify what knowledge, skills, and experience he lacked to make such a consultancy successful. As part of his MBA capstone paper summarizing what he learned at Rushmore, Mr. Laya developed a plan to fill in those gaps and to move into such a consultancy within a few years.

As a recent graduate, it's too soon to report on how that development is going. Perhaps Mr. Laya will follow his plan. Or perhaps in following that plan he will find even more appealing work, as he has done before in his successful career. In either case, his grounding in business management will serve him well . . . as will his understanding of what it takes for an enterprise to succeed, one of his knowledge bases as a new MBA from Rushmore.

Mr. Laya has shown a great talent for spotting opportunities he would enjoy better than his current work. With his MBA and ability to find distance learning opportunities that fit him and his goals well, Mr. Laya should make rapid progress from here in building on his sound foundation in career planning.

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