

Three Life Lessons To Pack For Your Professional Journey!

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Last fall I had the privilege of addressing the graduating class of Capitol Technology University in Laurel, Maryland. My commencement speech sought to impart insights from my life experience that I hoped the graduates would find useful as they began their careers. With the graduation season upon us, I thought I would share an adaptation of that address to a wider audience.

Everyone is on a life journey. Many are on a professional journey as well — a pathway to entrepreneurship, a dream job, a life of service and all the other options the 21st Century offers.

My own journey started with leaving my native India and traveling to the United States to pursue higher education. It also included marriage, motherhood and nine years as an employee of various firms. I rose the corporate ladder and did my best to absorb knowledge and contribute value along the way. I later started my own business from the basement of my home, developed our company's service offerings, engaged customers and hired skilled employees to establish a thriving organization. Twenty years later my firm stands on solid financial ground and continues to grow as a premier government contractor.

Combined, these diverse experiences provided me insights into the human experience and offered many life lessons. I would like to share three that I believe will be especially useful to those just beginning their professional journey. Even those further along their chosen career path might find a takeaway or two.

LESSON 1

Respect yourself.

You must first hold yourself in esteem before you can garner the respect of others. Do some soul searching and identify your core values and beliefs. Then, live your life in a way that respects and honors those values and beliefs.

C.S. Lewis wrote, “Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is looking.” We almost always know what the “right thing” is. We all possess that inner voice that alerts us to right and wrong based on our unique value system.

Always listen to that inner voice! It is the truest reflection of you as a person, distinguishing actions to take from those to avoid. Often, it speaks based on imperceptible environmental cues we do not fully comprehend. Some call that voice intuition. Follow your intuition when seeking answers or making decisions.

From a professional perspective, find a line of work and a company culture that align with your values and capabilities. Across my life and career, I’ve often experienced work situations and decisions that made me feel uncomfortable. But, when I listened to my inner voice, I always found the wisdom to act in ways that aligned with my values. It not only calmed my spirit but also increased my sense of inner strength.

LESSON 2

Show that you care.

Care can be expressed in many ways as you proceed on your professional journey. It could be as simple as taking pride in your work and work products. Always treat each task or project as an opportunity to add value. When it is obvious to you that you have added value, others will see it too. Put your best effort forward every time and you will reap magical rewards. You will be noticed and remembered.

Showing that you care can be expressed in other ways, too. One form of caring is embracing your organization’s underlying mission and working closely with your peers to fulfill it. So, too, is getting to know coworkers and supervisors as human beings and offering them help and support when needed.

A caring spirit motivated by altruism can lead to advancement, greater responsibility and leadership roles. It also can help you create a network of connections with like-minded professionals who could be the source of new career opportunities or pathways to collaborative endeavors. Most important, caring yields a sense of fulfillment from your career.

LESSON 3

Promote balance in your life.

Identify all the important dimensions of your life. Beyond your work and professional life could be family, friends, sports, hobbies, volunteer work, health and spirituality, among others.

Carve out time and energy to address these other facets of your life. Live a balanced life. In the words of a former First Lady, “Don’t confuse having a career with having a life.”

A single-dimension existence is a sure recipe for stress and unhappiness. Consider how perturbations in one area of your life can cause anxiety and pain in others. When you shift focus to other aspects, you can help restore calmness and perspective across all the dimensions that comprise you.

So, spend time with family and friends. Do things that bring you joy — and that bring joy to others. Take time to be grateful every morning and every night for all the sources of happiness in your life.

Last, but not least, take time to savor your successes as well as your failures. Remember, we learn more from failure than success. Failing provides an opportunity for introspection and self-growth, teaches us resilience and challenges us to evolve.

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There are many items you need to pack when you embark on your professional journey. Be sure to add respect, caring and balance to academic knowledge, life experience and the well wishes of family and friends.