

## **A Lifelong Learner Lightens His and Others' Loads**

Donald W. Mitchell

When a puzzled school administrator called Mark Adamson's mother with a question about young Mark's views, his mother forthrightly replied, "Don't worry about him. Let him make up his own mind."

Mr. Adamson didn't have as much confidence as his mother did in his abilities to choose. As an adult, he described himself this way: "I never grasped concepts easily and I was, and still am today, the kind of person who has to study twice as hard and twice as long as the person next door."

Despite his need to work hard, Mr. Adamson learned what was expected and earned good grades. Each day, he saved a bit of time to dream of the day when he could leave school and begin making his own decisions.

After high school, he was glad to leave school behind. He tried his wings.

A vacation trip from his native South Africa to scuba dive in Australia led to a decision to become a professional diver. Mr. Adamson became certified as a PADI Dive Master and worked in a dive shop. Unfortunately, he became frustrated after realizing that the only thing he was learning was how "not to" run a business.

Sticking to water sports, Mr. Adamson next joined a sailing school in South Africa that was conducted aboard a yacht. The course was over all too soon, and he couldn't find a job sailing.

Information Technology was booming, and he decided next to enter computer school. Mr. Adamson earned a computer science certificate a year later by learning about hardware, software, networking, systems analysis, design, and programming. From this educational experience, he learned that he didn't want a job where he was tied to a computer screen for eight hours a day.

He started as a temporary support technician with a small, growing firm and soon became the leader of client support activities. Mr. Adamson supplemented his on-the-job training with courses in business and project management. After four years with the firm, he had worked as an IT support

team leader and an IT support operations manager and was moving into IT service level management.

Mr. Adamson liked project management work. He enjoyed a sense of accomplishment from starting and finishing a project. He also liked being able to move onto another project so he could avoid being trapped by the unappealing tasks of daily maintenance. The shifts kept his mind stimulated. On the negative side, he noted that you can easily lose technical skills if you don't keep using them.

At this point, he realized that although he enjoyed the work he could not expect to earn as much as he would like without an advanced degree. For Mr. Adamson, an MBA seemed like the right choice.

There was a problem. Despite having earned a number of learning certificates and having good work experience, he had no undergraduate degree. Yet an undergraduate degree wouldn't really meet his needs.

How could he enroll in an MBA program? Graduate schools normally require undergraduate degrees.

At age 25, Mr. Adamson found an online university that would accept his certificates and experience as a substitute for an undergraduate degree. With that encouragement, he launched into graduate-level education about how to become a better manager.

Mr. Adamson was fascinated by what he learned. When not studying, he was bored by other activities. That was quite a change from the days when he had to study to keep up. In reflecting on those experiences, he was pleased to be able to apply his new theoretical knowledge to practical situations in his life and business.

He was initially concerned that he might not be able to handle all of the academic demands. Because of those concerns, he worked hard and overcame his lack of university experience. He gained skill and confidence through devoting every spare minute for the next two years to his MBA studies at Rushmore University and graduated at 27.

After graduating, he left the organization that had employed him for over 7 years and went to work for Barclay's Bank. A year there was enough, and

Mr. Adamson next joined a consulting firm, Quintica, as an IT service management consultant, trainer and coach. In this work, he helps clients to apply best practices to IT management. To improve his capabilities, he earned the ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) Service Management Manager's certificate.

Mr. Adamson's goal in this new work is to help clients make their lives easier by showing them how to use technology better and to make sure they are not forgetting important aspects of IT management such as disaster recovery and service continuity. Because of his help clients don't have to study and work so hard . . . allowing them to enjoy a better life balance between work and their personal lives.

Mr. Adamson's personal life also improved in this new work. In his new job, he has visited some of Africa's most beautiful locations for his work. While there, he explored the natural wonders . . . especially the aquatic ones.

In reflecting on these changes, Mr. Adamson notes that he has learned as much about working with people from his MBA as he has about IT from his training and work experience. In responding to questions from clients and colleagues, he continually draws on the full extent of his MBA studies.

A major change has been that Mr. Adamson can get things done much faster now than when he was younger.

Succeeding with an MBA changed his outlook on life. "I now firmly believe that there is nothing you cannot teach someone. Everyone is able to learn something. The challenge, however, is always going to be working with people. I have learnt and am still learning the saxophone. I was never musically inclined, but by completing my MBA has given me the confidence to learn new things (not just music) and therefore not to disregard things I previously considered too difficult or 'out of my league.'"

What's next for Mr. Adamson?

There's a possible doctorate in his future. In the meantime, Mr. Adamson enjoys the better job he gained because of his MBA and the increased time he has for personal interests including his love of water sports in exotic locations.

How can learning improve your life?

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Donald W. Mitchell is a professor at Rushmore University. For more information about ways to engage in fruitful lifelong learning at Rushmore to increase your effectiveness, visit

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